



ESE Explained

With Mrs. Stencel

What is an accommodation?

Feeling confident that your child is in the right school environment is a concern for any parent. For parents whose children have special needs, that concern presents its own types of challenges. Will your students be cared for and accepted? Can they be challenged without feeling that their disability is hindering their chance to progress academically or socially?

Students with special needs require more than academic assistance and instruction. At St. Stephen, we want to assure parents that your child's academic, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being are paramount. Every month I plan on writing information that will help answer any questions that you might have. This month I will focus on accommodations. What is an accommodation, and what is the purpose for them?

Accommodations are adjustments made to allow a student to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities without lowering learning or performance expectations and without changing what is being measured. The purpose of accommodations is to ensure **equal access** to the full school experience for students with learning disabilities.

Accommodations do not change instructional content, give students an unfair advantage, or change the skills or knowledge that a test measures. Accommodations make it possible for students with learning impairments to demonstrate their learning without being hindered by their disabilities. Appropriate accommodations need to be an integral part of the normal teaching and testing cycle—never reserved only for periods of assessment. Accommodations, provided for both testing and instruction, can change the way students access information and demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities; they do not alter academic standards or expectations.

Assessment (testing) accommodations are changes in assessment materials (e.g., large print) or procedures (e.g., extended time) that allow students to demonstrate their abilities—not their disabilities—during tests and exams. Without accommodations, an assessment may not accurately measure the knowledge and skills of a student with a learning disability. An accommodation does not change an item or test validity.

Now that we have talked about what an accommodation is, let's talk about what they are not. Accommodations are not special treatment. To have accommodations in place should never be looked at as an advantage over others; they simply level the playing field. Accommodations are also not automatic A's. Grades are always based on what level of proficiency the student can demonstrate in each course.

Next month I will continue to discuss the differences between an accommodation and a modification.

I also want to add in what accommodations we provide here at St Stephen. As always, if you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me at jstencel@sscsfl.org.