

# Accommodations, Modifications, Grades, and Transcripts

## Accommodations and Modifications

Accommodations. An accommodation is a change in the teaching or testing procedure in order to provide a student with access to information and to create an equal opportunity to demonstrate knowledge. Accommodations ensure that the activity or test reflects the student's ability rather than disability. Accommodations do not change what is being taught or tested. They do not change the instructional level, content or performance criteria. Accommodations level the playing field. Accommodations should facilitate an accurate demonstration of what the student knows or can do. They change HOW not WHAT.

Examples of accommodations: Grading a content area assignment for content not writing mechanics; preferential seating; having a content area test read to the student

Modification. A modification is a change in the activity or testing procedure that in some way changes what is being taught or measured. Modifications change what a student is expected to learn and/or demonstrate. The course content differs; the subject area stays the same. Modifications can either lower or enhance. Modifications change the playing field. They change WHAT.

Examples of modifications: Changing the level of the problems of a math assignment; reading a lower level literature book; reducing the number of outcomes.

❖ ❖ *IEP Documentation and Kansas State Assessments*. Accommodations and modifications should be discussed at the IEP meeting and listed on the IEP. Some accommodations are approved for the Kansas State Assessments, BUT the student must regularly receive the accommodations during routine classroom instruction and assessment activities for it to be allowed on the state assessments.

## Grading Students Who Receive Accommodations or Modifications

Accommodations. Students who receive accommodations will be graded like everyone else. (Remember – accommodations do not change what is being taught or measured).

Modifications. Students with disabilities should, in general, be graded like everyone else. Districts cannot modify grades on the basis of the student's special education status alone. Alternate grading systems are appropriate **if they are offered to all students**, not just students with IEPs, and the grading modifications are outlined in the IEP. KSDE has indicated that if the alternate grading is available to students with 504 plans, this would meet the requirement of being available to all students.

❖ ❖ *IEP Documentation*. IEP teams should discuss how students with modifications will be graded and the grading criteria should be documented in the IEP. The team needs to discuss the type of modifications necessary and how this should impact grading. For example, if a student is only responsible for learning 50% of the outcomes, it would make sense that an alternate grading system be used. A few examples of grading alternatives include: pass/fail, IEP grading, and using an

*alternative grading scale. Special and general education teachers can collaboratively determine the grade. Be wary of grading students based upon individual effort.*

### **More on Grading – Transcripts/Report Cards.**

Course Titles. Students enrolled in a general education class for learning skills other than the course content (social skills, interactions with peers) should not receive credit for the listed course, but should be graded based on the criteria listed on his or her IEP.

There are basically two options that schools can use when the curriculum has been modified:

- One option is to change the name of the course on the transcript. The new course title must NOT indicate that the course is special education. Instead, descriptive terms, such as Practical Math, Basic English, or Functional Science must be used.
- A second option is to use an asterisk after course names on the transcript to indicate that the course was modified. The explanation of the asterisk must not indicate the student's participation in special education, and if it is used only for students with disabilities, this would be viewed as discriminatory. Regardless of the option that schools use, report cards for all students should be the same.

### **Honor Rolls and other Distinctions**

A school district may not exclude students from honor rolls solely because they are receiving special education services. However, a district may require that students perform on grade level and meet certain grade requirements in order to be placed on the school honor roll, even though some students with disabilities will not be able to perform at that level.

A district may not arbitrarily exclude students receiving special education when determining GPA or class ranking. The school may not eliminate students from competition for valedictorian, salutatorian or class ranking for scholarships merely because they receive special education. The school may use uniform standards for measuring academic achievement of educationally sound purposes, even though some students with disabilities may not be able to perform at higher levels.

A school district may use a weighted grading system that applies to all students. However, that system may not arbitrarily assign lower weights to all special education classes. The weighting of the classes must be based on an assessment of actual differences in the difficulty of all courses, including special and general education classes, using objective criteria.

### **Graduation.**

Local districts may require students with disabilities to meet all standards for graduation, including passing a minimal competency test. The denial of a diploma because of inability to pass the minimum competency test is not discriminatory. Students with disabilities must, however, be provided with any accommodation needed that does not alter the nature, content, or integrity of the test.

Students with disabilities can receive a regular high school diploma upon meeting state and school district graduation requirements. A modified or differentiated diploma or certificate may not be used for students receiving special education services unless the same diploma or certificate is granted to students without exceptionalities in the same graduating class. However, if the student has met the required courses for graduation and the IEP team believes the student still needs additional special education and related services, the student may be allowed to participate in graduation exercises and may receive a Certificate of Attendance instead of a diploma (KSDE, Process Handbook, p. 8-1).

•→ •→ *IEP Documentation. IEP teams need to review the student's course of study regularly and at appropriate times before the child receives a diploma to assure that graduation requirements will be met and that the goals and objectives in the IEP will be completed. **Graduation from high school with a regular diploma constitutes a change in placement, requiring written prior notice.***

Information taken from "The Answer Book on Section 504" by Susan Gorn, published by LRP Publications in 1998 and a booklet published by the Montana Office of Public Instruction, which was approved by OSEP. Much of the information was quoted from *Letter to Runkel*, OCR 1996.

August, 2004