

Research on the Accommodations Wheel

Federal laws *No Child Left Behind 2001 (NCLB)* and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA)* require the participation of students with disabilities in standards-based instruction and assessment initiatives. A student who does not qualify for special education under IDEA but is shown to have a mental or physical impairment which limits learning may qualify for assistance in a regular classroom environment under Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act, 1973). Schools are held accountable for the academic achievement of students. Accommodations are needed to facilitate student access to grade-level instruction and district-wide and State assessments. Mentoring Minds' *Accommodations Wheel* incorporates researched-based strategies and pedagogically-sound principles for teaching and learning.

Accommodations offer a way for students to demonstrate what they have learned. Students take in information in a variety of ways and they must be able to communicate that knowledge. Accommodations are changes in how students access information and demonstrate learning. Changes or adjustments to classroom instruction ensure students have equal access to the curriculum and have the opportunity to be successful (IDEA, 2004). Joyce (1990) accents the importance of having knowledgeable personnel. For students to be successful, school personnel must have skills, the knowledge, and the attitude to effectively carry out their responsibilities toward teaching and learning. Both national associations of school principals agree that professional staff development focusing on data and effective strategies can improve student achievement (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 1996; National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2001).

The *Accommodations Wheel* serves as a tool to stimulate collaboration and lead to an informed, responsible staff. Educated staff must understand how to accommodate their students. They should know why each accommodation is selected. Team members should have a firm grasp on why careful and thorough input is needed for informed decisions so as not to under accommodate or over accommodate. When educators comprehend that purposeful accommodations can actually create an improved learning environment, then success is within reach of students.

Murnane and Levy (1996) advocate the assumption that all students, including those with disabilities, have access to curriculum and instruction that will allow them to acquire the knowledge and skills to achieve success in the 21st century. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) aligns IDEA closely to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001), helping to ensure equity, accountability, and excellence in education for children with disabilities. The Mentoring Minds' *Accommodations Wheel* addresses the

obligation, under IDEA (2004), of states and local education agencies to children with disabilities to improve the results of education.

Some students with disabilities need accommodations made to their educational program in order to participate in the general curriculum and to be successful in school. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) directs the provision of accommodations to attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) students even though they may not qualify for special services under IDEA. Students who qualify under Section 504 are required to have a plan that specifies classroom accommodations. Needed accommodations for students in Special Education should be written into a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). The Mentoring Minds' *Accommodations Wheel* is a tool to use in conjunction with the IEP or Section 504 Plan. The *Accommodations Wheel* offers suggestions to teachers as they help students experience success in the classroom.

The purpose of the *Accommodations Wheel* is to help students participate equitably in instruction and in assessments, to demonstrate what they know and can do, and to be successful. Accommodations must be based upon individual needs of each student as there is no prescribed set of appropriate accommodations for all (Rogan and Havir, 1993). Justification and documentation should be cited for each student's accommodations. Selected accommodations need to be aligned with and become a consistent part of daily instruction. An accommodation cannot be used for the first time during the assessment of a student. Rather, accommodations on State assessments should be those provided to students on a regular basis during classroom instruction (SASA, 2002). However, an accommodation may be appropriately used for instruction but may not be an allowable one for State assessments (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, & Hall, 2005). Mentoring Minds recommends that educators become familiar with allowable assessment accommodations for their individual state.

An appropriate standards-based education is offered to all students and success in meeting these high expectations is intended for all. Meaningful access to the curriculum involves a multifaceted approach. Research shows that appropriate instructional accommodations (Elliott and Thurlow, 2000) and a variety of instructional approaches be used (Kame'enui and Carnine, 1998). Favorable outcomes for students with disabilities are reached when access to the curriculum occurs through differentiated instruction (Tomlinson, 1999) and through the use of technology (Rose and Meyer, 2000). Other elements recommended for consideration include time and subject matter domains (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000).

Accommodations refer to a change in instructional or assessment materials or procedures. The following categories are the most common: timing/scheduling, setting, response, and presentation (Cortiella, 2005; Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, and Hall, 2005; Center for Equity and Excellence in Education (CEEE), 2005).

Specific accommodations under each category are listed and incorporated by Mentoring Minds. The Mentoring Minds' Product Development Team further delineated the general categories into 12 areas on the *Accommodations Wheel*. The subject areas are included due to the consideration that must be given to accommodations across the disciplines (IDEA, 2004 ; Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, and Hall, 2005; CEEE, 2005). The purpose of this specificity is to organize accommodations, to guide in the appropriate selection, and to offer multiple suggestions to best fit the needs of students.

Supporting the learning styles of students through accommodations is a critical need. Mentoring Minds identified accommodations based on recommendations, the law, and best practices found in a wide range of literature (Cortiella, 2005; Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, and Hall, 2005; CEEE, 2005; IDEA, 2004; Baxendell, 2003; Kame'enui and Carnine, 1998; Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1992; Dunn and Dunn, 1978). Presentation accommodations include how the instruction is best presented, strategies that promote learning in specific subject matter, and suggested materials and equipment. A shortage of time is often a need students, who have learning difficulties, face. Timing/scheduling accommodations for instruction and assessment help students compensate for this need and are generally found in the sections of the wheel named Time Management and Homework Assignments, yet these type of accommodations are integrated among other sections. The *Accommodations Wheel* ensures variety in this category by identifying accommodations that allow additional time for tests, extend time for assignments, vary the schedule to allow breaks between work periods, provide a note taker, and so forth. Setting accommodations are noted in the areas on the wheel entitled, Classroom Environment and Testing.

A variety of response accommodations are noted on the *Accommodations Wheel*. A response accommodation allows a student to use some type of assistive device or organizer to successfully complete assignments, participate in activities, or take tests. Test accommodations adhere to local, district, and state policies and guidelines. The response accommodations are addressed in all twelve windows of the wheels. Graphic organizers organize the work of students and help them remain focused on the content. This accommodation helps students arrange information into patterns with labels. Using graphic organizers is a process that research shows aids comprehension (Baxendell, 2003; Horton, Lovitt, and Bergerud, 1990; Jitendra, 2002; Lovitt, 1994; Maccini and Gagnon, 2000; Scruggs and Mastropieri, 1992). Visual organizers include templates, highlighters, place markers, and graph paper. Photocopying parts of written text or the teacher's notes allows a student to use highlighters, bold words, and write in the margin. These accommodations and other related ones are interwoven among the twelve areas on the *Accommodations Wheel*.

Assistive technology can meet the goal of increasing access to instruction and assessment. Identification of assistive technology devices for accommodations

provide support that enable some individuals to engage in or perform many tasks. The *Accommodations Wheel* helps classroom teachers be aware of assistive technology devices so that they can ensure that all students in the classroom have an equal opportunity to participate in the learning process successfully (IDEA, 1997).

Section 654(a) (3) (B)(iii) (I) of IDEA (2004) states that positive behavioral interventions and supports must be in place to improve student behavior in the classroom. IDEA (1997) specifically references the necessity of positive interventions. The *Accommodations Wheel* offers multiple behavioral accommodations in the Classroom Environment and Behavior sections to provide support so a student can achieve success in learning.

One section of the *Accommodations Wheel* delineates accommodations for testing at the campus level to promote success on various measures of learning. The IDEA requirements state that students with disabilities be included in assessments and have access to the general curriculum. In agreement, NCLB mandates that students with disabilities participate in assessments and be included in the accountability system. Thus, all schools are held accountable for student access to the general curriculum, high expectations for all, and the end result being improved learning. The achievement of adequate yearly progress (AYP) has raised the level of importance of equitable access to the curriculum.

The law and the literature document the necessity of selecting appropriate accommodations both for instruction and assessment (IDEA, 2004; CEEE, 2005). A team approach, including student input, is recommended to determine which accommodations are necessary. The team should also work collaboratively to provide student support in the use of accommodations (Cortiella, 2005; Thompson, Morse, Sharpe, and Hall, 2005).

Based on the literature and federal laws, the Mentoring Minds' Product Development Team developed the *Accommodations Wheel*. The accommodations selected were the result of careful research on teaching and learning. Accommodations provide students equal access to the curriculum. Selection of appropriate accommodations allows learners to actively participate with other students in the general education classroom and in school-wide activities. The *Accommodations Wheel* is a tool to assist teachers, parents, and specialists as they collaboratively make decisions to help students be successful in school.

Bibliography for the Accommodations Wheel

Baxendell, B. (2003). Consistent, coherent, creative: The 3 c's of graphic organizers. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 35, 46-53.

Center for Equity and Excellence in Education (CEEE). (2005). Types of Accommodations. *Assessment and Accountability*, Arlington, VA: George Washington University. Retrieved April 18, 2007, from http://ceee.gwu.edu/AA/Accommodations_Types.html.

Cortiella, C. (2005). No Child Left Behind: Determining appropriate assessment accommodations for students with disabilities. *LD Online*. Retrieved April 18, 2007, from <http://www.ldonline.org/article/10938>.

Dunn, R. & Dunn, K. (1978). Teaching students through their individual learning styles: A practical approach. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Elliott, J. & Thurlow, M. (2000). Improving test performance of students with disabilities in district and state assessments. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Horton, S., Lovitt, T., & Bergerud, D. (1990). The effectiveness of graphic organizers for three classifications of secondary students in content area classes. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 23, 12-22, 29.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. (1997;2004). Washington, D.C.: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in the U.S. Department of Education.

Jitendra, A. (2002). An exploratory study of schema-based word-problem-solving instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities: An emphasis on conceptual and procedural knowledge. *The Journal of Special Education*, 36, 23-38.

Joyce, B. (1990). *Changing school culture through staff development*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Kame'enui, E. & Carnine, D. (1998). *Effective teaching strategies that accommodate diverse learners*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Lovitt, S. (1994). Strategies for adapting science textbooks for youth with learning disabilities. *Remedial and Special Education*, 15, 105-116.

Maccini, P., & Gagnon, J. (2000). Best practices for teaching mathematics to secondary students with special needs: Implications from teacher perceptions and a review of the literature. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 32, 1-22.

Murnane, R., & Levy, F. (1996) Teaching the new basic skills: principles for educating children to thrive in a changing economy. New York, NY: Free Press.

- National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). (1996). *Standards for quality elementary and middle schools, kindergarten through eighth grade* (3rd ed.). Alexandria, VA: NAESP.
- National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2001). *Supporting principals who break ranks: Recommendations from Breaking Ranks II for creating systems that support successful high schools*. Reston, VA: NASSP.
- No Child Left Behind*. (2001). Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.
- Nolet, V., & McLaughlin, M. (2000). *Assessing the general curriculum: Including students with disabilities in standards-based reform*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Rehabilitation Act. (1973). Section 504. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.
- Rogan, J. & Havir, C. (1993). Using accommodations with students' learning disabilities. *Preventing School Failure*, 38, 12-15.
- Rose, D., & Meyer, A. (2000). Universal design for individual differences. *Educational Leadership*, 58, 39-43.
- Scruggs, T. & Mastropieri, M. (1992). Effective Mainstreaming Strategies for Mildly Handicapped Students. *Elementary School Journal*, 92, 389-402.
- Student Achievement and School Accountability Conference (SASA)*. (2002). Hosted by Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Education.
- Technology-related Assistance with Disabilities Act*. (1988). Washington, D.C.: House of Representatives, 100th Congress, 2nd Session.
- Thompson, S., Morse, A., Sharpe, M., & Hall, S. (2005). *Accommodations Manual*. Washington, D.C.: Council of Chief State School Officers.
- Tomlinson, C. (1999). *The differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.