

# JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

## Occupation and Industry Series

# Accommodating Educators with Disabilities

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A service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy

## Preface

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a service of the Office of Disability Employment Policy of the U.S. Department of Labor. JAN makes documents available with the understanding that the information be used solely for educational purposes. The information is not intended to be legal or medical advice. If legal or medical advice is needed, appropriate legal or medical services should be contacted.

JAN does not endorse or recommend any products or services mentioned in this publication. Although every effort is made to update resources, JAN encourages contacting product manufacturers/vendors and service providers directly to ensure that they meet the intended purposes. This guarantees that the most up-to-date information is obtained.

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# **JAN'S OCCUPATION AND INDUSTRY SERIES**

## **Introduction**

JAN's Occupation and Industry Series is designed to help employers determine effective accommodations for their employees with disabilities and comply with title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Each publication in the series addresses a specific occupation or industry and provides information about that occupation or industry, ADA issues, accommodation ideas, and resources for additional information.

The Occupation and Industry Series is a starting point in the accommodation process and may not address every situation. Accommodations should be made on a case by case basis, considering each employee's individual limitations and accommodation needs. Employers are encouraged to contact JAN to discuss specific situations in more detail.

For information on assistive technology and other accommodation ideas, visit JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <http://askjan.org/soar>.

## **Information about Educators with Disabilities**

### **How many educators with disabilities are working today?**

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, nearly four million educators, specifically teachers, working in preschool to secondary settings were employed in the United States in 2006. In addition, there were close to 1.7 million professionals who taught in post-secondary settings, ranging from four year colleges and universities to technology and culinary schools in that same year (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). If disabilities affect one-fifth of all Americans (Census Bureau, 2008), then close to 1.1 million educators, from preschool teachers to post-secondary professors and instructors, could be in need of job accommodations.

With the high standards teachers are held to - along with the myriad skills they are required to master and the tasks they accomplish on a daily basis - teachers with disabilities may need reasonable accommodations to effectively perform their jobs. They may need accommodations related to cognitive, mental health, motor, sensory, and other disabilities.

## **Educators and the Americans with Disabilities Act**

### **What is a disability under the ADA?**

The ADA does not contain a list of medical conditions that constitute disabilities. Instead, the ADA has a general definition of disability that each person must meet (EEOC, 1992). Therefore, some people with medical conditions will have a disability under the ADA and some will not.

A person has a disability if he/she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment (EEOC, 1992). For more information about how to determine whether a person has a disability under the ADA, visit <http://askjan.org/corner/vol02iss04.htm>.

### **Are educators with disabilities required to disclose their disability to their employers?**

It depends. The ADA regulates when employers can ask medical questions of job applicants, new hires, and employees. During the application stage, employers are not allowed to ask medical questions and applicants are not required to disclose their disabilities, unless they need an accommodation. Employers are required to provide accommodations for job applicants with disabilities to participate in the application process, but only if they know about the disability and need for accommodation (EEOC, 1992).

Once an employer makes a job offer, but before the new hire actually starts working, employers can ask any medical questions they want as long as they ask all new employees in the same job category the same questions. At this stage, the new hire must disclose a disability if asked (EEOC, 1992).

Once working, employees only need to disclose their disabilities if they want to request an accommodation (EEOC, 1992).

### **Can an employer ask educators with disabilities to submit to a medical examination?**

Yes, if the need for the medical examination is job-related and consistent with business necessity. Disability-related inquiries and examinations of employees must be “job-related and consistent with business necessity.” According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC, 2000), the federal agency charged with enforcing the ADA, a medical inquiry or examination is job-related and consistent with business necessity when:

- an employer has a reasonable belief, based on objective evidence, that an employee’s ability to perform essential job functions will be impaired by a medical condition; or

- an employer has a reasonable belief, based on objective evidence, that an employee will pose a direct threat due to a medical condition; or
- an employee asks for a reasonable accommodation and the employee's disability or need for accommodation is not known or obvious; or
- required in positions that affect public safety, such as police and fire fighters.

For additional information, visit: Enforcement Guidance: Disability-Related Inquiries and Medical Examinations of Employees under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) at <http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/guidance-inquiries.html>.

## **Accommodating Educators with Disabilities**

(Note: Educators may develop some of the limitations discussed below, but seldom develop all of them. Also, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all people with disabilities will need accommodations to perform their jobs and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is only a sample of the possibilities available. Numerous other accommodation solutions may exist.)

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What limitations is the employee experiencing?
2. How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee's job performance?
3. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
4. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?
5. Has the employee with a disability been consulted regarding possible accommodations?
6. Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee with a disability to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
7. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training regarding disabilities?

### **Accommodation Ideas:**

#### **Motor/Mobility Impairments**

Motor and mobility impairment, as used in this publication, refers to limitations in motor movements such as walking, lifting, sitting, standing, typing, writing, gripping, and maintaining stamina. Many conditions cause motor or mobility impairment, including but not limited to multiple sclerosis, cancer, stroke, spinal cord injury, cumulative trauma disorder, back condition, arthritis, cerebral palsy, Parkinson's disease, and heart condition.

#### **Difficulty standing in front of class:**

- Use sit/stand stool
- Use anti-fatigue mat/carpeting with extra padding
- Use counter height stool
- Alternate often between sitting and standing
- Rearrange student seating so the individual may sit, but still be viewed easily by all students, e.g., semi-circle

- Adjust height of chalk board, white board, or interactive white board
- Allow use of supportive foot wear

**Difficulty bending to assist students:**

- Have student come to individual when needed or when directed to do so
- Use teacher's aide and student teachers
- Use student assistants to help others
- Allow use of portable desk height stool so that individual can sit next to a student's desk

**Difficulty bending to obtain materials or access files:**

- Use automatic shelves and file systems so that materials are brought to appropriate height with a push of a button
- Have most commonly used materials on easy to access shelves or drawers
- Have shelves lowered or raised
- Have student helpers to assist with tasks
- Sit on a low stool when accessing lower shelves, cabinets, and drawers
- Use a reacher to access out of reach shelves
- Consider allowing use of a service animal

**Difficulty sitting for long periods of time at desk:**

- Use ergonomic chair so that seat can be adjusted to fit the person using it
- Use adjustable height desk for the option to sit or stand while working
- Take frequent rest breaks and alternate between sitting and standing

**Difficulty moving around room, building, or grounds:**

- Make sure appropriate mobility aids are being used for the condition experienced by the person with a disability and for the environment
- Have accessible path of travel and make sure it is clear at all times
- Make sure floor surface is appropriate (even and slip resistant, and if carpeted, no more than 1/2 inch thick, securely attached, and firm padding underneath)
- Locate work station and planning area near restrooms, individual's work room, and emergency exit
- Develop a plan to signal for help in an emergency so that the individual does not have to physically go to office to get assistance
- Provide appropriate parking

**Difficulty writing on chalkboard:**

- Use writing aid to hold chalk
- Use PC projector
- Use overhead projector
- Use flip chart
- Use pocket chart

**Difficulty writing on papers:**

- Provide writing aid to assist in holding writing device
- Allow frequent rest breaks and alternate between tasks
- Provide writing line guides, clip board/paper holders, tactile paper with raised lines
- Use typewriter
- Convert forms to digital format when possible and allow computer based data entry
- Use stamps for comments, dates, and signatures when practical
- Provide an ergonomic workstation

**Difficulty keyboarding:**

- Use key guards
- Provide voice recognition software
- Use ergonomic keyboard
- Provide other alternative input: head stick, scanning systems, etc.
- Use wrist rests
- Provide ergonomic chair with arm/elbow support
- Allow frequent rest breaks/alternate between tasks

**Sensory Impairments**

Sensory impairments, as used in this publication, are any conditions that affect hearing, speech, vision, or respiration.

**Difficulty viewing computer screen due to low vision:**

- Provide larger sized monitor
- Provide external magnification (fits over existing monitor)
- Use screen magnification software
- Reduce glare via glare guards, blinds on windows, or adjusting lighting in the work area
- Provide monitor with high resolution, high contrast, and flicker free features
- Allow frequent rest breaks for eyes
- Change font size
- Provide a keyboard with large print on keys

**Difficulty viewing papers due to low vision:**

- Provide hand/stand/optical magnifier
- Provide closed circuit television system
- Provide electronic magnifier
- Enlarge information on copier
- Provide task lighting
- Reduce glare in area, via overhead lights, windows, etc.
- Install adjustable light switch or other alternative lighting
- Change font size

- Allow frequent rest breaks for eyes
- Use a document camera and computer projector to project pages onto a wall screen

**Difficulty obtaining information from computer screen due to no vision:**

- Provide screen reading software
- Provide Braille display terminal
- Provide reader (clerical staff, etc.)

**Difficulty viewing papers due to no vision:**

- Provide optical character recognition system
- Use reader/assistant

**Difficulty communicating with others due to hearing loss or no hearing:**

- Provide assistive listening devices (FM, infrared, power loop)
- Provide real-time captioning via computer/PC projector
- Use hearing aids
- Implement appropriate positioning and lighting to assist with lip reading
- Reduce background noise and improve acoustics by shutting classroom doors and windows, adding carpet and acoustical wall/ceiling coverings, improving etiquette at meetings, and reducing air rush sound from air and heating ducts
- Allow written communication
- Consider use of a sign language interpreter
- Use electronic mail (via computer)

**Difficulty accessing information from video tape/DVD:**

- Have equipment capable of providing closed captioning when it is available (new television, decoder)
- Use assistive listening devices
- Provide closed captioned (either in house or by using a service)

**Difficulty communicating over the telephone due to hearing impairment:**

- Provide text telephone
- Provide telephone amplification via amplified phone (handset or via in-line or portable amplifiers)
- Use relay service
- Use captioned telephone and Cap-tel service
- Use voice carry over phone
- Use video phone

**Difficulty responding to fire and emergency signals:**

- Add visual signals to auditory alarms
- Use vibrating pager
- Consider allowing use of a service animal
- Have students or another employee alert person that alarm has sounded

- Use Signtel Intercom System

**Difficulty speaking loudly enough for others to hear:**

- Provide portable voice amplifier
- Provide stationary PA system or FM system when portable systems do not provide enough gain
- Provide communication board or other communication device with speech output
- Use signals with special meaning to reduce amount of speaking needed
- Prerecord frequently used instructions and store on computer (CD or interactive whiteboard) to reduce amount of speaking needed
- Use supplementary teaching materials such as videos DVDs and computer software
- Use the narration feature in PowerPoint or a similar program to add sound to presentations that will be used frequently
- Provide a computer with screen reading software so that the individual can type instructions rather than speaking

**Allergies/Multiple Chemical Sensitivities**

**Allergies to chalk:**

- Use overhead projector
- Use PC projector
- Use dry erase board with low fume dry erase markers
- Use large tablet/easel
- Provide good ventilation/air purification devices

**Sensitivities to cleaning agents, smoke, pesticides, perfumes, paint, carpet, and other building furnishings:**

- Use air purification device
- Avoid the irritant to the extent possible
- Use non-toxic paint and other cleaning products that are less irritating alternatives
- Remove, replace, or detoxify existing carpet and select other less toxic building furnishings and supplies
- Improve ventilation within the worksite
- Notify in advance of painting or use of pesticides so that alternative work arrangements can be made
- Educate others concerning the nature of multiple chemical sensitivities and how fragrances can affect the condition
- Move work area away from such areas as the shop class, chemistry lab, cafeteria, or parking lot
- Have cleaning, maintenance, and remodeling jobs performed while the building is unoccupied
- Consider implementing a fragrance policy
- Provide a dehumidifier to prevent build-up of mold

- Provide access to a list of ingredients in cleaning products and other chemical agents used on school grounds

### **Mental Health Impairments**

Mental health impairment, as used in this publication, refers collectively to all diagnosable mental disorders. Mental disorders are health conditions that are characterized by alterations in thinking, mood, or behavior (or some combination thereof) associated with distress and/or impaired functioning (Goldman, 1999). Examples of mental health impairments include depression, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, schizophrenia, and addiction.

#### **Difficulty handling stress, emotions, and change:**

- Have mentor to assist when stress levels become high
- Provide administrative and coworker support with open communication
- Allow time off for counseling and stress management support groups
- Limit number of subjects to be taught (e.g., specialize in one or two subjects)
- Consider limiting number of students in class if feasible
- Have plan period at the same time everyday
- Have own classroom instead of having to change rooms
- Use stress management techniques effectively
- Use soothing music or environmental sound machine to block out background noise when doing paperwork
- Allow additional time and training to learn new responsibilities
- Allow telephone calls to emotional supports
- Schedule meetings with supervisor to discuss workplace issues, production levels, effectiveness of accommodations
- Develop strategies to deal with problems before they arise
- Obtain clear expectations of responsibilities and the consequences of not meeting them
- Provide sensitivity training to co-workers
- Provide to-do lists and written instructions
- Consider providing in-service training on stress management

#### **Difficulty with organization, staying on task, finishing paperwork, managing time:**

- Provide organization tools such as electronic schedulers, pace setters, memo recorders, software organizers, calendars, and grade books
- Assign permanent classroom instead of having to change rooms
- Schedule structured plan period at the same time everyday
- Use color code files, papers, books
- Create detailed lesson plans and outline
- Use specialized lesson plan books
- Limit number of subjects and classes to be taught
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps

- Assign a mentor to assist with determining goals, providing daily guidelines, reminding of important deadlines
- Consider providing in-service training on time management

### **Cognitive Impairments**

Cognitive impairment, as used in this publication, refers to disturbances in brain functions, such as memory loss, problems with orientation, distractibility, perception problems, and difficulty thinking logically. Cognitive impairment is a syndrome, not a diagnosis. Many conditions can cause cognitive impairment, including multiple sclerosis, depression, alcoholism, Alzheimer’s disease, Parkinson’s disease, traumatic brain injury, chronic fatigue syndrome, and stroke.

#### **Difficulty with concentration:**

- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Reduce clutter in the classroom
- Plan for uninterrupted work time
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps
- Restructure job to include only essential functions

#### **Memory deficits:**

- Allow individual to tape record meetings
- Provide printed minutes of each meeting
- Provide written as well as verbal instructions
- Allow additional training time for new programs and initiatives
- Provide reminders of important deadlines via e-mails, memos, and weekly supervision
- Provide mentor for daily guidance
- Use notebooks, planners, or sticky notes to record information for easy retrieval
- Provide cues to assist in location of items by using labels, color coding, or bulletin boards

#### **Situations and Solutions:**

A junior high teacher with multiple sclerosis was preparing to return to work after a year of medical leave. She had difficulty standing due to lower extremity weakness so could not write on the chalkboard as much as needed. Her employer purchased an LCD Pen Tablet with a projector, which allowed the teacher to sit while working and write on the pen tablet and project what she wrote on the chalkboard. The cost was \$8500.

A newly hired teacher with a seizure disorder used a service animal to alert her that a seizure was coming on. The school had a “no animal” policy. The school allowed the teacher to bring her service animal to work and to keep it with her in her classroom. She was also provided breaks to take the service animal outside and given the opportunity to educate coworkers about the use of service animals. The cost was \$0.

A teacher with fatigue related to cancer treatment was having difficulty complying with a school policy that teachers had to go to the office to clock in and out each day. The teacher was excused from complying with the policy and was allowed to call the office from her classroom instead. The cost was \$0.

A high school guidance counselor, with ADD, was having problems with concentration due to the noise outside the office. His school provided him with a phone light, sound proofing, and a floor fan for white noise. The accommodation was very successful and the cost was under \$600.

A counselor who was having difficulty keyboarding and entering cases because of her dyslexia was accommodated with a voice recognition program for her computer. The total cost was \$250.

A social work instructor for a college had chronic fatigue syndrome and a psychiatric disability. As a result, the instructor had difficulty getting to work on time and handling a large workload. As an accommodation, the job was restructured. This included a self-paced workload, flexible work hours, and an exchange of work duties with another employee. Cost of accommodation was \$0.

A sixth grade teacher for a public elementary school has ADD. As a result, the teacher had difficulties finishing paperwork, staying on task, attending to the subject being taught, getting to work on time, and managing his time appropriately. The teacher is now using a computer with a day planning calendar software package that assists him with organization, time management, scheduling, and planning. He also carries a file folder box with labeled colored folders that contain written reminders, notes, and memos. Approximate cost of accommodation was \$40.

A teaching assistant injured her back while working with children with severe disabilities. As a result of the injury, she had great difficulty assisting the children with toileting and mobility from class to therapy. The teacher was accommodated with a flexible schedule to attend extensive physical therapy sessions. A lift is currently being considered to assist the employee in lifting students. Approximate cost of lift is \$6,400.

A technician/educator with a school system had low vision and was having difficulty viewing information from a computer screen. Because the employee benefited from magnification, an inexpensive screen magnification software package was purchased. The employer reported that the accommodation was effective and allowed the school system to save between \$1,000 and \$5,000 in insurance costs, workers' compensation, and training a new employee.

A teacher with an ankle impairment was very limited in her ability to walk up and down stairs. As an accommodation, the school reassigned her to another building that was single level. The total cost of the accommodation was \$0 and both the employee and employer were very satisfied with the accommodation.

A college professor who had incurred a traumatic brain injury needed to reschedule departmental meetings and classes she taught to after 11:00 am so that she could use the uninterrupted morning hours to get her planning, studying, and administrative duties done. There was no cost for this accommodation.

An elementary teacher with bone cancer was accommodated with a designated parking space near the entrance that was closest to her classroom. Redistributing the duties of paraprofessionals in the building allowed for help with escorting the children to the cafeteria, music and art rooms, and the gymnasium. The cost of these accommodations was \$0.

### **Products:**

There are numerous products that can be used to accommodate people with limitations. JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <http://askjan.org/soar> is designed to let users explore various accommodation options. Many product vendor lists are accessible through this system; however, upon request JAN provides these lists and many more that are not available on the Web site. Contact JAN directly if you have specific accommodation situations, are looking for products, need vendor information, or are seeking a referral.

## Resources

### **Job Accommodation Network**

West Virginia University  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080  
Toll Free: (800)526-7234  
TTY: (877)781-9403  
Fax: (304)293-5407  
jan@askjan.org  
<http://askjan.org>

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities.

### **Office of Disability Employment Policy**

200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room S-1303  
Washington, DC 20210  
Toll Free: (866)633-7635  
TTY: (877)889-5627  
Fax: (202)693-7888  
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/>

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. ODEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.

### **American Federation of Teachers**

555 New Jersey Ave. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20001  
Direct: (202)879-4400  
<http://www.aft.org>

The mission of the American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO, is to improve the lives of members and their families, to give voice to their legitimate professional, economic and social aspirations, to strengthen institutions, to improve the quality of the services provided, to bring together all members to assist and support one another and to promote democracy, human rights, and freedom in the union, in the nation, and throughout the world.

**Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)**

107 Commerce Center Drive, Suite 204  
Huntersville, NC 28078  
Direct: (704)947-7779  
Fax: (704)948-7779  
<http://www.ahead.org>

AHEAD is an international, multicultural organization of professionals committed to full participation in higher education for persons with disabilities.

**Council for Exceptional Children**

Division for Learning Disabilities (DLD)  
1110 North Glebe Road  
Suite 300  
Arlington, VA 22201  
Toll Free: (888)232-7733  
TTY: (866)915-5000  
Fax: (703)264-9494  
<http://www.cec.sped.org>

The Council for Exceptional Children is dedicated to improving educational success for individuals with exceptionalities: students with disabilities and/or gifts. Advocates for appropriate government policies, sets professional standards, provides continual professional development, advocates for newly and historically underserved individuals with exceptionalities, and helps professionals obtain conditions and resources necessary for effective professional practice.

**National Education Association**

1201 16th St. NW  
Washington, DC 20036-3290  
Direct: (202)833-4000  
Fax: (202)822-7974  
<http://www.nea.org>

The National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization, is committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA's 3.2 million members work at every level of education—from pre-school to university graduate programs. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States.

**National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped**

Library of Congress  
1291 Taylor Street NW  
Washington, DC 20011  
Toll Free: (888)657-7323  
Direct: (202)707-5100

TTY: (202)707-0744  
Fax: (202)707-0712  
nls@loc.gov  
<http://www.loc.gov/nls>

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped is a free national library program of Braille and recorded materials for those who are blind and have physical limitations. .

**Rehabilitation Engineering Society of North America (RESNA)**

1700 North Moore Street, Suite 1540  
Arlington, VA 22209-1903  
Direct: (703)524-6686  
TTY: (703)524-6639  
Fax: (703)524-6630  
<http://www.resna.org>

RESNA's purpose is to promote and support the development, dissemination, integration, and utilization of knowledge in rehabilitation engineering, and to assure that these efforts result in the highest quality of care and service delivery for all citizens.

**United Federation of Teachers**

Committee for Members with Disabilities  
52 Broadway  
New York, NY 10004  
Direct: (212)598-7711  
<http://www.uft.org>

The United Federation of Teachers (UFT) negotiates for fair and competitive salaries, enhanced professionalism, and improved working conditions, not only to benefit its members but also to help recruit and retain the best educators for New York City schools. As an advocate for public school students, the UFT regularly lobbies for appropriate school funding by the city, state and federal governments. In addition, the union has strongly supported and often led efforts to: raise academic standards and strengthen instruction; reduce class size; create safer, more orderly schools; improve school facilities; and increase parent involvement in schools.

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