

On Serving Special Education Needs while Preserving Course Integrity in Middle and High School
David Jones, April 2009

It is safe to say that all teachers are in favor of "leveling the playing field" for Special Education students.

No teacher would suggest penalizing the student who needs corrective lenses to read his test. Likewise, a student with processing delays ought to have additional time for tests. This equality of opportunity is something we all work to preserve in our classes. The purpose of many special education services is to support students in achieving the State Learning standards by eliminating the unfair influence disability.

Reducing the content demands of a course for Special Education Students when they are a candidate for the same credit as the rest of the class is illegitimate and not supported in Part 200 Regulations.

To level the playing field does not mean to shorten it. Special education students who are in the regular classroom, whose report cards and transcripts list the course in exactly the same way as every other student in the class, are subject to the same standards as the rest of the class. It is not legitimate to grant equal credit where a student has not been held to the same standard. **Adapting content does not mean reducing content. Maintaining "course integrity" means all students are held to the same standards and that grades will not be inflated for any student. While there will be equality of opportunity, there cannot be guaranteed equality of result.**

The Part 200 regulations are clear in presenting the **general curriculum** (defined as "the same general education curriculum as for students without disabilities" [200.1(t)]) as the standards to which students with disabilities are to be held. (Also see School Law, 30th Edition, page 529 Section 14.24).

This applies even to specially-designed instruction. "Specially-designed instruction means adapting, as appropriate to the needs of an eligible student under this Part, the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction to address the unique needs that result from the student's disability; and to ensure access of the student to the **general curriculum**, so that he or she can meet the educational standards **that apply to all students** (emphasis mine)." [200.1(vv)]

"The IEP identifies the specially designed instruction to be provided to the student, including any special education supports and services and supplementary supports and services, accommodations, including test accommodations for the student to participate and progress in the general education curriculum. Accommodations may be provided, pursuant to the IEP, that include reducing the amount of homework or classwork, but **still requiring the student to demonstrate mastery of the subject in order to obtain course credit** (Emphasis mine)." (Quotation from email correspondence with Pat Geary at the NYS Education Department (pgeary@mail.nysed.gov), 14 May 2006).

The question presents itself: if we reduce things like the number of vocabulary to learn for tests, then are we not failing to prepare the student to master the course, since those things not assigned to be learned in fact will be tested later and the student held accountable?

The classroom teacher plays a key role when collaborating with special educators and both are entitled to time to develop the strategies. "When consultant teacher services are specified in a student's IEP, the regular education teachers of the student for whom the service will be provided **shall be given the opportunity to participate in the instructional planning process with the consultant teacher** to discuss the objectives and to determine the methods and schedules for such services following the development of the IEP." [200.4(5)]

When we disagree with the student's program, we have the right to initiate a CSE review [200.4(4)]