

# Writing Curriculum Modifications in the IEP

Revolutionary Common Sense by Kathie Snow, [www.disabilityisnatural.com](http://www.disabilityisnatural.com)

*IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) states: "A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classes solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum." For example, a 10-year-old student should not be removed (or denied placement) in a fifth grade classroom just because he isn't reading at grade level—the class reading material (in this case) should be modified so he can "be involved and make progress" (per IDEA) in the fifth grade curriculum. This is one in a series of articles about curriculum modifications.*

Curriculum modifications (CMs) describe what the school will do to support the goals and objectives in a student's IEP (Individualized Education Program). Generally, CMs fall within the "related services" category on an IEP form. Many parents (as well as many educators) are not familiar with CMs because so many students are still in segregated special ed rooms. Under these circumstances, CMs aren't utilized since the student does not have access to the *general ed* curriculum, and functional (instead of academic) goals are written.

One of the barriers to inclusion is the belief that if a child is not doing "grade-level" work, he cannot be in a regular ed classroom. But IDEA, as noted above, is very clear that the need for CMs should not be the basis for excluding a child from the regular ed environment. In order to follow the law, we need to thoughtfully consider what CMs would enable a child to be successful in the regular ed environment.

Writing appropriate CMs is a critical component of the IEP for students with disabilities who *are* in regular ed classrooms. Again, per IDEA, the presumption is that students with disabilities will "be involved and make progress" in the regular ed curriculum. Thus, the IEP team doesn't always have to focus on writing numerous goals (since the child is expected to achieve the same/similar goals as his peers). Instead, the team will focus more on CMs, to ensure the child will achieve those goals.

In my book (*Disability is Natural: Revolutionary Common Sense for Raising Successful Children*

*with Disabilities*) and in presentations on inclusive education, I recommend parents have individual meetings with members of the IEP team prior to the "official" group meeting. This strategy enables parents to learn where each person is coming from, negotiate the finer points, and hopefully reduce/eliminate an educator's opposition to a child being in regular ed classrooms. These pre-meetings can also help improve parent/educator relationships, which can change the dynamics of the "official" meeting and reduce the "us/them" mentality.

In these individual meetings or in the "official" IEP meeting, parents can share how CMs can enable a child to participate in the regular ed curriculum. When parents carefully plan ahead and suggest well-written CMs with a can-do attitude, "resistant" educators will be hard-pressed to justify excluding the child from a regular ed placement: parents have already done much of the work in identifying a student's needs and the modifications to meet those needs!

Alternatively, progressive, welcoming educators may be the guiding force in ensuring a child has the CMs he needs to be successful in the regular ed environment. Regardless of who takes the lead, it's very important to involve the child in the process. It's his education, not ours! Simultaneously, other students, as well as other teachers, can provide ideas we can consider. Many heads are better than one!

Before deciding what CMs a student may need, we must be familiar with both the curriculum and the student's current abilities and needs. Regular ed

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teachers are familiar with their own curriculum, of course. Special ed teachers, unless they're already providing services in inclusive classrooms, may not have a clue about the regular ed curriculum. If parents have had an older child in the school, they may be familiar with the classroom's curriculum; if not, they can learn about it by observing in the classroom and/or by reviewing the textbooks and other materials, and then brainstorming what CMs their child will need.

A strategy that worked for my son in elementary school was for his classroom teacher and I to review her lesson plan in advance. During the review, I asked the teacher about the overall goal of the activity/lesson—in other words, what was the goal for the class, as a whole? In some instances, the goal would be the same for Benjamin. Still, he might need a modification to enable him to achieve that “general academic” goal. As an example (and in the primary grades), Benj needed worksheets enlarged. So the classroom teacher would make a note for the teacher's aide to enlarge Benj's worksheet on the school copier the day before.

Sometimes, however, the teacher and I decided that the goal for Benj was slightly different than her overall goal for the whole class. At that time, she and I (and sometimes Benj) talked about what we wanted Benj to learn from the activity/lesson. Again, the teacher would make notes in her lesson plan. These were not written into his IEP as they were “on-going” goals that changed from month to month, depending on the lessons/activities. During the first few months of each school year, these “lesson-plan review meetings” took about an hour or so. As the year progressed, however, my son's teachers learned from their own experiences, and were able to figure out the CMs on their own and/or with Benjamin's input. As a result, the need for us to review the teacher's lesson plans was reduced and/or eliminated.

Following are some examples of CMs for students in the regular ed environment. When thinking

about/writing CMs, remember these two important guidelines: (1) CMs reflect what the school, not the student, will do, and (2) CMs support the child's participation in the general ed curriculum. Each CM should begin with, “The school will:”

- Provide large-print books and materials [or books on tape].
- Provide oral spelling tests.
- Reformat/rewrite the sixth grade social studies' text into a fourth grade reading level.
- Provide a computer and geometry software [or software for art, writing, history, etc.] that's similar to the general curriculum.
- Allow Clint to perform all math functions on a calculator [and/or computer].
- Provide a daily audiotape of the teacher's lectures [to allow review at home].
- Provide copies of teacher's overheads one day prior to their use [to enable the student to get a headstart on the material].
- Permit Mary to answer every other question on math tests.
- Extend test-taking time by 15 minutes.
- Provide small-group activities during science.
- Substitute videos on American History in lieu of the American History textbook.
- Provide math manipulatives in lieu of worksheets, and allow Amelia to demonstrate math proficiency through demonstration.

If you get stuck, brainstorm with others, including the student, other teachers, students in the class, and even older children who have been in that class/grade level.

All children can learn. When students with disabilities are provided the curriculum modifications they need, they can be successful academic learners in the general education environment. They, like their peers who do not have disabilities, will be able to go on to higher education or enter the job market, in pursuit of their dreams.