



Grading My Child with Significant Cognitive

Disabilities in an Inclusive Classroom



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Grades are assigned and report cards given in inclusive classrooms. Your child's teacher may have already talked to you about how grades are awarded and what report cards will cover. It is important that thought has been given to how your child's work will be graded and what will be in your child's report card. The purpose of this brief is to (a) identify the IEP team's role in grading and report cards, (b) provide ideas for how to talk to your child's teacher about grades and their meaning, and (c) suggest

what to do if your child's school or district has not yet identified grading and report card considerations for students with significant cognitive disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

When your child is included in a general education classroom, classroom routines and procedures already exist. These include the teacher's approach to grading and report cards. These established approaches may be dictated by the state or district or by the teacher. If

the approaches have not considered students with significant cognitive disabilities, they may not be appropriate for your child whose performance on the state’s alternate assessment is measured using [alternate academic achievement standards](#).

IEP Team’s Role in Grading and Report Cards

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires progress reports on Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, but is silent on how grading on the curriculum should be determined for students with disabilities. However, the Office of Civil Rights has issued letters making it clear that any modified grading must be individualized and that parents should be provided an opportunity for input. Therefore, the IEP team, including the parents, should discuss grading and report cards for students who are in an inclusive classroom. These approaches also apply to grading and report cards in other settings.

Discussion about grading and report cards

should occur even if policies for these are set at the state or district level, especially if these policies do not consider students with significant cognitive disabilities in general education classrooms. This discussion can help you understand the basis for grades whether they are based on products (for example, assignment performance), process (for example, effort or work habits), or progress (for example, score gains). After the basis is identified, possible adaptations that may be needed to ensure that grades are meaningful for your child can be discussed. Table 1 shows some examples of adapted grading for students with significant cognitive disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

Grading for all students should be standards based. This means that assigned grades are based on mastery of specific concepts, processes, and skills aligned to content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled. Content standards refer to the knowledge that a student is expected to master for each grade. This is different from alternate

Table 1. Selected Examples of Grading Adaptations for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

Adaptation	Academic Example
Prioritize educational content and assignments	If a team prioritizes certain core science objectives for each unit being covered during the reporting period, then the student will spend more time and receive more support on the assignments associated with these objectives. These assignments then will count more toward the total science grade.
Evaluate effort	A portion of a student’s grade on a class assignment comes from effort on homework by measuring the number of attempted problems on the homework assignment.
Evaluate processing	A portion of a student’s grade on a class assignment comes from using a process taught in class, such as adding a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence and a period at the end.
Modify weights	Greater weight is given to participation when a student who usually needs support is able to increase independence in completing the steps of an assignment.

Adapted from Reyes, Wakeman, and Thurlow (2020) *Grading for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms* ([TIES TIP #11](#)).

Relevant Resources on Standards and Curriculum

[AA-AAS: Standards that are the “Same but Different”](#)

[The General Education Curriculum – Not an Alternate Curriculum](#)

academic achievement standards that determine the breadth, depth, and complexity with which a student will be expected to master the content standards on the alternate assessment. Standards-based grading involves using a set of criteria to indicate where your child is in relation to meeting the grade-level standards.

Good resources for IEP team members to read before a discussion about grading are [Grading for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms](#) and [Standards-based Grading and Report Cards in Inclusive Elementary and Middle Schools](#). The *Standards-based Grading and Report Cards* resource provides several examples of standards-based report cards.

With an understanding of how grades are assigned in the inclusive classroom, the IEP team can suggest the most appropriate approach for your child. This suggestion cannot be based solely on the fact that your child has a disability, but can be based on your child’s specific needs. Decisions about grading and report cards should be documented in the IEP. If not, grades will be assigned in the same way as for other students in the classroom, and report cards will be based on those grades.

Participation in an inclusive classroom has [many advantages for your child](#). Participation in learning with peers and growth in knowledge and skills need to be recognized. Grading

and report cards are one way to do this. A decision to forego grades or report cards for your child should not be considered.

Talking to Your Child’s Teachers about Grades and Report Cards

Good communication is essential to identifying an appropriate approach to grading and report cards for your child in an inclusive classroom. Ideally, your child’s general education and special education teachers will be involved in IEP team discussions about grades. If not, talking to all of them about your child’s grades and report cards should take place at the beginning of the school year and the decisions should be reflected in the IEP. Strive for an approach that recognizes the progress your child has made on a few focused assignments on priority standards, emphasizing quality rather than quantity. Several ideas for distance learning in [Grading Considerations for Inclusive Classrooms in an Online Environment](#) apply whether instruction is remote or in-person.

Do not forget that your child needs to be told about how grades are assigned as well. Your child’s teacher should talk about this as well as about the report card your child will receive.



Promoting Grading and Report Card Considerations for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities

In some states and districts, approaches to grading and report cards are set in policy. These policies rarely have addressed how to grade students with significant cognitive disabilities who are in inclusive classrooms. Historically, it was recommended that the same approach should be used for all students in a classroom. That recommendation does not make sense for the child who participates in the state's alternate assessment, which holds students with significant cognitive disabilities to the same content standards but different achievement standards. In other words, expectations for the depth, breadth, and complexity of the content to be mastered is different.

Advocate whenever possible with your school's principal about the need for appropriate grading practices in inclusive classrooms. If the opportunity arises, talk to district-level personnel as well.

Key Points to Remember

Grading and report cards tend to be sensitive topics for teachers and parents alike. Thoughtful consideration of how to make these meaningful for your child with significant cognitive disabilities will make the rich inclusive education experience even richer. Remember these points:

- Grades and report cards are important for your child if they are viewed as important for your child's peers in the inclusive classroom.
- Grades and report cards should provide an accurate reflection of your child's performance and progress.
- Decisions about grading and report cards that meet the individualized needs of your child should be documented in the IEP.
- Communication about grading and report cards is essential to avoid misunderstandings.

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