

## 10 Steps for Disagreeing with Your School District

Consider the following steps when you enter into a dispute with your school district related to your child's special education curriculum and needs:

1. Talk with your child's classroom teacher and other school personnel who are aware of your child's needs, such as the counselor, nurse, school psychologist, or social worker. Naturally, not all of these people are involved in every situation. Also, discuss the problem you face with any team members or specialists who know your child, such as therapists, classroom assistants, and other teachers, to see if adjustments or changes can be made through new understanding and effort.
2. If this first step does resolve the problem under consideration, be sure to find out who among the school personnel will be willing to offer support for your subsequent efforts. Is the teacher sympathetic? Will he or she stand by your request? Does the counselor have information that will help? Ask them if they will be willing to come to meetings with you later or supply statements in support of your position.
3. Discuss your concerns with professionals outside of school who know your child, such as your family doctor, pediatrician, psychologist, audiologist, neurologist, or other specialists. Will they support your efforts to get the requested services for your child? Will they write letters or come with you to important conferences to answer questions? Will they express their views on a tape recorder for you to bring to the school?
4. Remember to keep detailed notes on your conversations and a file of up-to-date records. These are invaluable.
5. Discuss your complaints with the school principal. Have a clear idea of your reasons for requesting a change in your child's program and present your documentation. Be straightforward and self-assured. You are an equal partner in this and other school conferences. It is neither necessary nor productive to be aggressive or apologetic. Approach it as a situation in which both of you are seeking a solution to a problem.
6. Go directly to your district Director of Special Education or Director of Pupil Personnel services if the school is unable or unwilling to change its decisions. If no such staff positions exist in your district, contact the superintendent of schools. The superintendent is responsible for all school programs in the district and must be involved if other officials are unresponsive. Again, your notes, records, and other files should be in order. Use them. In all of these conferences, it is important to know which parts of the federal and/or state law protects your child's rights.



## Unique to IEP

## Common Characteristics

## Unique to 504

- | Unique to IEP   | Common Characteristics  | Unique to 504  |
|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Required under IDEA</li></ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mandated by laws</li></ul>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Required under rehabilitation Act</li></ul>                              |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Qualification based on 13 disability categories</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accommodations at no cost</li></ul>                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Qualification based on a record of impairment</li></ul>                  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describes accommodations and modifications</li></ul>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parent engagement throughout processes</li></ul>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Describes services that alter learning environments</li></ul>            |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Formal written learning goals &amp; objectives</li></ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reviewed yearly</li></ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parents pay for an outside evaluation</li></ul>                          |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mechanisms for conflict resolution</li></ul>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reassessment of student every 3 years</li></ul>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No formal written plan is required</li></ul>                             |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• State receives funding for eligible students</li></ul>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Parents can resolve disputes via mediation or lawsuit</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• States do NOT receive additional funding for eligible students</li></ul> |



# BEING A GOOD ADVOCATE

- BE a good listener
- BE collaborative
- BE polite
- BE on time
- Do your homework before you meet
- Keep a notebook/journal on all meetings and communications (include a current copy of your child's IEP)
- Have a list of all the items you want to talk about or ask about
- Try never to go alone, always have someone with you (friend, family member) so they can take notes for you
- Put a picture of your child on the conference table before the meeting begins to remind everyone who they are meeting about

•It's ok to disagree with the school, but always keep the lines of communication open and remain calm in the process.



- Attend School Board Meetings
- Keep in contact with your local legislators
- Volunteer at your school, help in your child's classroom
- Be involved in SAC (Student Advisory Councils)
- Become a member of your local Autism Society groups

# The NYSED Office of Special Education (OSE) Educational Partnership

## OSE

OSE will guide the work of the Educational Partnership with the goal of improving outcomes for students with disabilities through collaboration with other offices within NYSED P-12 Instructional Support, the Office of Higher Education, the Office of Early Learning, and Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation.

The Special Education  
Technical Assistance  
Partnership for  
**Equity**

The Special Education  
Technical Assistance  
Partnership for  
**Data**

The Special Education  
Technical Assistance  
Partnership for  
**Transition**

The Special Education  
Technical Assistance  
Partnership for  
**Behavior**

The Special Education  
Technical Assistance  
Partnership for  
**Academics**

The Technical Assistance Partnerships (TAPs) will work closely together to support all groups within the Regional Educational Partnerships and the Early Childhood and School-age Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Centers.

## Regional Teams:

Supporting students from early childhood through high school (birth-21)

### Regional Partnership Center

12 Centers will:

- promote meaningful change within the educational system
- build collaborative school/community relationships
- provide information and training in the areas of literacy, behavior, transition, specially designed instruction, and equity

### Early Childhood Family and Community Engagement Center

14 Centers will:

- promote meaningful family involvement within the educational system
- build collaborative community relationships
- provide information and training about available service options and delivery systems for children from birth-5

### School-age Family and Community Engagement Center

14 Centers will:

- promote meaningful family involvement within the educational system
- build collaborative community relationships
- provide information and training about available service options and delivery systems for school-age children

Utilizing a team approach and data-based decision-making, the regional teams will provide professional development and support to a variety of stakeholders, including families, preschools, schools, districts, and community partners.

## School Accommodation and Modification Ideas for Students who Receive Special Education Services

Some students with disabilities who receive special education services need accommodations or modifications to their educational program in order to participate in the general curriculum and to be successful in school. While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its regulations do not define accommodations or modifications, there is some agreement as to what they mean. An *accommodation* as used in this document allows a student to complete the same assignment or test as other students, but with a change in the timing, formatting, setting, scheduling, response and/or presentation. This accommodation does not alter in any significant way what the test or assignment measures. Examples of accommodations include a student who is blind taking a Braille version of a test or a student taking a test alone in a quiet room.

A *modification* as used in this document is an adjustment to an assignment or a test that changes the standard or what the test or assignment is supposed to measure. Examples of modifications include a student completing work on part of a standard or a student completing an alternate assignment that is more easily achievable than the assignment.

Modifications and accommodations should be discussed by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team and team decisions are written into a student's IEP. These changes should be chosen to fit the student's individual needs. It's important to include the student, if appropriate, when discussing accommodations and modifications. Asking the student what would be helpful is a good first step.

Under IDEA, assistive technology can be used as an accommodation for students with disabilities. Assistive technology is defined as "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability." There are many assistive technology products available to help students with disabilities. The IEP team should consider if assistive technology is needed to make progress on goals and objectives in the IEP or in the general education

curriculum. When reviewing these ideas, keep in mind that any accommodation or modification an IEP team chooses must be based on the individual needs of the student, and they must be provided if written in the student's IEP.

### Textbooks and Curriculum

#### Books: Accommodations

- Provide audio books in accessible formats and have the student follow the text while listening
- Provide summaries of chapters
- Use peer readers
- Use marker to highlight important textbook sections
- Provide two sets of classroom curriculum materials, one for home and one for school
- Provide the student with a list of discussion questions before reading the material
- Provide books and other written materials in alternate formats such as Braille or large print
- Explore use of assistive technology (such as Bookshare, Kurzweil)

#### Books: Modifications

- Provide alternative books with similar concepts but at an easier reading level
- Give page numbers to help the student find answers

#### Curriculum: Accommodations

- Provide a vocabulary list
- Substitute alternatives for long writing assignments (clay models, posters, panoramas, collections, power point, or oral presentation)
- Provide alternatives to reading aloud in front of the class
- Provide alternatives to crossword puzzles or word finds

#### Curriculum: Modifications

- Shorten assignments to focus on mastery of key concepts

*NOTE: many of the accommodations listed in this handout may also be appropriate for students with disabilities who have a Section 504 accommodation plan. The purpose of Section 504 accommodations is to eliminate barriers to full participation in school activities, including the general education curriculum. Modifications do not apply to 504 students.*



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- Shorten spelling tests to focus on mastering the most functional words

### **Classroom Environment: Accommodations**

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- Keep work space clear of unrelated materials
- Keep the classroom quiet during intense learning times
- Reduce visual distractions in the classroom
- Provide a computer for written work
- Seat the student close to the teacher or a positive role model
- Use a study carrel (provide extra carrels so that the student will not feel singled out)
- Seat the student away from windows, doorways, and radiators
- Provide a clear view of the board, teacher, and screen
- Keep extra supplies of classroom materials (pencils, paper) on hand
- Provide additional personal space between desks
- Post a visual schedule on student's desk
- Allow a pass system for students needing frequent movement breaks
- Provide accessible classroom locations and accessible furniture (such as special desks, tables, chairs)
- Provide headsets to block noise
- Provide FM or sound field system for listening
- Provide organizers for lockers/desk

### **Instructions and Assignments**

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#### **Directions: Accommodations**

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- Use both oral and printed directions
- Highlight key words in directions
- Give directions in small steps using as few words as possible
- Number and sequence steps in a task
- Have a student repeat directions to check for comprehension
- Provide visual aides
- Show a model of the end product (such as a completed math problem or finished quiz)
- Stand near the student when giving directions
- Allow use of tape recorder or assistive technology device to record directions

#### **Time/Transitions: Accommodations**

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- Alert student several minutes before a transition from one activity to another

- Provide additional time to complete a task
- Allow specified amount of extra time to turn in homework without penalty
- Provide assistance when moving between classrooms or around the building
- Allow student to leave classroom 2-3 minutes early to avoid crowded hallways
- Increase wait time for responses
- Provide a visual timer

### **Handwriting: Accommodations**

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- Use worksheets that require minimal writing
- Use fill-in questions with space for a brief response rather than a short essay
- Provide a "designated note taker" or photocopy of another student's or teacher's notes (do not expect student to arrange with another student for notes)
- Provide outlines for videos
- Provide print copy of any assignments or directions written on the blackboard or smartboard
- Provide photocopy materials rather than requiring student to copy from the board or text book
- Let the student use a tape recorder to dictate answers
- Provide access to a word processor, alpha smart, or similar device
- Provide adaptive writing tools, pencil grips, slanted surface
- Allow use of voice activated software for long written assignments
- Allow student to dictate a writing assignment for a teacher or teacher's aide to scribe
- Provide partially completed outlines of lectures for students to fill in the blanks
- Explore use of alternate keyboard options and writing software

### **Grading: Accommodations**

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- Use daily or frequent grading and average into a grade for the quarter
- Weigh daily work higher than tests for a student who performs poorly on tests due to the disability
- Mark the correct answers rather than incorrect ones

### **Grading: Modifications**

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- Provide partial grade based on individual progress or effort
- Permit a student to rework missed problems for a better grade