

WINTER 2006
Volume 2

Learning Disabilities Association of Tennessee

In this Issue:

Accommodations vs. modifications

Helpful Hints for Parents

The 10th Annual Rise Conference

Calendar of Events



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The Doctor is In:

Modification versus Accommodation

Sue Marsh, EdD

Many students with specific learning disabilities need accommodations and/or modifications to their educational program in order to access the general curriculum and be successful in school. These terms can be confusing. While both accommodations and modifications are types of adaptations that are made to the environment, curriculum, or assessment practices to enhance success, distinct differences between the two exist. PEAK, Colorado's federally designated Parent Training and Information Center, provides this clarification. Their website is www.peatc.org.

Accommodations change the way a student accesses information and demonstrates learning. They **do not** substantially change the instructional level, content, or performance criteria. Examples of curricular accommodations include taking tests orally, large print textbooks, additional time to complete a test or assignments, lab sheets with highlighted instructions, or the use of a computer for writing. Examples of environmental accommodations include a locker with an adapted lock, preferential seating, or eating lunch in an area other than the cafeteria.

Modifications change what a student is expected to learn. They may substantially change the instructional level, content or performance criteria. These changes allow the student to enjoy meaningful participation in the classroom. While they enhance productivity and school learning experiences, they may do so at a level below typically developing peers.

Examples include use of a calculator, viewing a video in place of text, a word bank, the use of a spell checker, projects substituted for written reports, and alternative books or materials on the same theme or topic.

When designing accommodations and modifications it is essential that the IEP team have a clear understanding of high school graduation requirements. This may not seem important when a child is in elementary school; however, when the curriculum is altered and requirements reduced, the student may not gain the knowledge necessary to pass Gateway and

Exit examinations. Each modification made to the curriculum should be weighed carefully against the graduation expectation.

Federal law requires a student's IEP to include a statement of accommodations required for participation in state and district-wide assessments. These are different than accommodations made to the curriculum.

They are designed to level the playing field for students with disabilities or students who may experience difficulty in testing situations. The Tennessee Department of Education website at

www.state.tn.us/education/assessments/tsaccom.shtml defines assessment

accommodations as modifications made to the test environment or test administration procedures. Assessment accommodations may only be used when necessary. They must be used throughout the year in order for the student to use them during the testing session.

There are two types. Allowable accommodations may be used by any student as needed. Examples include flexible setting, flexible scheduling, large print or Braille, and re-reading instructions. Special Accommodations may be used by students receiving special education services or services under Section 504. Documentation of need must be evident in the service plan or IEP.

Examples include the use of a reader, extended time or the use of a calculator.

For more information or extensive suggestions for accommodations and modifications the following websites may prove helpful:

www.ldonline.org/article/8022

www.schwablearning.ort/articles.asp?r=306

www.eparent.com/education/idea03_12.htm

<http://alpha.fdu.edu/psychology/>

ACC_MODIFICATIONS.htm

Helpful Hints

This is a list of suggestions you might want to share with your school - they are designed for parents; however, many would work equally as well in an educational environment.

1. Keep the environment predictable and familiar.
2. Provide structure and routine.
3. Prepare your child for changes, giving logical explanations.
4. Pay attention to sensory input from the environment, like noise, temperature, smells, many people around, etc.
5. Help your child learn coping skills for dealing with anxiety and sensory difficulties.
6. Be logical, organized, clear, concise and concrete. Avoid jargon, double meanings, sarcasm, nicknames, and teasing.
7. State your expectations clearly.
8. Be very specific about cause and effect relationships.
9. Work with your child's school to modify homework assignments, testing (time and content), grading, art and physical education.
10. Have your child use the computer at school and at home for schoolwork.
11. Help your child learn organizational and time management skills.
12. Make use of your child's verbal skills to help with social interactions and non-verbal experiences - for example, giving a verbal explanation of visual material.
13. Teach your child about non-verbal communication (facial expressions, gestures, etc.). Help them learn how to tell from others' reactions whether they are communicating well.
14. Learn about social competence and how to teach it.
15. Help your child out in group activities.
16. Get your child into the therapies they need, such as: occupational and physical therapy, psychological, or speech and language (to address social issues).

Tenth Annual Beyond Access Conference Great Success

Lorna Schmidt

The Beyond Access Conference originated as part of the RISE Project at the University of Memphis to provide educators, administrators, parents, and related service providers with current information about the best and most promising practices in inclusive education. Restructuring for Inclusive School Environment (RISE) has been hosting this conference in the Shelby County area for ten years. This year marked a special time as partnerships were developed with Arkansas and Mississippi Boards of Education to send teachers and administrators to this event. The conference was held for the first time at the Cook Convention Center on November 15, 2006, with over 430 attendees. The conference theme “Energizing Education: Going Outside the Lines”, stressed the need for schools and educators to become more creative and flexible in meeting education needs of diverse learners. The featured speaker was Dr. Debbie Silver, noted educator and author, who shared information about differentiated instruction and helping students create their own learning. Tammy Mullins and Sue Marsh were also presenters for breakout sessions on strategies for teaching diverse learners.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Tennessee had an exhibit where information was given out about services for children and adults with learning disabilities in the Memphis area. Membership information was distributed to several professionals and parents, and a bracelet sponsoring advocacy for learning disabilities was given to individuals who joined that day. Many people visited the booth and took information on Association membership. Since the conference

there have been more people join LDA of Tennessee.

The luncheon entertainment was provided by Mr. Sujeet Desai. Mr. Desai is an accomplished musician who was born with Down’s Syndrome. He was an inspiring, entertaining performer. Mr. Desai and his new wife also provided breakout sessions on their experiences growing up and going through the educational system. The Desai’s were sponsored by the Down Syndrome Association of the Mid South.

Feedback from participants has been very positive. Attendees noted that they felt inspired and provided with information to meet the needs of students. LDA representatives are assured that the conference was successful in providing methods of teaching that were “Outside the Lines.” Planning for the eleventh Beyond Access Conference is underway. For more information contact the RISE office at 901-678-4932.

Need last minute gift ideas?

How about an LDA membership! LDA is the voice for people with learning disabilities of all ages. LDA is the leading advocate for laws and policies that create opportunities for people with learning disabilities. LDA is a leader in promoting research into the nature and causes of learning disabilities. LDA membership is a great way to show support for the needs of people with learning disabilities.

Looking for Training?

For more trainings in your area log on to the TN Disability Training Network Calendar at <http://kc.vanderbilt.edu/tncpathfinder/calendar/>

You can also search online for services and professionals at these websites.

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder – www.familypathfinder.org

West Tennessee Community Services Network www.wtcsn.org Memphis Shelby County LINC services 901-415-2700.

44th LDA National Conference to be Held in February

Pittsburgh in February? Yes that is right, the Learning Disabilities Association National Conference will be held in Pittsburgh, PA February 14-17, 2007.

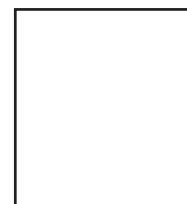
The four day conference promises to be full of information for parents, professionals, and self advocates. Registration is still open. Visit the LDA of America website at www.ldanatl.org for more information and to register online.

The Wednesday afternoon Keynote Address will be made by Dr. Naomi Zigmond of the University of Pittsburgh, who is widely known for her practical research on the effectiveness of services for students with learning disabilities. The title of her speech, "*The Special Education Teacher in the Twenty-First Century: A Call for Unconventional Thinking*," reflects her view that the pressures of high-stakes accountability assessments not only puts pressure on students, families, and teachers, but calls for a re-examination of the qualifications, roles, and responsibilities of the special education teacher who works with students with learning disabilities.

Our own Tammy Mullins from Tennessee will be presenting at this year's conference. The conference has something for everyone from adults with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, parents of children with learning disabilities and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, teachers of special education and general education, Principals, Administrators, Counselors, Social Workers, Researchers, Medical and Mental Health Professionals, Education Policy Advocates and even College Student Support Personnel. Attendees will discover the latest in LD research; learn effective teaching techniques and strategies; hear from leading experts in the LD field; network with colleagues and make new friends; learn about critical policy issues; earn graduate and/or continuing education credits (CEUs) and much more.



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The Learning Disabilities Association of Tennessee has a mission to provide information concerning awareness, advocacy, parent information, and community education to maximize the quality of life for individuals and families affected by Learning Disabilities and related disorders in Memphis, Shelby County, and West Tennessee.