action driven education

SPRING 2025

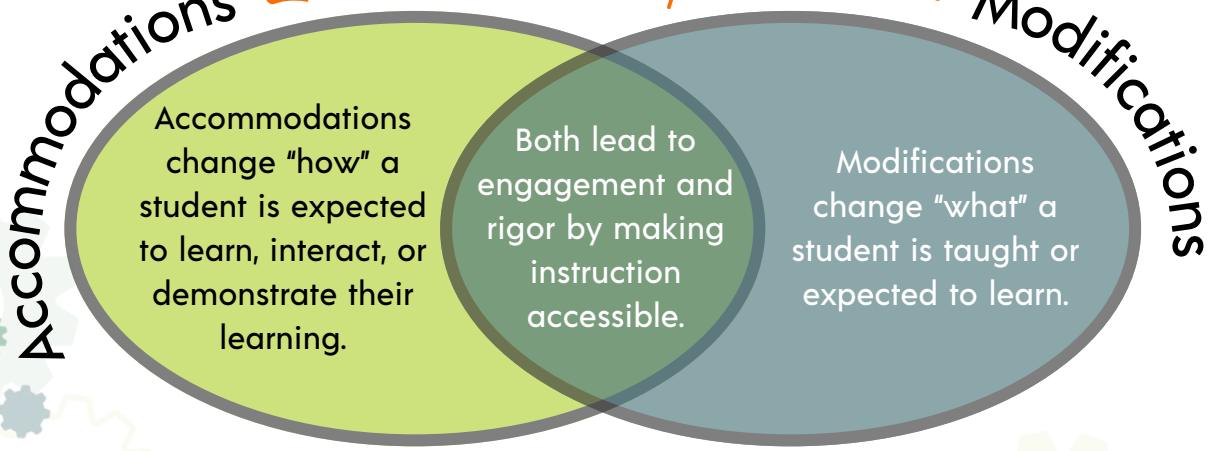
Modifications → Meaningful Learning

When we modify the curriculum, we adapt the "what" of instruction so students can engage with the material at a level that matches their abilities. Modifications don't make content easier; they make it meaningful, which leads to engagement and rigor. Modifications make it possible for a learner to participate, connect, and grow. But how?

Keep Exploring

Curriculum modifications aren't about lowering expectations—they're about reshaping content so that every learner has a meaningful way in. When we modify the curriculum, we're not simplifying it to make things "easier"; we're adjusting what a student is expected to learn or demonstrate during assessments so that it aligns with their current abilities, strengths, and learning profile. This could mean reducing the breadth, depth, or complexity of content, presenting alternative materials, or creating different pathways for demonstrating understanding. The goal is not to limit learning but to make it accessible! When students are given access to content that feels relevant and achievable, they become more confident, motivated, and engaged. In this way, modifications preserve rigor, not by keeping expectations high in a one-size-fits-all way, but by ensuring that each student can make progress, feel successful, and grow. Meaningful access fosters meaningful outcomes.

Let's Compare



Learning Never Ends

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Modifications Make Inclusion Possible

It's outlandish to suggest, but let's consider for just a moment a theoretical situation where we could clone Jacob, a 13-year-old boy with an intellectual disability. One Jacob participates in a well-designed, fully inclusive, modified general education program while the other Jacob is pulled out of the general education program into a high-quality full-time special education classroom.

What is the result for each Jacob?

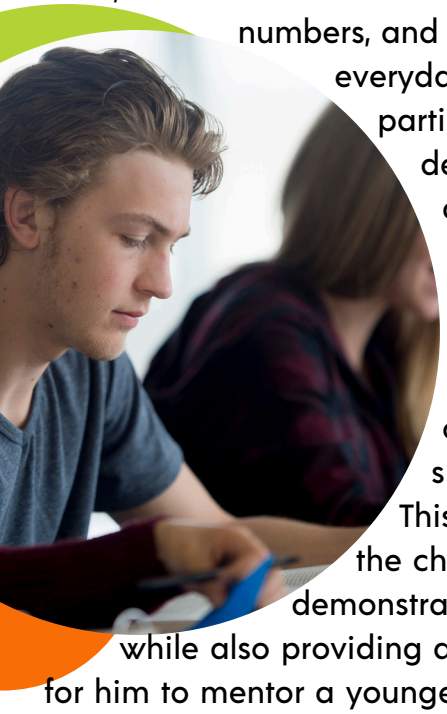
Tell me the story...

Two Different Placement Options

"Good morning, Jacob," Mr. Clarke says as Jacob enters homeroom. "Good morning, Mr. Clarke," Jacob replies with a smile before shuffling to his desk to begin a conversation with his best friend, Danny, about video games. The familiar homeroom process continues, followed by a bell dismissing the students to their first-period class.

Jacob in Pull-Out Instruction

Jacob didn't bother taking off his coat because he knew he was headed off to Ms. Williams's classroom for the rest of the day. Here, he engages in pull-out instruction based on his IEP goals. Jacob is working to master his basic math facts, such as addition and subtraction of whole numbers, and to use them to solve everyday problems. He participates in activities designed to rehearse and learn these skills. Today, he is excited because he will be working to teach a younger child in the class how to add single-digit numbers. This opportunity provides the chance for him to demonstrate mastery of the skill while also providing a social opportunity for him to mentor a younger peer.



His reading level has steadily improved to above the second-grade level. He's excited because it's library day, so he gets to pick a few

Keep reading on the next page!

Jacob Included in General Education

Jacob gathers his books and shuffles out the door with his classmates. Off to Social Studies class where Ms. Haggerty is starting a new unit about westward expansion. This is something Jacob's very interested in because he's always enjoyed learning about Native Americans. He's excited to read a modified passage on the topic that his teacher has adapted to his mid-2nd-grade reading level. He's been working to make a vocabulary journal by previewing texts to identify unknown or important words. The class conversation that follows is enjoyable as Jacob shares information from his article that was not included in other articles his classmates read.

In what seems like a blink to Jacob, he's off to math class with Ms. Miller, where he's excited to show her his completed probability math homework. The assignment focused on three skills. First, like his classmates, Jacob is working to learn about probability, which he understands means the "chance something might happen." Jacob's assignment was to cut five different colors (red, blue, green, yellow, and orange) of paper into pieces, count how many of each color he included in a can, then record how many of

new books to read during silent reading time. His reading program is focused on vocabulary strategies. This week he is learning to skim passages to look for words he may not know before reading. Ms. Williams has put together several reading activities for Jacob to practice this skill independently. Later, he will complete another activity to test his vocabulary and comprehension skills.

He's struggling a little bit with writing skills, but that's all going to change soon as his teacher has a new idea for a writing program she wants to try with him. Altogether, he's making good progress on his IEP goals, and his parents and teacher are pleased.

Now explore Jacob's inclusion program beginning on the previous page

each color he included on a piece of paper. His job was then to solve different math problems showing the amount of different combinations of colors (ex: How many red and green? How many total? How many are left in the can if you remove all the yellow? How many are left if you remove all the red and green? Etc). Ms. Miller has told Jacob that she plans to use his can as a warmup activity in class today to test his classmates' understanding of probability. He's excited to ask the class questions like, "What is the chance I will reach in and pull out a red piece of paper?"

Jacob is doing quite well with his math and reading in his classes. His skills continue to climb, and his parents and teachers are pleased with his progress on his IEP goals. Additionally, he has learned many age-appropriate concepts and skills that he will use upon graduation.

What's the context?

Modifications make it work

Jacob is doing well in both settings. However, fortunately (or unfortunately depending on your point of view I suppose) we can't clone people, so we rely upon well-designed research to prove which story is most likely to culminate in the highest performing Jacob. This research indicates that both well-designed inclusive and pull-out settings are effective. However, due to the depth of experience and exposure to more content, the highest student achievement and performance on standardized test scores were found among students educated in inclusive settings. These students tend to outperform their same-ability peers who were educated in pull-out settings.

Creating a truly inclusive classroom depends on the thoughtful and creative use of curriculum modifications. Modifications open the door for students to become meaningfully engaged with content alongside their peers in the general education setting. When these modifications are combined with targeted, needs-based teaching strategies—like those used by a Barrier-Moving Educator—students can participate in age-appropriate instruction while simultaneously building the essential skills they need to succeed. It's this powerful combination that is the difference maker between the two setting options.

Action Driven Education provides both administration and staff training on the Barrier-Moving Mindset. Schedule a consultation today!

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Get to the point...

Research shows inclusion is the winner

Although there's no single "best" way to educate a child, research shows that students receiving modified instruction within an inclusive general education setting often outperform peers with similar abilities who are educated in pull-out settings.

The story continues...

An engaged learner wins every time

Jacob heads home after another fun day at school. He's excited to share the stories from his day with his parents, work on his homework, and play video games. He and his family are proud of the progress he's making at school and know that everything is coming together for his future.

Action-Driven Practice Connection

3 Ways to Modify Standards-Aligned Content

Breadth: Consider how broadly the student needs to know the content and/or its relationship to other content.

Depth: Depth refers to the level of understanding a learner may develop within a particular skill.

Complexity: Consider the difficulty level to which the student is expected to master the content.

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Layered Instruction

Layered Instruction involves recognizing and creating opportunities to develop need-related skills while simultaneously exposing the student to grade-level content.

- Academic skills: Consider natural opportunities in the curriculum to teach need-related skills, such as matching prerequisite skills, spiraled previously taught content, complementary academic tasks, and other related academic skills.
  - Ex: teaching addition during a measurement unit, creating opportunities to write during math class, building upon opportunities to read in social studies, etc.
- Social/Emotional/Behavioral skills: Consider ways to redesign the instructional environment to provide opportunities for a student to build and rehearse the need-related social, emotional, or behavioral skills.
  - Ex: Developing and rehearsing IEP-directed social skills while working with a lab partner in biology, rehearsing managing emotion skills during English class, etc.