DID YOU KNOW???

(about)

Grading Students with Special Needs

EXISTING LAW:
While no law exists regarding the grading of students with special needs, there are district, state and federal policies and guidelines to assist the grading process. Once those guidelines are determined, the discussion around grading must occur at the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting so that all parties understand the student’s individual needs regarding this issue. Special and general educators need to work together if they want the grades they assign to reflect the quality of the student’s work, the student’s readiness for future instruction, the level of competence and skill mastery as outlined in the IEP, and finally the student’s progress and effort. Decisions should be made as to who will bear the responsibility for assigning grades and how they will weigh the above factors. Teachers should maintain open communication on grading with colleagues, parents, and students throughout the year.

Based on the above mentioned policies, courts have determined certain truths about grading students with disabilities:

- A district may use a different grading system for a student with a disability participating in the general curriculum only if the student’s IEP team adopts an alternate system in response to the student’s individual disability-related needs. It is up to the IEP team to decide if a student should be graded on an alternate basis.
- When the absences of a student with a disability are disability-related, a school district must make reasonable accommodations.
- School districts may not modify grades on the basis of a student’s special education status alone.
- A teacher should not reduce a student’s grade merely because she/he received accommodations that are not related to course content.
- A district should be able to produce a record (i.e. Rubric, grading criteria) explaining the process for grade determination.
- A district should NOT have anything identified as a “district-wide grading policy” regarding students with disabilities.

SCENARIOS:

Scenario A: Modified grading and curriculum:
A school-aged student with special needs named Pat is participating in regular education classes and is receiving instruction using both a modified curriculum and a modified grading scale. During an assignment of creating a two page essay, per the IEP, Pat is expected to write only one paragraph with a mastery level as indicated on the IEP.

Scenario B: Modified curriculum:
A school aged student with special needs named Pat is participating in regular education classes and is receiving instruction with a modified curriculum. During an assignment involving the creation of a two page essay, per the IEP, Pat is expected to write only one paragraph.
Scenario C: Modified grading scale only:
A school aged student with special needs named Pat is participating in regular education classes and is receiving instruction at grade level with grade level content. His IEP indicates that he is to be assessed using a modified grading scale based on showing 80% mastery of goals and objectives.

Scenario D: Accommodations only: (examples may include, but are not limited to, Braille, interpreter, large print, assistive technology and/or behavior intervention plan)
A school aged student with special needs named Pat is participating in regular education classes and is receiving instruction at grade level with grade level content. The student uses a keyboard for generating written material due to a disability which impairs the use of a writing instrument.

What action should the District take?

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW
The district requires IEP teams to review current assessments, indicate present levels, and develop specific written language in the IEP to address the student’s unique needs with regard to curriculum and accommodations. The district recognizes four (4) options, as identified in the above scenarios, of grading students receiving special education services. Students who require modified grading would be assessed using their level of mastery, as stated in the IEP goal. (i.e. level of mastery is 80% therefore 80%=A)

In the scenarios provided, the required action for the District is:

Scenario A - Pat's paragraph, as a component of the modified curriculum, would be graded based on the present levels indicated in the IEP and the grade is assessed using a modified grading scale based on the percent of mastery toward goals and objectives indicated in the IEP.

Scenario B - The content of Pat's assignment would be graded using the same criteria as that of the non-disabled students in the class. The one paragraph expectation would represent the modified curriculum.

Scenario C In this scenario, mastery of goals and objectives at 80% is equivalent to earning an A on the grading scale once criteria for achieving an A is established. Subsequent grading would be equivalent to the grading scale of general education students. (General grading scale is 90=A, 80=B, 70=C, 60=D therefore Pat's modified grade scale based on the IEP would be 80=A,70=B,60=C,50=D) In addition, once mastery is achieved, the team should reconvene to amend the IEP and adjust the appropriateness of the mastery level and/or goal.

Scenario D - The curriculum and grading scale used for Pat in this scenario are the same as those of the non-disabled students. Accommodations are used to provide equal access to allow Pat to make progress toward the general curriculum.
Suggested IEP Statements:

A. The student will be graded based on a modified grading scale using a modified curriculum. Progress toward IEP goal attainment will be separate from the overall content mastery grade and will be based on a modified curriculum. The special education and general education teacher(s) will collaborate in the assignment of grades.

B. The student will be graded based on the completion of a modified curriculum. The grading scale will be the same as that used with a non-disabled peer. Progress toward IEP goal attainment will be separate from the overall content mastery grade. The special education and general education teacher(s) will collaborate in the assignment of grades.

C. The student will be graded based on a modified grading scale. Progress toward IEP goal attainment will be separate from the overall content mastery grade. The special education and general education teacher(s) will collaborate in the assignment of grades.

D. No statement warranted.

**The above suggested IEP statements serve as a guide for statements that can be included on IEPs under the Services section of the annual goals or Special Factors. These suggestions are NOT a complete representation of the information that can be included on a student’s IEP!**