

Accommodations vs. Modifications

Imagine someone who hasn't exercised in years is told to run a marathon in a month. Even being allowed to walk portions of it instead of running probably wouldn't make them capable of accomplishing the task. Trying to do so would probably leave them discouraged and very sore. However, being told that they can participate in a 5k instead would be much more manageable. Both involve exercise, but the goal changed - run a 5k instead of a marathon. The goal was modified to reflect the person's ability.

Sometimes the words 'accommodation' and 'modification' are used interchangeably, but they are in fact different things and have different effects on student learning. An **accommodation** changes the way a student receives information or is tested on the information without changing the learning goal or standard. Another way of thinking about accommodations is that they change *how* a student learns but not what they learn. An example of an accommodation is allowing a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) to take breaks during a test. They are still taking the same test with the same objectives, but how they accomplish the task is different.

A **modification** changes the learning goal or objective. This goes beyond changing how the student learns or is tested and effectively changes *what* they are actually learning. A modification could change the instructional level, the content or curriculum covered, the performance criteria (objective), or the assignment structure. An example of a modification would be reducing the amount of spelling words a student is required to learn or changing an essay assignment into a poster project.

Generally, it is better for a teacher to make accommodations rather than modifications to assignments. It is important to try accommodations first before modifying curriculum since modifications change the actual learning goals, which usually results in students learning on a lower level. This doesn't mean, however, that modifications should never be used. Like in the opening illustration, the accommodation of walking alone wouldn't be enough to complete the goal of running a marathon, a modified goal was needed. If a student cannot achieve success at the targeted level, using modifications to make the material more manageable for the student is an important part of teaching. Modifications allow the student to learn at their present level rather than failing to comprehend information above their understanding.

Examples of accommodations include:

- Large print;
- Braille;
- Books on tape;
- Audio amplification devices;
- Visual cues;
- Note taker;
- Reduction in the length of the assignment but not the content of the assignment (i.e. every other problem);
- Audio recordings;
- Speech to text;
- Word processing;
- Graphic or visual organizer;
- Extended time;
- Breaks in assignments or tests;

Modifications – Modifications actually lower learning expectations and should only be used if this is the only way for the child to be successful. Parents must understand if modifications to grade level standards are being made their child may be at risk for not meeting graduation requirements.

When choosing to modify curriculum make decisions:

- Based on the child's abilities;
- Based on the child's current skills;
- Based on the child's emotional well-being; and
- To help them be successful.

Examples of modifications include:

- Reducing assignments so a student only completes the easiest problems;
- Altering assignments to make them easier;
- Requiring a student to learn less materials than are required by the State's academic content standards;
- Providing help to a student via hints or clues to the correct answers on assignments and tests