

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **Accommodations—A Key to Success**

Accommodations are changes that are made in how the student accesses information and demonstrates performance (Rule 6A-6.03411(1)(a), Florida Administrative Code [F.A.C.]).

Accommodations are important for students with disabilities. Students use accommodations to increase, maintain or improve academic performance. For example, students who have a visual impairment may use braille instructional materials or audiobooks. Students who use wheelchairs may need a ramp or elevator to move independently in a building.

Accommodations can be provided in four areas:

- Presentation—how students receive information,
- Responding—how students show what they know,
- Setting—how the environment is made accessible for instruction and assessment, and
- Scheduling—how time demands and schedules may be adjusted.

The state of Florida has adopted rigorous educational standards, known as Florida Standards and Next Generation Sunshine State Standards, to ensure students become college, career and life ready. Together, these standards define the core content of the general education curriculum. Accommodations assist in making grade-level standards accessible to students with disabilities. Students are taught knowledge and skills specified in the standards in kindergarten through Grade 12. Some students with significant cognitive disabilities require modifications to achieve grade-level standards. These students may learn alternate achievement standards, known as access points. Access points reflect the core intent of the standards at reduced levels of complexity.

In Florida, all students, including students with disabilities, have the opportunity to work toward grade-level academic standards or access points, as appropriate, and graduate from high school with a standard diploma. Students may use accommodations during instruction and assessment, if they need them. The goals for learning in school do not have to change because students use accommodations. Accommodations can help students with disabilities be able to meet the same requirements as students without disabilities.

Statewide assessments measure how students have been taught and have mastered the knowledge and skills required in the academic standards. In Florida, statewide assessments include the statewide standardized assessments (English Language Arts and mathematics); the statewide science assessment; the statewide standardized alternate assessments (language arts, mathematics, science and social studies); and

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end-of-course (EOC) assessments for selected high school courses. Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language Learners 2.0 (ACCESS for ELLs 2.0) assessments measure the English proficiency of ELLs beginning in kindergarten and Grades 1-12. Alternate ACCESS 2.0 is an assessment for students who are ELLs in Grades 1-12 and have a significant cognitive disability.

All public school students participate in the statewide assessment program. Students with disabilities and students who are ELLs may have accommodations for statewide assessments. Generally, students use the same kinds of accommodations for classroom instruction and statewide assessments (FDOE, 2015, March 20); **however, a student may use other accommodations for classroom instruction even if they are not available on statewide assessments. Parents must be notified and give written consent for their child to use such accommodations in the classroom.** Parents must acknowledge in writing that they understand the possible impact or future consequences. A list of online resources for statewide student assessment accommodations is provided in [Appendix A](#).

### Federal and State Requirements

Florida's accountability system supports the requirements of federal law regarding participation of all students, including students with disabilities, in standards-based instruction and assessment. The Every Student Succeeds Act, which reauthorizes the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), was passed in December 2015. ESEA ensures that the education system will prepare every child to graduate from high school ready for college and careers (United States Department of Education, 2015, December 2).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) governs services provided for students with disabilities. Each eligible student has an individual educational plan (IEP) that documents the services the student needs. Both laws (ESEA and IDEA) require students with disabilities to participate and make progress in the general education curriculum. The laws include provisions for accommodations for instructional activities and statewide assessments. Students with a significant cognitive disability may work on access points and participate in the statewide standardized alternate assessments. The annual goals on the IEP must be aligned with grade-level standards (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2015, November 16).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a federal law that prohibits disability-based discrimination of students enrolled in public schools. When a student is disabled under Section 504 and in need of services and accommodations, the Section 504 team will develop a Section 504 plan. The Section 504 plan identifies the services and accommodations necessary for a student to access instruction and may include accommodations in the classroom and for local and state assessments.

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The state of Florida ensures students with disabilities the right to a free appropriate public education and exceptional student education (ESE) services (section [s.] 1003.571, Florida Statutes [F.S.], and Rules 6A-6.03011 through 6A-6.0361, F.A.C.). The requirements for the state assessment program and accommodations for students with disabilities and students who are ELLs are included in s. 1008.22(3)(a)-(c), F.S.

### **Eligibility for Accommodations**

Any student with a disability who has been evaluated and determined to have a disability under IDEA or Section 504 may have accommodations. The student's needs for accommodations are documented in an IEP or Section 504 plan.

A student who is eligible for ESE services under IDEA is identified by one or more disability. The following Florida administrative rules define the disabilities and describe eligibility criteria:

- Specific Learning Disability—[Rule 6A-6.03018, F.A.C.](#)
- Intellectual Disability—[Rule 6A-6.03011, F.A.C.](#)
- Emotional/Behavioral Disability—[Rule 6A-6.03016, F.A.C.](#)
- Deaf or Hard of Hearing—[Rule 6A-6.03013, F.A.C.](#)
- Visual Impairment—[Rule 6A-6.03014, F.A.C.](#)
- Dual Sensory Impairment—[Rule 6A-6.03022, F.A.C.](#)
- Orthopedic Impairment—[Rule 6A-6.030151, F.A.C.](#)
- Other Health Impairment—[Rule 6A-6.030152, F.A.C.](#)
- Traumatic Brain Injury—[Rule 6A-6.030153, F.A.C.](#)
- Speech Impairment—[Rule 6A-6.03012, F.A.C.](#)
- Language Impairment—[Rule 6A-6.030121, F.A.C.](#)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder—[Rule 6A-6.03023, F.A.C.](#)
- Developmental Delay, Ages 3-5 Years—[Rule 6A-6.03027, F.A.C.](#)

Under Section 504, an individual with a disability is defined as any person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activity. Major life activities include caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working (Rule 6A-19.001, F.A.C.). A student with a temporary disability, such as a broken arm, may need accommodations for a limited time. A Section 504 plan should be developed for students to receive accommodations in the classroom and, if necessary, on statewide assessments. The plan describes the educational impact of the student's disability and the accommodations and services the student needs to access education and other school activities in the least restrictive environment (BEES, 2011).