HLP 13:
Adapt Curriculum Materials and Tasks

High-Leverage Practices
for Students with Disabilities

By U.S. law, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) must be written to align with the standards for the grade level a student is enrolled in. This can be challenging when students with disabilities are performing below that grade level. As teachers write long- and short-term goals (HLP 11), and systematically design instruction to address those goals (HLP 12), a key tool they use is making adaptations to curriculum materials and assessments. Adaptations (which can be broken down into accommodations and modifications) help the student bridge the gap between their current functioning level and the level needed to succeed. Teachers who are strategic about leveraging key accommodations and modifications are in position to help their students access the curriculum in powerful ways that can lead to learning and behavioral success. Identifying effective adaptations takes more than picking from a list. An effective special educator tailors adaptations to specific student needs, drawing upon information from a range of data sources (HLP 4), including colleagues (HLP 1) and family members (HLP 3), while regularly evaluating the impact of adaptations on student learning outcomes and making adjustments as needed (HLP 6).

This resource is intended to support school leaders looking to embed the HLPs in professional development, implementation, teacher observation and feedback efforts at their school site.

The major source for content within this resource is the chapter by Sheila Alber-Morgan, Maria Helton, Alana Oif Telesman, and Moira Konrad in *High-Leverage Practices in the Inclusive Classroom*; the book *High-Leverage Practices in Special Education: The Final Report of the HLP Writing Tea*m, and content on **www.highleveragepractices.org**.

Teachers Who Effectively Adapt Curriculum Materials and Tasks

- Provide instruction that meets each student's individual needs by intentionally planning for differentiation.
- Examine the directions of a task/activity to identify advanced vocabulary, sentence complexity, and/or length, and simplify these directions as needed.
- Accompany directions with visual aids to illustrate each step and help students better comprehend how to complete a task.
- Use technology to facilitate students' understanding of tasks and concepts.
- Use a combination of adaptations to increase the likelihood of student success.
- Adapt materials by reducing the amount of content presented or required for completion.
- Differentiate tasks/materials, building from easier to more challenging content, to enable access to challenging content for lower performing students while simultaneously providing a warm up for higher performing students.
- Highlight relevant information within a text, lecture/notes, and/or worksheet activities to make important ideas and concepts more visible to students.
- Use (and gradually fade) guided notes to assist students with retention of course content information and improve note-taking skills.
- Create and use graphic organizers to help students understand relationships between, and organization of, concepts. Teachers also explicitly teach and scaffold use of graphic organizers with students.
- Provide and explicitly teach students to use mnemonic strategies to help students remember important aspects of lessons and content.

Tips for School Leaders to Support Teachers

- Ensure all educators have strong knowledge about available, possible, and relevant adaptations based on students' individualized needs.
- Evaluate the extent to which educators identify and implement adaptations that are a good match for students' needs given curriculum demands.
- Help novices avoid the common pitfall of over accommodating students by using data and ongoing decision making/instructional adjustments.
- Help educators break away from only considering accommodations and modifications that come on a pre-written list (e.g., extended time, preferential seating, etc.). Spur creativity and use data to evaluate impact on performance.

Questions to Prompt Discussion, Self-Reflection, and Observer Feedback

- In what ways can instruction, tasks, and materials be differentiated to meet students' individual needs?
- Why is it important to gradually fade certain adaptations/supports over time?
- What is the difference between adapting or modifying materials versus providing accommodations?

Online Resources

[OSERS Policy Guidance on Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) (PDF)](#)
From the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, the purpose of this guidance is to provide State and local educational agencies (LEAs) with information to assist them in meeting their obligations under the IDEA and its implementing regulations in developing IEPs for children with disabilities.

[High-Leverage Practices: A Professional Development Guide for School Leaders](#)
A downloadable online guide providing school leaders, including administrators, principals, mentors and coaches, with practical tools for engaging staff members in learning about how high-leverage practices can enhance student learning in the school and district.

Journal Articles

Kurth, J. A. (2013). A unit-based approach to adaptations in inclusive classrooms. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 46*(2), 34–43. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005991304600204

Leko, M. M. (2015). To adapt or not to adapt: Navigating an implementation conundrum. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 48*(2), 80–85. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059915605641

Salend, S. J. (2008). Determining appropriate testing accommodations: Complying with NCLB and IDEA. *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 40*(4), 14–22. https://doi.org/10.1177/004005990804000402

Supplement Section: Guiding Principles for Appropriate Adaptations and Accommodations. (2005). *TEACHING Exceptional Children, 38*(1), 53–54. https://doi.org/10.1177/0040059905038001102

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