

Guide to Modifications and Accommodations in Grading

Andrea and Nancy Hungerford have set forth three steps to determining what grade to award to students with disabilities in the general classroom.

1. Determine (in writing) the core curriculum content of each class (that is, what essential skills every student should have gained by the end of the course.)
2. If the student is expected to demonstrate all core skills, but in different modes or amounts, the student is receiving accommodations-grade should NOT be marked modified.
 - fewer problems (but problems that test the entire range of skills)
 - assistance with spell check or calculator
 - oral testing or written response not counted down for spelling SO LONG AS none of these are core skills for the class issue
3. If the student is excused from demonstrating some of the course's core skills, the student is receiving modifications –grade SHOULD be marked modified.
 - test problems cover only part of the skills taught
 - test is untimed, includes fewer problems, or spelling isn't counted IF these skills are the FOCUS OF THE COURSE

An example might be a math test where fewer problems or untimed tests are given, but the whole range of skills are represented in the test accommodations. Another example might be that in science written tests, spelling and grammar are not counted as part of the grade.

Although the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its regulations do not specifically address modified grading and grade reporting practices, ODE often gets questions from school staff and parents about these issues. This Q & A is based on information from various sources, including the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education, and other special education legal references. Our purpose in providing this information is to support equitable and non-discriminatory treatment of students with disabilities.

1. Must a student with a disability be given grades in a general education classroom?

It depends. If grades are the standard used for granting general education credit, students with disabilities enrolled in that class should receive grades. Grades provide a measure of the student's mastery of a particular subject area, and provide the IEP team with information to make appropriate educational decisions.

2. May a student with a disability in a general education classroom be given a modified grade rather than a standard grade?

Alternative grading systems may be appropriate as long as the district ensures that grading policies and practices are not discriminatory. For example, the district may offer alternative pass/fail grading for all students, regardless of whether or not a student has a disability. If an asterisk on the report card indicates, "individualized learner objectives", then the use of an asterisk would have to be applied to all students, not just those receiving special education.

Modified grading (and/or modified curriculum) may be necessary when a student's disability makes it impossible for them to achieve the level of performance expected of other students. A student's IEP team would decide if modified grading (and/or modified curriculum) is necessary for a student with a disability. At least one of the student's regular education teachers participates on the IEP team. This is a critical area of IEP team participation for regular education teachers.

Not all modifications or accommodations on a student's IEP affect the student's ability to master the objectives of the course. For example, a student with learning disabilities who needs books on tape and to take tests orally may acquire sufficient knowledge of world history to master the objectives of the course. These modifications/ accommodations do not, of themselves, imply that the course content has been modified or that the grading system needs to be modified for this student.

3. Can classes be identified as special education classes on the high school student's report card or transcript to indicate that the student has had a modified curriculum in a general education class?

No. The class should be described based on the content of the curriculum. Words such as "English essentials" or "practical math applications" or other descriptive phrases must be used. Other acceptable descriptive words include: "basic", "level 1", "independent study", etc. Words such as "special education English" or "resource math" should not appear on the transcript.

If a student is in a general education math class but is working on math skills at a much lower level (say, the class is 8th grade algebra, but the student is working on functional math skills), the transcript or report card should indicate that that period is a functional math skills class (rather than algebra) for that student. Alternatively, the transcript or report card could identify the class as algebra with an asterisk that indicates the student is working on "individualized learner objectives."

4. Can asterisks or other symbols or codes be written on a high school student's report card or transcript to indicate that the student has had a modified curriculum in the general education class?

Yes. Modifications or exceptions to the grading scale may be identified as long as the notation of modifications or exceptions does not identify the student as having a disability or being in special education. These modifications or exceptions must be available to any student, not just those students with disabilities. An asterisk after the grade may denote that the student received modified grades or completed work at a lower grade level. However, the explanation of the asterisk on the transcript or report card may not indicate the student's participation in special education.

The decision to specially mark a class should not be based on the student's disability but used only where a student is unable to master the objectives of the course even with appropriate modifications/accommodations.

5. Is it considered discrimination for students with disabilities to receive low or failing grades?

No. However, continuing a student in a class where the student is receiving poor grades needs to be considered by the IEP team. The team should review the student's performance and his/her behaviors and review whether the student is receiving the necessary special education and related services, supports, and accommodations and modifications.

6. How does an IEP team decide whether a student needs modified grading?

Typically, grades may reflect:

- The relative quality of a student's work;
- The student's readiness for future instruction;

- The student's level of competence/skill mastery;
- The student's effort and participation; and/or
- The student's completion of class work and homework.

The IEP team may want to discuss how these factors will be applied to a student with a disability, and whether any of these factors need to be adjusted because the factor is disproportionately affected by the student's disability. It is critical that a general education teacher participate in this discussion and decision-making process. This is an area where it is critical to have collaboration between general and special educators, the student and the parents.

Examples:

- An IEP team is considering grading for a student with ADHD and serious organizational problems with homework. The team decides that the student needs targeted instruction on organizational skills and daily home-school communication to maintain a homework system. The team agrees to modified grading (not counting homework for grading purposes as long as the student can demonstrate course objectives based on classroom work) for one quarter while the team evaluates the effectiveness of the other interventions. The student's IEP includes the following:

Specially Designed Instruction:

organizational skills 20 min/day classroom 1/28/01 to 3/12/01

Supplementary Aids/Services, Modifications & Accommodations

home-school communication daily classroom 1/28/01 to 3/12/01

(first period teacher to give student tracking form)

(last period teacher to check for completeness)

modified grading quarterly classroom 1/28/10 to 3/12/01

(quarter grade not to be reduced by missing homework, across all classes, third quarter only, to be reconsidered at end of third quarter)

- An IEP team is considering grading for a student with a communication impairment who unable to speak up in class. The team decides that class participation will not be counted for grading purposes, and that the teacher will periodically meet with the student individually or in a small group to give the student more comfortable opportunities for practicing her communication skills. The student's IEP includes the following:

Supplementary Aids/Services, Modifications & Accommodations;

modified grading quarterly classroom 1/28/10 - one year

(classroom participation not factored into grade, across all classes)

modified assignments sec * classroom 1/28/01 - one year

*when oral presentations are assigned, student will be offered option to present in small group or 1:1 with teacher

- c. An IEP team is considering grading for a student with mental retardation who receives all of her special education services in a regular class. She is mostly working on individualized objectives that parallel the regular curriculum but she cannot demonstrate mastery at the same level expected of other students at that grade level. The IEP team decides that the student will be graded in each content area based on mastery of her individualized learning objectives. In a few areas she is capable of demonstrating mastery at the same level expected of other students at that grade level. In those areas, she will be graded as the other students are.

The student's IEP includes the following:

Supplementary Aids/Services, Modifications & Accommodations;
modified grading daily classroom 1/28/10 - one year
(grades based on IEP objectives for reading, written language, math)
(grades in science, social studies, music & PE not modified)

7. Can a general education teacher refuse to implement modifications and accommodations on a student's IEP?

No, individual teachers do not have the discretion to refuse to implement modifications and accommodations on a student's IEP.

The teacher should inform the student's special education teacher or case manager if the teacher believes that the modifications and accommodations are unnecessary or inappropriate. In that case, the special education teacher or case manager may need to schedule an IEP meeting to consider changing the modifications and accommodations on the IEP.

Similarly, the teacher should inform the student's special education teacher or case manager if implementation of the modifications and accommodations in that class would somehow interfere with the student's ability to earn credit in that class. In that case, the special education teacher or case manager may need to either schedule an IEP meeting or confer with the parents and school counselor about a scheduling change.

8. What happens if the IEP team decides in Example (a), above, that the student's homework should not be counted as part of the student's grade, but the science teacher believes that completing science homework is a critical component of demonstrating course objectives?

It is important to remember that the IEP team decides what modifications and accommodations are necessary for a student, but the IEP team does not decide the impact of those modifications and accommodations on credit and course completion. As stated above, all teachers must implement IEP modifications and accommodations.