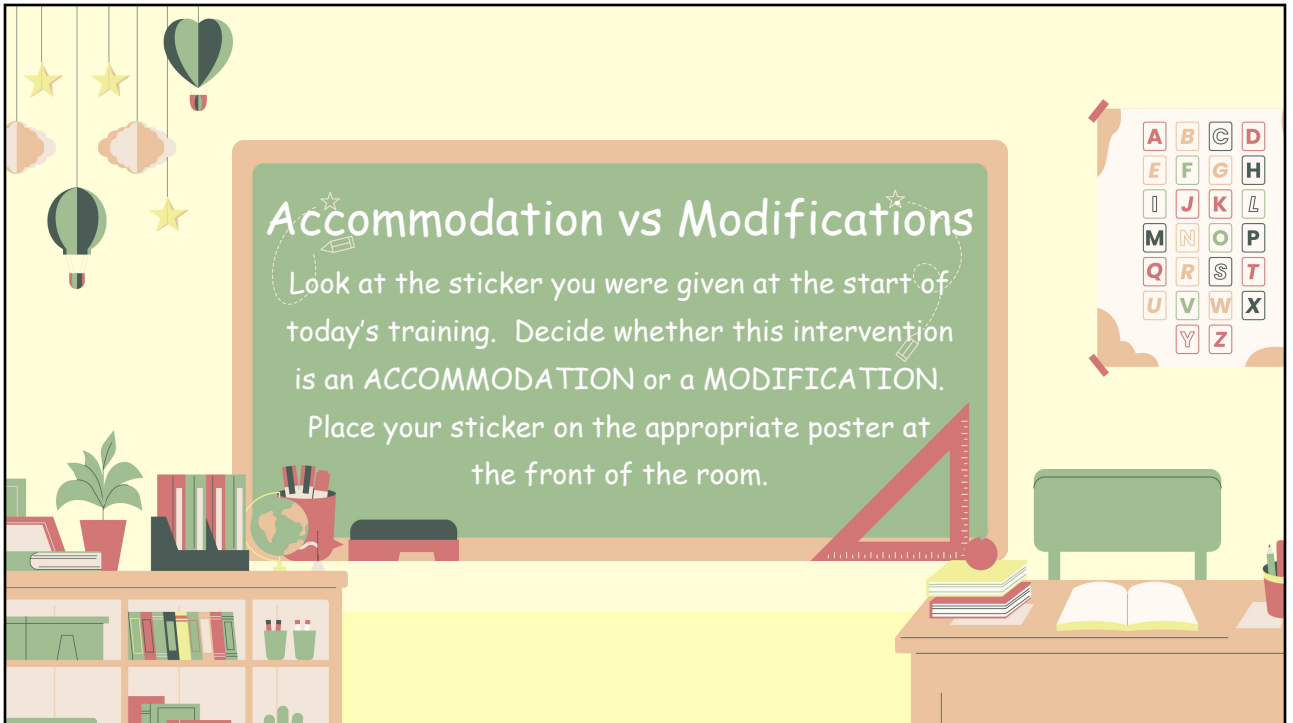
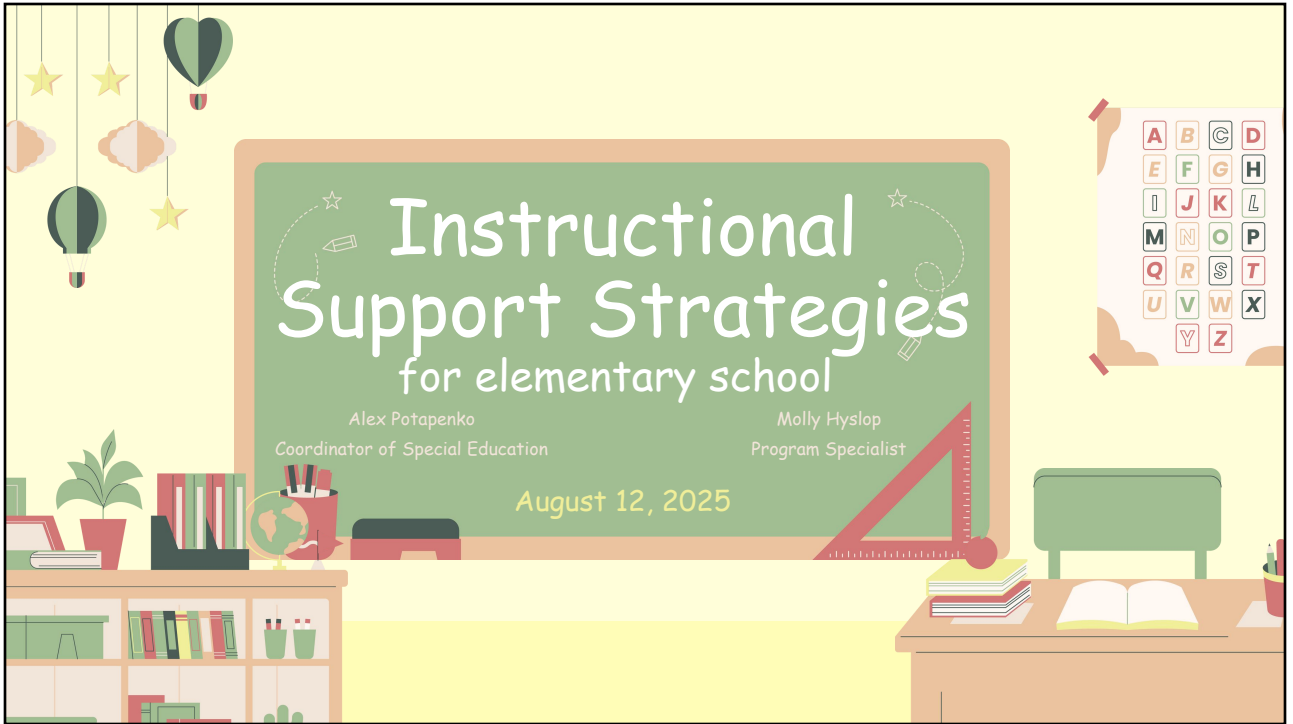




So what IS the difference??

Sometimes it can feel confusing, but the difference between accommodations and modifications is VERY important! Providing a student with modified work when they only need accommodations can significantly impact their ability to access the grade level standards

Accommodations

Accommodations alter HOW a student learns or demonstrates their knowledge without changing the core content or learning expectations. Accommodations focus on the process of learning and assessment. They provide access to the same curriculum and learning goals as their peers, but through different methods or with adjustments to the learning environment.

Modifications

Modifications, on the other hand, change the content or expectations of what a student is expected to learn or achieve. These changes may be necessary when the general curriculum is too advanced for a student, or when a student requires a different set of learning outcomes.

Accommodations

Extended time on assignments and tests

Preferential seating (e.g., near the teacher, away from distractions)

Frequent breaks (movement or sensory breaks)

Reduced distractions during testing or work time

Check for understanding frequently

Small group or 1:1 instruction

Use of visual aids and organizers (charts, graphic organizers)

Read-aloud for tests and assignments

Simplified or clarified directions

Use of assistive technology (text-to-speech, speech-to-text, tablets)

Alternative response formats (oral answers instead of written, multiple-choice instead of open-ended)

Chunking tasks into smaller parts

Use of fidget tools or sensory supports

Behavior support plans or positive reinforcement systems

Peer buddy or classroom aide support

Flexible seating or movement options

Modified homework expectations (shorter or fewer problems)

Daily or weekly home-school communication logs

Visual schedules or timers

Extra wait time when responding to questions

Modifications

Alternate curriculum or functional academic content
(e.g., life skills, basic numeracy/literacy)

Significantly reduced workload (e.g., completing 1-2
problems instead of 10) *More than 20%

Simplified reading material or texts

Use of pictures or symbols instead of written
language

Modified grading criteria (e.g., effort-based rather
than performance-based)

Alternate assignments or projects (e.g., lower grade
level standards)

Use lower grade-level materials

Complete different homework problems than peers

Excusal from assignments or tests

Embedded instruction during functional routines (e.g.,
teaching math during snack time using counting food)

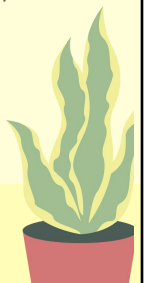


Special Education Instructional Aides
support students with special needs
-in the Special Education setting
-in the General Education setting
-throughout the rest of the school site
during unstructured times



WHERE do we support students?

In short, we help them wherever they
need support



Scenario 1

You are an Instructional Assistant in a 3-5 SDC/CLC class with students who have mild to moderate disabilities, including Specific Learning Disabilities, ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and Speech/Language Impairments.

You are running a small reading comprehension group with 3 students using a short passage and discussion questions. The teacher is working with another group, and a 3rd group of students is at an independent work center (monitored by another IA).

In your group:

- *Student A keeps interrupting by talking off-topic and making jokes
- *Student B puts their head down and refuses to read aloud or answer questions
- *Student C, who benefits from frequent check-ins and visual supports, is trying to stay on task but begins to disengage as the group gets off track

Meanwhile, at the independent work center, Student D becomes frustrated with the writing prompt and starts tearing their paper. They call out for help repeatedly, then get up and walk over to your group, demanding assistance. The IA leading that group seems unsure how to manage the interruption while continuing the lesson, and the group starts losing focus.

Guided Discussion Questions

Responding to Behavior While Teaching

- How can you support students showing avoidance or off-task behavior without losing momentum?
- What strategies could help redirect Student A and re-engage Student B in the moment?

Managing Small Group Instruction

- How can you encourage your group to maintain focus and engagement?
- What classroom tools (visual agendas, behavior expectations, self-monitoring checklists, etc.) could help?

Support & Collaboration

- What communication systems or roles (e.g., when to step in, when to wait) should be clarified ahead of instruction?
- How can you and the other staff support each other when a student leaves their assigned area?

In the Special Education Setting

Instructional Support (SAI)

What it looks like:

- Reinforcing lessons and activities under the direction of the special education teacher
- Working 1:1 or in small groups to reteach or scaffold instruction
- Using visual aids, manipulatives, or alternative materials
- Supporting students in accessing their IEP goals during academic tasks

Why it matters:

- Helps students access curriculum at their instructional level
- Promotes skill-building aligned with their IEP
- Provides consistent, structured reinforcement of classroom learning



Behavioral and Emotional Support

What it looks like:

- Monitoring for signs of frustration, dysregulation, or sensory overload
- Using proactive strategies like visual schedules, timers, or calming techniques
- Implementing behavior support plans (BSPs) consistently
- Coaching students through conflict resolution or social situations
- Logging or documenting behaviors as required

Why it matters:

- Supports students in developing self-regulation and coping skills
- Keeps the learning environment safe and structured
- Helps reduce behavior incidents and promote inclusion

Personal Care and Daily Living Support

What it looks like:

- Assisting students with tasks like hand-washing, eating, or managing personal items (backpacks, devices)
- Helping with transitions between activities or locations
- Supporting motor needs (e.g., helping with mobility, adaptive equipment)
- Encouraging independence in routines and self-care skills

Why it matters:

- Meets students' individual needs so they can participate fully in school
- Builds independence and life skills
- Ensures dignity, safety, and comfort for students with physical, cognitive, or developmental challenges



These responsibilities are carried out under the direction of a credentialed special education teacher and often involve collaboration with other staff (OT, SLP, behaviorists).



Scenario 2

Sofia is a 3rd-grade student in a Special Day Class for students with moderate disabilities. She has a diagnosis of autism and uses an AAC (augmentative and alternative communication) device to communicate. She often needs support with transitions, staying on task, and peer interactions.

Sofia is being mainstreamed for 30 minutes a day into a general education 3rd-grade classroom during their science centers time. The goal is to increase her social interaction, exposure to grade-level vocabulary, and participation in shared learning experiences.

Today's Setting:

The science center activity involves students rotating between three stations, including:

- Observing and recording plant growth
- Labeling parts of a flower
- Building a simple terrarium

You are a classroom aide in Sofia's SDC class, and you accompany her into the general education classroom to support her engagement and participation.

Guided Discussion Questions

Supporting Peer Interaction

What are effective ways you can support peer interactions between Sofia and her general education classmates, especially when Sofia uses an AAC device?
Follow-up: How can the aide avoid becoming a barrier or translator and instead act as a bridge?

Supporting Engagement AND Independence

How can you balance providing necessary support to Sofia while also promoting her independence and participation in the activity?

Follow-up: What might that look like during a hands-on center like building a terrarium?

Supporting Unique Needs

How should you respond if Sofia becomes overstimulated or disengaged during the mainstreaming time?

Follow-up: What strategies can be used to preserve Sofia's dignity while helping her regulate or refocus?

In the General Education Setting

Facilitating Access to the Curriculum

What it looks like:

- Clarifying or simplifying directions during whole-class instruction
- Supporting students in completing assignments with accommodations (e.g., scribing, reading aloud, chunking tasks)
- Helping students stay on task and manage transitions between activities
- Providing prompts or cues to support independence without doing the work for the student

Why it matters:

- Ensures students with disabilities can meaningfully participate in grade-level learning
- Supports inclusion while honoring individual learning needs
- Promotes academic success without creating dependency



Supporting Social Interaction and Inclusion

What it looks like:

- Coaching students through peer interactions, conversations, or cooperative work
- Encouraging participation in group activities, play, or class discussions
- Modeling appropriate social behavior or problem-solving
- Fostering peer relationships through subtle support rather than over-assistance

Why it matters:

- Helps students build relationships and social confidence
- Prevents isolation and promotes a sense of belonging
- Encourages natural peer supports and social skill development

Promoting Independence and Self-Regulation

What it looks like:

- Using fading prompts to encourage students to complete tasks on their own
- Teaching and reinforcing self-regulation strategies (e.g., using a break card, breathing techniques)
- Supporting students in recognizing when they need help and advocating appropriately
- Helping students follow behavior plans or coping strategies in real-time situations

Why it matters:

- Builds long-term skills students need to succeed with less adult support
- Helps students manage emotions and behavior in inclusive settings
- Aligns with IEP goals related to independence and self-management



These responsibilities are always carried out in partnership with the special education and general education teachers, with the goal of creating inclusive, respectful, and empowering learning environments.



Scenario 3

Noah is a 4th-grade student with ADHD and a mild language processing disorder. He is fully included in the general education classroom with support. Noah is bright and articulate but often misreads social cues and becomes overly intense or dominating during games. He sometimes interrupts others, argues over rules, or talks over peers, which leads to social friction.

During lunch recess, Noah gravitates toward a group of peers playing four square. He wants to join and is accepted by the group, but quickly takes over, insisting everyone follow "his" version of the rules. When another student disagrees, Noah loudly declares, "You're cheating!" and refuses to rotate out. Tension builds, and one peer says, "Forget it, Noah's ruining the game again."

As the RSP Instructional Assistant, part of your responsibilities includes supporting the inclusion of students with special needs in unstructured settings (such as at the lunch shelter or on the playground). You are supervising a group of students with IEPs during recess when this situation unfolds.

You are expected to support inclusion and coach students as needed, without hovering or taking over.

Guided Discussion Questions

Promoting Authentic Inclusion

What are proactive ways you can support peer relationships and inclusion so that Noah is seen as a capable and welcome member of the group?

Follow-up: Could visual cues, pre-teaching, or social scripts help?

Guiding with Dignity in Mind

How can you coach Noah in managing his impulses and understanding peer expectations without embarrassing him or calling him out in front of others?

Follow-up: How can you help him get space if he escalates?

Providing Appropriate Support

How can you balance being a supportive presence while still allowing natural peer interactions and minor conflicts to play out without immediate adult intervention?

In the Unstructured Setting

Promoting Positive Peer Interactions and Social Skills

What it looks like:

- Encouraging students to join games, conversations, or group play
- Coaching students on turn-taking, sharing, and conversational skills
- Modeling appropriate social behavior (e.g., how to ask to join a game)
- Gently mediating peer conflicts and encouraging problem-solving

Why it matters:

- Students with mild learning disabilities may struggle with social cues or confidence
- Builds friendships and reduces isolation
- Strengthens social-emotional development in natural settings



Supporting Self-Regulation and Behavior

What it looks like:

- Helping students recognize and manage frustration, impulsivity, or sensory overload
- Using visual supports, timers, or calming strategies proactively
- Reminding students of expectations (e.g., playground rules) in a respectful, supportive way
- Redirecting behavior calmly and privately when needed

Why it matters:

- Unstructured time can be overwhelming or overstimulating
- Teaches coping and self-regulation skills in real-world situations
- Helps students participate safely and successfully without constant adult intervention

Encouraging Independence and Confidence

What it looks like:

- Fading adult support to let students navigate social or activity choices on their own
- Offering choices and encouraging decision-making (e.g., "Do you want to play tag or use the swings?")
- Providing encouragement and praise for trying new things or taking initiative
- Avoiding over-prompting or hovering so students can build autonomy

Why it matters:

- Builds self-esteem and real-world competence
- Prepares students for greater independence across school environments
- Supports generalization of IEP goals beyond the classroom



These responsibilities help create inclusive, supportive environments where students with learning differences can develop socially, emotionally, and behaviorally during critical peer-based times.



Special Focus: Prompting

Least to Most Intrusive

Level	Prompt Type	Description	Example
1	Independent	No help; student does task alone	Student lines up when bell rings
2	Visual Prompt	Picture, symbol, or visual schedule	Uses picture chart for handwashing steps
3	Gestural Prompt	Nonverbal cue like pointing or motion	Aide points to where the backpack should go
4	Verbal Prompt (Indirect)	General verbal cue or question	"What do you do next?"
5	Verbal Prompt (Direct)	Specific instruction	"Put your paper in the bin."
6	Modeling Prompt	Demonstrating the correct behavior	Aide shows how to greet a peer
7	Partial Physical Prompt	Light physical guidance	Gently guiding student's hand to the correct bin
8	Full Physical Prompt	Hand-over-hand assistance	Helping zip coat hand-over-hand

Why Use This Hierarchy?



promotes INDEPENDENCE by starting with the least amount of help



helps students build CONFIDENCE and internalize routines or skills



allows staff to FADE SUPPORT over time as the student becomes more independent

