

INSTRUCTIONAL ASPECTS OF SPED PROGRAM IN US PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM APPLICABLE TO OTHER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

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Abstract: Special Education program is implemented in each and every US Kindergarten thru 12 public schools and it is the major educational program that is subject to extra funding. In this review, instructional aspects of Special Education Program currently implemented in Kindergarten thru 12 US Public School System that may be applicable to educational systems of other regions and countries are discussed within the context of eligibility categories in regards to characteristics and educational approaches, referral process, RTI (response to intervention), standardized testing, accommodations during testing and regular class settings.

Key Words: Special Education, Referral, Response to Intervention, identification, ARD (Admission, Review, and Dismissal), IEP (Individualized Educational Plan), FIE (Full and Individual Evaluation), Modifications, Accommodations, Learning Disability, Other Health Impairment, Attention Deficit disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, Speech Impairment, Autism, Dyslexia, Tier-I-II-III Interventions, Standardized Testing

Introduction

According to The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of US law, the term special education means specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. It is important to note that under this law;

- Not all struggling learners have a disability.
- A child with a disability who does not need special education services is not eligible for special education. In other words, there should be an educational need sourced by student's disability. Such an example is when a child's low achievement is caused by lack of appropriate instruction or Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

Eligibility Categories

There are 13 disability categories in special education:

1. Learning disability
2. Other health impairment
3. Speech impairment
4. Autism
5. Emotional disturbance
6. Orthopedic impairment
7. Auditory impairment
8. Visual impairment
9. Deaf-Blind
10. Mental retardation
11. Developmental delay
12. Traumatic brain injury
13. Non-categorical Early Childhood

1. Learning Disability (LD)

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LD is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, perform, or do mathematical calculations. The term includes such conditions as

- perceptual disabilities,
- brain injury,
- minimal brain dysfunction,
- dyslexia, and
- developmental aphasia

The term does not include a learning problem that is primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.

Characteristics

Researchers estimated that 90% of all children identified as learning disabled are referred for special education services because of reading problems. Approximately half of the students in special education receive services in the category of Learning Disability. Many students with learning disabilities show one or more of the following characteristics:

- Deficits in written language
- Underachievement in math
- Poor social skills
- ADHD
- Behavior problems
- And low-self- esteem.

In addition to their academic and social-skills deficits, students with learning disabilities possess positive attributes and interests that teachers should identify and try to strengthen.

Educational Approaches

Best practice is characterized by explicit instruction, the use of content enhancements, and teaching learning strategies to students.

Explicit instruction is unambiguous, clear, direct teaching of targeted knowledge or skills: Students are shown what to do, given frequent opportunities to practice with teacher feedback, and opportunities to later apply what they have learned.

Content enhancements such as graphic organizers, note-taking strategies, and mnemonics help make curriculum content more accessible

Learning strategies help students guide themselves successfully through specific tasks or general problems

Ways the student learns best: Does he or she learn by hands-on practice, looking, or listening?

Breaking tasks into smaller steps, and giving directions verbally and in writing; giving the student more time to finish schoolwork or take tests; letting the student with reading problems use textbooks-on-tape (available through Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic, listed under Organizations); letting the student with listening difficulties borrow notes from a classmate or use a tape recorder; and letting the student with writing difficulties use a computer with specialized software that spell checks, grammar checks, or recognizes speech.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties such as inaccurate word recognition and poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction.

Characteristics

Dyslexic students have

- difficulty segmenting spoken words into individual sounds- mat; m-a-t.
- difficulty in accurately decoding nonsense words.
- difficulty in reading single words when they are not in context.

Reading becomes extremely difficult and fluency is slow and inaccurate.

Reading comprehension is difficult as well as learning the names of the letters and associated sounds.

Spelling, rapid naming - vocabulary - and word findings are all difficult.

Written composition, learning and saying the alphabet in correct sequence are very difficult.

Three times as many boys as girls are affected,

Bad spelling, problems remembering telephone numbers and appointments, and bad handwriting can also be signs of dyslexia, particularly in the many high-achieving dyslexics who have managed to compensate for their reading difficulties.

Educational Approaches

Teachers need to spend time with the dyslexic children in their classes and make an effort to help them.

The most important thing to do is to be understanding and supportive. All successful dyslexics attribute their success to a crucial someone who believed in them when they were struggling in childhood. Students shall not be blamed or to be put pressure on for not achieving.

They have to be explained that their dyslexia is a real physical condition, like deafness or having to wear glasses. To help the child distinguish between letters that confuse him, they have to be taught to begin writing each of the letters at a different point on the letter.

Students identified as dyslexic may receive accommodations in classroom instruction and testing. These accommodations usually are;

- Orally reading all proper nouns associated with each passage (from the state-supplied proper-nouns list) before the students begin individual reading
- Orally reading all test questions and answer choices to students,
- Extending the testing time over a two-day period.

Eligible students should be tested individually or in small groups.

2. Other Health Impairment (OHI)

OHI is defined as having limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment adversely affecting a child's educational performance, that is due to chronic or acute health problems such as;

- asthma,
- attention deficit disorder (ADD)
- attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD),
- diabetes,
- epilepsy,
- a heart condition,
- hemophilia,
- lead poisoning,
- leukemia,
- nephritis,
- rheumatic fever,
- sickle cell anemia

Characteristics

Students with other health impairments may have limited mobility and may get tired easily, depending on their illness. They may appear inattentive, depending on their illness. They may experience social isolation due to stigma related to their illness and/or frequent absences.

The student with 'other health impairments' does not have the strength or alertness to keep up with their class. Common 'other health impairments' on the reservations are asthma, ADD, ADHD and diabetes, less common health impairments are epilepsy, heart conditions, or hemophilia. OHI is basically caused by health problems and diagnosed by medical person, not school personnel.

Educational Approaches

Students may miss many days of school due to illness, so, accommodations should be made to keep students from falling too far behind, including sending work home and providing a tutor in the child's home or after school.

Most students actually want to go to school, as they see it as a distraction from their illness and they need to socialize with their friends, attending school and being with their friends helps them to feel "normal".

If a student misses class a lot because she is sick, the teacher needs to change around the curriculum for her so she is not so far behind. She can receive lecture notes, videotaped lectures, or can use the Internet in researching topics from home.

The teacher must also be aware of the student's physical condition and mental abilities, often students with health impairments do not have the same stamina as other students. They can be paired

up with another student, given assignments that are shorter, or given more time to complete their work. They can use art instead of writing in an assignment if their writing abilities or other intellectual abilities have become limited.

3. Speech Impairment (SI)

SI (A speech or language impairment) is a communication disorder such as

- stuttering,
- impaired articulation,
- a language impairment, or
- a voice impairment that adversely affects a student's educational performance.

Students eligible for Speech Impairment (SI) usually receive speech therapy from a certified speech therapist (audiologist) or speech pathologist at certain times.

Characteristics

A child's communication is considered delayed when the child is noticeably behind his or her peers in the acquisition of speech and/or language skills; delays in speaking may be the first sign to parents that something might be wrong in their child's development.

Sometimes a child will have greater receptive (understanding) than expressive (speaking) language skills, but this is not always the case. Speech and language development is affected by the physical, cognitive, and sensory-motor characteristics of each child. They may say "see" when they mean "ski" or they may have trouble using other sounds like "l" or "r." Listeners may have trouble understanding what someone with a speech disorder is trying to say. People with voice disorders may have trouble with the way their voices sound.

Educational Approaches

As the child with specific speech and language difficulty may have additional difficulties which impact on his/her learning it is important that the child sits near the teacher. This will facilitate both teacher and child in utilising the prompts, cues or other strategies employed to engage the child. Before initiating a conversation it is important to make eye contact with the child. This will ensure to have his/her attention.

Depending on the child's language difficulties it may be important to simplify language and using a slower speech rate. This will facilitate communication and the processing of information through the auditory channel. It is important, however, that speech rate is not so slow as to lose continuity in the message.

It is important to simplify sentence structure. Teacher language should be aimed at the level of language functioning of the child. This will aid the decoding of incoming information.

Where children experience serious difficulty with the understanding of what is being said, repetition, exaggeration, modelling, gesture and the rephrasing of sentences should be used to aid communication. Depending on the age of the child it sometimes helps to involve the child in selecting the strategy that works best for them.

4. Autism (AU)

A child may be considered to be a child with autism if the child has a developmental disability significantly affecting:

- Verbal communication;
- Nonverbal communication; and
- Social interaction;

Other characteristics often associated with autism are

- engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements
- resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines
- unusual responses to sensory experiences

Autism is generally evident before age 3. The most accurate statement regarding the cause of autism is in most cases a specific cause cannot be confirmed.

Characteristics

Autism may be defined as any diagnosis on the Autism Spectrum ranging from Pervasive Developmental Disorder to Aspergers Syndrome. Individuals who fall under the Pervasive Developmental Disorder category in the DSM-IV exhibit commonalties in communication and social deficits, but differ in terms of severity. Here are some major points, (from the Autism Society of America), that help distinguish the differences between the specific diagnoses used:

- Autistic Disorder, impairments in social interaction, communication, and imaginative play prior to age 3 years. Stereotyped behaviors, interests and activities.

- Asperger's Disorder (Mild Autism), characterized by impairments in social interactions and the presence of restricted interests and activities, with no clinically significant general delay in language, and testing in the range of average to above average intelligence.
- Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified (commonly referred to as atypical autism) a diagnosis of PDD-NOS may be made when a child does not meet the criteria for a specified diagnosis, but there is a severe and pervasive impairment in specified behaviors.
- Rett's Disorder, a progressive disorder which, to date, has occurred only in girls. Period of normal development and then loss of previously acquired skills, loss of purposeful use of the hands replaced with repetitive hand movements beginning at the age of 1-4 years. (Rett was not used to be classified as an Autistic Disorder before, but it is now)
- Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, characterized by normal development for at least the first 2 years, significant loss of previously acquired skills.
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Educational Approaches

Children with autism are among the most difficult students to teach. Those children require instruction that is carefully planned, meticulously delivered, and continually evaluated and analyzed. Learning style best suits the child shall be determined and emphasized.

It is common for an autistic child to be unable to process multiple sensory inputs at the same time. For example, it may be impossible to process both visual and auditory input simultaneously. In such cases, teaching has to be separated into "channels" and focus has to be on only one sense at a time.

Autistics often have trouble with generalization, which can affect the way they learn skills. When teaching a child to look both ways before crossing a street, it may be necessary to show them in several locations. If not, they may think they need to look only when crossing at that particular spot.

Autistic children may fixate on something they enjoy, such as trains. Incorporating this fixation into their lessons by including stories of trains, math problems involving trains, and so on gives motivation to learn. It is common for an autistic to have trouble connecting two events even if they are very close together. If teaching reading with flash cards, use cards with both the written word and the picture of the object on the same side of the card. If they are on different sides, the child may not understand that they represent the same idea.

5. Emotional or Behavioral Disorders (ED)

Emotional or behavioral disorder is a condition in which one or more of the following characteristics are exhibited for a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a student's educational performance. Such disabilities are;

- An inability to learn that which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or other health factors.
- An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.
- Inappropriate type of behavior or feeling under normal circumstances.
- A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.
- Schizophrenia is also included as part of the definition.
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Characteristics

Although various factors such as heredity, brain disorder, diet, stress, and family functioning have been suggested as possible causes, research has not shown any of these factors to be the direct cause of behavior or emotional problems. According to the federal definition of emotional disturbance, children and youth who are socially maladjusted are not eligible for special education and related services unless it is determined that they are also emotionally disturbed. Some of the characteristics and behaviors seen in children who have emotional disturbances include:

- Hyperactivity (short attention span, impulsiveness);
- Aggression/self-injurious behavior (acting out, fighting);
- Withdrawal (failure to initiate interaction with others; retreat from exchanges of social interaction, excessive fear or anxiety);
- Immaturity (inappropriate crying, temper tantrums, poor coping skills); and
- Learning difficulties (academically performing below grade level).
- They can get out of their seats, yell, talk out and curse, disturb peers, hit or fight, ignore the teacher, complain and argue excessively, steal and lie.

Children with the most serious emotional disturbances may exhibit distorted thinking, excessive anxiety, bizarre motor acts, and abnormal mood swings. Some are identified as children who have a severe psychosis or schizophrenia. Many children who do not have emotional disturbances may display some of these same behaviors at various times during their development. However, when children have

an emotional disturbance, these behaviors continue over long periods of time. Their behavior thus signals that they are not coping with their environment or peers.

Educational Approaches

To increase appropriate behavior, a necessary first step is for the teacher to explicitly, clearly, and fairly define behavioral expectations. Other educational approaches include;

- Presenting materials at independent level, not frustration level,
- Providing short, manageable tasks,
- Setting short-term expectations,
- Repeating directions frequently,
- Using special education staff for problem solving,
- Following through on everything
- Be willing to modify classroom expectations and homework problems,
- Not placing hands on students, keeping a sense of humor and using it,
- Solving problems privately and not publicly

Teachers can most effectively change behavior when they avoid fulfilling the function of an undesired behavior, and assist a student fulfill the behavioral function or purpose through a desired behavior. For example, if the function of a student's yelling is to gain the teacher's attention, the teacher may remove the student from the class (time-out) and deliberately avoid fulfilling the behavioral function to gain the teachers attention. However, when the student speaks in an appropriate tone of voice the teacher gives the student the attention he/she desires and assists the student in choosing a desired behavior.

Referral Process

Referral process is a very delicate component of identifying eligible students that will receive special education services and it is mandated by RtI (Response to Intervention). Only major aspects of RtI will be described in this section.

RtI Tiered Intervention Categories:

Tier I interventions:

Tier I interventions are available to all students. They are basically classroom modifications, e.g., checking homework of the child each day.

Tier II interventions:

Tier II interventions are individualized to the needs of students in general education setting. They are;

- Problem-solving interventions: They are classroom-based interventions implemented by teacher.
- Standard-protocol interventions: They are stand-alone interventions given outside of the classroom. *Ex:* tutorials
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Tier III interventions:

Tier III interventions are for severe and chronic students. They are given only through special education.

Referral Process Steps

1. Classroom teacher notices the sign of academic difficulty.
2. Teacher independently puts Tier I interventions into place and monitors/documents the performance.
3. If the student fails Tier I, the teacher refers him/her to Student Support Team for Tier II interventions by completing a referral form.
4. Student Support Team starts collecting data and meets with the teacher in order to brainstorm about interventions (must be scientific, research-based interventions) likely to meet the needs of the referred student.
5. The student is observed/monitored with Tier II by Student Support Team for a reasonable period of time (i.e. 6 weeks). If the student fails, change the intervention.
6. A student, who continues to show chronic and significant academic deficits despite a history of intervention attempts, may need to be found eligible for special education. Then Tier III.
7. If a child continues to experience difficulty in general education after above interventions, school personnel may refer the child for a FIE for special education services.

Standardized Testing

As other students, students receiving special education services have to be tested via standardized state tests for federal and state accountability purposes. In the example state of Texas, Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) measures a student's mastery of the state-mandated curriculum that is the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS).

TAKS (Accommodated) Test

TAKS includes a form called TAKS (Accommodated) for students receiving special education services who meet the eligibility criteria for specific accommodations. This is a general assessment based on the same grade-level academic achievement standards as TAKS. The TAKS (Accommodated) includes format changes (larger font, fewer items per page) and contains no embedded field-test items. TAKS, including TAKS (Accommodated), is administered in English for

- Grades 3–9 reading
- Grades 3–10 and exit level mathematics
- Grades 4 and 7 writing
- Grade 10 and exit level English language arts (ELA)
- Grades 5, 8, 10, and exit level science
- Grades 8, 10, and exit level social studies
- TAKS, including TAKS (Accommodated), is administered in Spanish for
- Grades 3–5 reading
- Grades 3–5 mathematics
- Grade 4 writing
- Grade 5 science

TAKS-M (Modified) Test

TAKS-M is an alternate assessment based on modified academic achievement standards and is designed for students receiving special education services who meet participation requirements for TAKS-M. Each test covers the same grade-level content as TAKS, but TAKS-M tests have been changed in format (larger font, fewer items per page, etc.) and test design (fewer answer choices, simpler vocabulary and sentence structure, etc.). TAKS-M is administered in English for

- Grades 3–9 reading, including SSI retest opportunities in grades 5 and 8
- Grades 3–11 mathematics, including SSI retest opportunities in grades 5 and 8
- Grades 4 and 7 writing
- Grades 10 and 11 English language arts (ELA)
- Grades 5, 8, 10, and 11 science
- Grades 8, 10, and 11 social studies

TAKS-Alt (Alternate) Test

TAKS-Alt is an alternate assessment based on alternate academic achievement standards and is designed for students with significant cognitive disabilities receiving special education services who meet the participation requirements for TAKS-Alt. This assessment is not a traditional paper or multiple-choice test. Instead, it involves teachers observing students as they complete state-developed assessment tasks that link to the grade-level TEKS. Teachers then evaluate student performance based on the dimensions of the TAKS-Alt rubric and submit results through an online instrument. This assessment can be administered using any language or other communication method routinely used with the student. TAKS-Alt is administered for

- Grades 3–9 reading
- Grades 3–11 mathematics
- Grades 4 and 7 writing
- Grades 10 and 11 English language arts (ELA)
- Grades 5, 8, 10, and 11 science
- Grades 8, 10, and 11 social studies

Other Standardized Tests

Linguistically accommodated testing (LAT) and Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System (TELPAS) are other tests assess students with limited English proficiency to

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address federal requirements by NCLB. Students eligible for special education services may also be a LEP (Limited English Proficient) student and in that case LAT and TELPAS tests may apply as well. For such students, ARD committee must include an LPAC member to address educational needs due to limited English proficiency and decide whether an exemption is appropriate.

Accommodations

Most students with disabilities can achieve grade-level academic content standards when they receive

- instruction from teachers who are highly qualified to teach in the content areas
- addressed by state standards and know how to differentiate instruction for diverse learners;
- specialized instruction within the framework of an IEP; and
- appropriate accommodations to help them access grade-level content.

Accommodations are practices and procedures that provide equitable access to grade-level curriculum during instruction and assessment for all students. This includes general education students with special needs, eligible ELLs who need linguistic accommodations, as well as students with disabilities who receive special education services.

Accommodations do not reduce learning expectations. Therefore, their use should not replace the teaching of subject-specific knowledge and skills as outlined in the state curriculum for each grade. Certain accommodations may be needed more often at some grades than others depending on academic content and rigor. Although some accommodations may be appropriate for instructional use, they may not be appropriate or allowed on a standardized assessment.

The decision to use an accommodation should be made on an individual basis and take into consideration both the needs of the student and whether the student routinely receives the accommodation in classroom instruction and testing. It is neither appropriate nor effective to provide “one size fits all” accommodations to students. For example, one student with a visual impairment might use large-print textbooks and worksheets while another would benefit from a magnification device. In most cases, accommodations are unique to a student and should not be provided to an entire group of students, such as those in the same class or disability category.

It should be kept in mind that students unaccustomed to using specific accommodations may be hindered rather than helped by the use of accommodations not routinely used in classroom instruction. In some cases students need ample experience with accommodations for them to be effective. The process of making decisions about accommodations requires, in essence, that educators attempt to “level the playing field” so that students can participate meaningfully in the general education curriculum and assessments. Accommodation decisions should not be made for entire groups of students, such as those in the same class or with a particular disability.

The more extensively students are involved in the selection process; the more likely appropriate accommodations will be used, especially as students reach adolescence and the desire to be more independent increases. Students need opportunities to learn not only which accommodations are most helpful to them but also how to make use of those accommodations in their classes.

Types of Accommodations

The accommodations except linguistic accommodations are categorized in four groups: presentation (P), response (R), setting (S), and timing and scheduling (T).

Presentation Accommodations allow students to access information in alternate formats other than regular print. These alternate modes of access may include auditory, multi-sensory, tactile, and visual modes.

Response Accommodations allow students to complete activities, assignments, and assessments using methods other than paper-and-pencil or machine-scorable responses. Response accommodations may also include allowing students to solve or organize problems using a supplemental aid.

Setting Accommodations change the location in which a test or assignment is given or the conditions of the assessment setting.

Timing and Scheduling Accommodations increase the standard length of time to complete an assignment or assessment or possibly change the way the time is organized.

Presentation Accommodations

Braille (Available in all standardized tests but TELPAS Reading)

A student who has a visual impairment and routinely uses Braille materials in the classroom may use a Braille version of the test. Braille tests are available in both contracted and uncontracted Braille*. Uncontracted Braille tests may be ordered only for students who use uncontracted Braille materials routinely in classroom instruction.

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Test items with a visual element that cannot be rendered in Braille will include a description of what is depicted in the print version of the test. Special consideration should also be given to lighting conditions for students with low vision. Student responses for all Braille and large-print tests must be transcribed and transferred to a scorable test booklet or answer document. If this is not done, the student's test cannot be scored. Transcribing may be done by the test administrator during or after testing.

*Uncontracted Braille is the most basic form of Literary Braille and requires the least amount of cognitive burden on the reader. Uncontracted Braille is very limited in use, as it is not suitable for most reading material beyond a beginning scope of a Braille reader, and is not suitable for math and science. Uncontracted Braille simply consists of the 26 characters of the alphabet and various punctuation symbols such as the period (.) and comma (,) but does not include abbreviations or contractions. Contracted Braille is more advanced than uncontracted and is considered to be the universal standard form of Literary Braille. Contracted Braille consists of several abbreviations and contractions that provide the reader with greater ease of use. Braille readers often learn uncontracted Braille first and then learn contracted, which requires more cognitive processing by the Braille reader to decipher the translation.

Large Print (Available in all standardized tests)

The student who has a visual impairment and has difficulty decoding grade-level material and reads quickly over unknown words, compromising comprehension as a result. The larger print allows the student to track carefully and more effectively, which causes fewer decoding mistakes and increases comprehension.

Magnifying or Low-Vision Devices (Available in all standardized tests)

Some students with visual impairments read regular print materials using magnification devices such as eyeglass-mounted magnifiers, or freestanding or handheld magnifiers. Some students also use a closed-circuit television (CCTV) or a document camera to enlarge print and display printed material with various image enhancements on a screen. For TELPAS reading tests, technology-based accommodations such as LCD projectors and interactive white boards, which enlarge the display of the online test, can be used to enable ELLs with visual impairments to test online.

Photocopies of Test (Available in all standardized tests)

Having a visual impairment (macular degenerative optic nerve hypoplasia) and vision loss is progressive over time. Doctor recommends print size of 20 point font enlargement and the use of optical visual aids for all school work. Although optical visual aids are available, student is not proficient with their use and takes longer to complete tasks. Student is able to complete assignments successfully in less time with larger print.

Photocopying test to a 20 point font size is necessary because the state-provided large-print test is smaller. To maintain security and confidentiality, districts must ensure that all standard test security policies and procedures are followed.

Place Markers (Available in all standardized tests)

A student may use a blank place marker on the test and answer document. These place markers may include index cards, adhesive notes, etc.

Colored Overlays (Available in all standardized tests)

A student may use colored overlays. Markers may be used to make notes on the colored overlay.

Reading Test Aloud to Self (Available in all standardized tests)

A student may read aloud or read into a recording device during testing and play it back while working. A student may also use a voice feedback device (e.g., PVC phone). If the use of these accommodations is distracting to other students or compromises the security of the test, an individual administration is required.

Oral/Signed Administration for Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies (Available in all standardized tests but TELPAS Reading)

An oral administration by a test administrator may include different levels of reading support for each student, such as reading only a few words or phrases, reading multiple sentences throughout the test, or reading the test in its entirety.

Reading Aloud Test Questions for TAKS–M Reading Selections (Available for TAKS–M reading sections only)

On TAKS–M reading tests and the reading section of the TAKS–M ELA tests, reading the test questions and answer choices aloud is an accommodation for students whose ARD committees have determined a need and who routinely use this type of assistance in classroom instruction. It is the

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responsibility of the ARD committee to determine if a student needs all of the test questions and answer choices read aloud or if the accommodation will be provided only if the student asks for assistance.

Dyslexia Bundled Accommodations (for TAKS and TAKS Accommodated Reading 3rd thru 8th Grades only)

The dyslexia bundled accommodations include orally reading all proper nouns associated with each passage before students begin individual reading, orally reading all test questions and answer choices to students, and extending the testing time over a two-day period. These three accommodations must be “bundled,” meaning the accommodations must be provided together.

Sign/Translate Directions (Available in all standardized tests)

Test administration directions given orally before or after the test may be either signed to a student who is deaf or hard of hearing or translated into the native language of a student with limited English proficiency. Translating directions into the native language of the student is not considered an accommodation for an ELL taking a TELPAS reading test or LAT. For these tests, translating directions is part of the test administration procedures.

If a student’s primary access to the TEKS is provided by a deaf educator in a classroom setting, then the deaf educator would be the test administrator. In some cases, a certified sign language interpreter may be needed to facilitate communication between the test administrator and student. The test administrator should employ the sign language that the student routinely uses as part of daily instruction.

When the test is administered in sign language, it may be necessary for the print versions of the test administration directions and/or test content to be projected on a screen so that the student can access the test in both print and sign; however if a test booklet must be photocopied onto transparencies for use on an overhead projector, an Accommodation Request Form must be submitted unlike direct projection onto a screen.

A) If a sign exists, the test administrator should use it when it occurs in print on the test. Signs that are commonly used in sign language are allowable in the signed administration of state assessments. Occasionally a commonly used sign that is “conceptually accurate” may appear to give the student an unfair advantage; however, conceptual accuracy is a critical component of American Sign Language and most sign systems. Conceptually accurate signs incorporate meaning in the production of the sign. For example, if an item asks the student to identify a triangle, the commonly used sign is a pantomimed drawing of a triangle. This is the commonly accepted sign used in conversation and instruction, and therefore should be the sign that is used when the English word “triangle” appears in the test. Finger spelling is not an acceptable substitution because it increases the difficulty of the item by requiring the student to recognize “triangle” by its spelling. A hearing student would not be required to recognize a word by its spelling in an oral administration; therefore, it should not be required of a deaf student.

B) If a sign has been locally developed and routinely used in instruction, the test administrator may use it when it occurs in print on the test. For much of the vocabulary used in instruction, there are not commonly used signs. In many cases, teachers or sign language interpreters will develop signs for frequently used vocabulary, with the understanding that these are locally developed signs for a particular academic setting. These locally developed signs may be used in a signed administration if they are regularly used during instruction. An example of a locally developed sign might be for the English word “fission.” It is not a commonly used word and it would be extremely rare to find it in any sign language dictionary. However, if “fission” is used frequently during science instruction, the teacher or sign language interpreter might develop a sign to be used only in the instructional setting. The concept of “splitting apart” might be incorporated into the formation of the sign. It would be allowable to use this locally developed sign in the testing situation. Conceptual accuracy in a sign that exists or in a sign that has been locally developed is a key component of sign language and should not be denied to the sign language user.

C) If there is no commonly accepted sign and a local sign has not been developed, the test administrator must determine if the word or phrase is or is not the concept being assessed. If the word or phrase is the concept being assessed, the test administrator must fingerspell the word. It is not acceptable to create new signs or to use an equivalent or expansion to explain vocabulary that is being assessed. For instance, in the following question of “What is the range of the sale prices for a Stunt-Pro bicycle at these stores?” the word “range” is the concept being assessed. Therefore, if a sign for this word does not exist or has not been locally developed, the test administrator must fingerspell it. If the word or phrase is not the concept being assessed, the test administrator may use a reasonable equivalent or expansion. The test administrator has more flexibility when signing words or phrases that are not the concepts being assessed. On the other hand, it is unlikely that a sign exists or has been locally

developed for the phrase “Stunt-Pro”. However, since this is not the concept being assessed, the test administrator may provide a reasonable equivalent or expansion.

Amplification Devices (Available in all standardized tests)

Amplification devices help reduce the interference of background noise, override poor acoustics, and reduce the effect of distance between the student and the test administrator. A student may use an amplification device, such as a frequency modulated (FM) system, if the student is identified as having a hearing impairment and/or has a disability that affects the student’s ability to focus or concentrate in large-group situations.

Manipulating Test Materials for Students (Available in all standardized tests)

A student may have a temporary or permanent disabling condition that interferes with the ability to physically manipulate test materials, such as test booklet pages, rulers, etc. The student must direct the test administrator very specifically regarding all steps necessary when manipulating the materials (for example, when to turn the page or where to place the ruler). For online administrations, the test administrator may assist a student who is unable to move the mouse to navigate the online test. The student must provide specific directions to the test administrator regarding how to navigate the test. The test administrator may not provide feedback regarding the correctness of the student’s directions.

Response Accommodations

Other Methods of Response (Available in all standardized tests)

A student may have a temporary or permanent disabling condition that interferes with or limits the ability to make notes, do computations, or record responses on a scorable document. This may include, but is not limited to, students with an injury (e.g., broken arm), physical condition (e.g., cerebral palsy), visual difficulties (e.g., extremely limited vision, broken eyeglasses, or tracking difficulties), or a significant deficit in written expression. Students who simply have poor handwriting or spelling skills will most likely not fall into this category.

However, this accommodation may be appropriate for students who have such severe fine motor or spelling deficits that they cannot communicate meaning through writing. Any of the following methods of response are allowed for students who meet the conditions above. Students

- may respond orally or sign responses to test items;
- mark responses in the test booklet;
- point to their response;
- use an augmentative communication device;
- record responses on a dry-erase board, chalkboard, or scratch paper (e.g., blank, lined, or graph paper);
- or type responses on a typewriter, portable word processor, or computer.

All special features of assistive devices (e.g., spell check, word predictor) must be disabled for all TAKS writing/ELA tests and the TAKS (Accommodated) or TAKS–M grade 4 writing test. In addition, these special features should be disabled for all other writing/ELA tests unless the student receives spelling assistance as an accommodation. Student responses may not be saved to a disk or hard drive.

Scribe

A scribe is the trained test administrator who writes down what a student indicates through an assistive communication device, pointing, sign language, print, or speech. Being a scribe requires understanding the boundaries of the assistance to be provided. A scribe may not edit or alter student responses in any way and must record word for word on the standard answer document exactly what the student has indicated. The scribe may not provide feedback regarding the correctness of the student’s response.

Written Composition

The role of the scribe is to write exactly what is dictated. The scribe should ask for clarification from the student about the intended use of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling of key words that are unique to the student’s creativity and word choice (not basic grade-level sight words) since these conventions are part of the score the student receives. The student must have the opportunity to review and edit what the scribe has written; for example, the scribe may intentionally leave out all capitalization and punctuation for the student to edit. The student must be made aware of the space allowed for his or her response so that the transcribed composition will fit onto the two lined pages provided on the standard answer document.

Open-ended Responses

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The role of the scribe is to write exactly what is dictated. The scribe is not required to ask for clarification from the student about the intended use of capitalization, punctuation, and spelling of key words since these conventions are not part of the scoring rubric used to assess students' short-answer responses. The student must be made aware of the space allowed for his or her responses so that the transcribed responses fit in the spaces provided on the standard answer document.

Griddable Items

When transcribing a student's response to a griddable item for a mathematics or science test, the student's response must fit in the spaces provided on the standard answer document. The student must be made aware of the spaces allowed for his or her response so that the transcribed response fits in the spaces provided on the standard answer document.

Computation/Notes

If the student is physically unable to record mathematical computations, the student must direct the scribe very specifically regarding all steps necessary to complete the computation (for example, digit by digit, how to align numbers, etc.). For transcription of notes during the test, the scribe must follow the student's exact instructions. This may include making notes in the margins of the test booklet or underlining phrases or words in passages. The scribe may not provide feedback regarding the correctness of any computations or relevance of any notes. If the use of any of these accommodations is distracting to other students or compromises the security of the test, an individual administration may be required.

Spelling Assistance (Available in TAKS Accommodated and TAKS M only)

If a student is capable of organizing thoughts and ideas in written responses but has a disability that affects the physical reproduction of letters and words or the ability to remember spelling rules, word structures, or letter patterns, spelling assistance may be used. For example, a list of frequently misspelled words would be appropriate only for a student who can select a word with an irregular spelling pattern for use on his or her written response but is unable to reproduce the letters or pattern needed to correctly and consistently spell the word without assistance.

- A student taking the TAKS (Accommodated) or TAKS–M grade 4 writing test may only use word lists. Word lists may not contain definitions or examples of how to use words in a sentence.
- A student taking the TAKS (Accommodated) or TAKS–M grade 7 writing test, grade 9 reading test, or grade 10 or 11/exit level ELA test may use spelling assistance (e.g., spell check, pocket spell checkers, word lists)

Calculation Devices (Available in TAKS Accommodated and TAKS M only)

Student's deficits are in basic math calculation and memory retrieval. There is no deficit in math reasoning. Before the use of the calculator, student failed tests by making mistakes on all operations. Student would "draw out" calculation problems but would miscount the final answer. A multiplication chart would also help, but only with multiplication facts. It is important to determine whether the use of a calculation device is a matter of convenience or a necessary accommodation. Calculators may be adapted with large keys or voice output (talking calculators). In some cases, an abacus may be useful as it serves as a paper and pencil for some students with visual impairments. If the use of the accommodation is distracting to other students, an individual administration may be required.

Supplemental Aids (Available in all standardized tests but TAKS)

A supplemental aid is a resource that assists a student in recalling information. If a student's disability affects memory retrieval, a supplemental aid may be allowed. The student must be able to understand the material being assessed, but may need assistance recalling the information. The supplemental aid must serve only as a tool and not as a source of direct answers—meaning it cannot provide direct answers to the TEKS being assessed. It is important to determine whether the use of a supplemental aid is a matter of convenience or a necessary accommodation.

Manipulatives (Available in TAKS Accommodated and TAKS M only)

Manipulatives are concrete objects that a student can move and touch in order to visualize abstract concepts. The manipulative must serve only as a tool and not as a source of direct answers—meaning it cannot provide direct answers to the TEKS being assessed. The following manipulatives are allowed;

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- real or play money,
- clocks,
- base-ten blocks,
- various types of counters (e.g., two-sided chips, blocks, etc.),
- algebra tiles,
- fraction pieces,
- non-labeled geometric figures.

Blank Graphic Organizers (Available in all standardized tests but TAKS)

A student who has a processing problem may benefit from the use of blank graphic organizers. Examples of common graphic organizers include webs, charts, and boxes. Blank graphic organizers do not contain any words, numbers, or symbols. Graphic organizers that contain any words, numbers, or symbols are considered supplemental aids.

Setting Accommodations

Minimizing Distractions to the Student (Available in all standardized tests)

A student may need an accommodation that minimizes external and/or internal distractions. Some examples of this accommodation may include, but are not limited to, headphones or a stress ball.

Individual Administration (Available in all standardized tests)

A student may receive an individual administration. A trained test administrator must be present in the testing room at all times.

Small-Group Administration (Available in all standardized tests)

A student may be tested in a small group. A trained test administrator must be present in the testing room at all times. The state does not define how many students constitute a small-group administration. Groupings for this accommodation should be based on student need and, in all cases, should be smaller than the number of students in a traditional testing room.

Timing Accommodations

Extended Time—Testing Over Two Days (Available in all standardized tests)

Testing over two days will be approved only for a very small number of students who have unique situations. Some examples of students who may need extended time on a test include those who take a Braille version of the test, have a serious medical condition or a severe physical impairment, or have a severe emotional disturbance. For example, it would not be appropriate to submit a two-day request for all students who have autism, but it would be appropriate for those who have documented success with the use of extended time on assignments similar in length and rigor to the state assessments.

It is not appropriate to request this accommodation for students with test anxiety, attention deficit disorder, or for students needing extra time to complete specific testing strategies unless there are other extenuating factors that make a student's situation unique.

Visual, Verbal, or Tactile Reminders to Stay on Task (Available in all standardized tests)

A student who loses focus easily may need general visual, verbal, or tactile reminders to stay on task. For example, a test administrator may say "You need to continue working" or "You are on page X." Or, the test administrator may gently tap a student's shoulder to redirect his or her attention to the test. The use of this accommodation may require an individual or small-group administration.

Multiple or Frequent Breaks (Available in all standardized tests)

A student who cannot concentrate continuously for an extended period or who becomes frustrated or stressed easily (e.g., a student with autism or a severe behavioral disability) may need frequent or extended breaks. This accommodation may also be helpful for a student who takes medication that causes fatigue or affects his or her ability to stay Alert. The test booklet may be divided into short sections (e.g., by using paper clips or adhesive notes) so that a student can take a break between each section.

A timer may be used so that the student can take breaks at planned intervals. A student may be allowed to take brief breaks in the testing room during a test session. However, testing personnel should ensure that while taking a break, the student does not participate in any activity that may potentially provide access to information related to any subject-area test content. For example, activities such as reading books or magazines are not permitted. The test booklet must be closed with the answer document inside, and it is essential that the student be closely monitored at all times so the content of the test is not discussed with others. The use of this accommodation may require an individual or small-group administration.

Conclusions and Recommendations

US Kindergarten thru 12 Public School System is among the largest public school systems in the world with the most number of foreign students incorporated into the system each year. US public school system is a very dynamic system that is updated regularly with the latest findings in research done in many Colleges of Education throughout the country. Postgraduate research done in Educational Sciences in US is amongst the leaders of the world in terms of quality and quantity. Thus, it would be very reasonable to evaluate and try to adapt parts of this system as needed. Unlike systems of other sciences, which would need the appropriate infrastructure to adapt, educational systems are relatively easier to adapt due to little physical infrastructure involved. However, one cannot underestimate the human factor that is the readiness of the society, thus it would be a safe bet to say that adapting portions of such a system would be easier for smaller school systems.

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