

Conducting the Presidential Fitness Test for Students with Disabilities or Health Concerns

This guide covers the principles and the processes that apply across all six options within the Presidential Fitness Test.



◆ Fitness Is for Everyone

The Presidential Fitness Test promotes fitness and provides meaningful measurement for every student. For a student with a disability or health concern, participation might look different than it does for their classmates, but the goal is the same: an individualized experience that reflects the student's effort and current level of fitness.

◆ Modifications, Adaptations, & Alternative Tests

The three terms in the table below describe the types of changes to a test from the least amount of change to the most amount of change (i.e. modification, adaptation, or alternative). As a general approach, use the smallest change that lets the student participate meaningfully and safely — consider a modification first, then an adaptation, and reserve an alternative test for when neither of those works.

TERM	WHAT CHANGES	EXAMPLE	USE WHEN
Modification	How the test is explained, cued, timed, or counted — the task itself doesn't change.	Hand signals instead of a verbal "ready, go"; extra demonstration and visual cue cards; testing in a quieter space.	The student can do the actual test movement if conditions around it change.
Adaptation	The equipment, positioning, or execution of the movement — the task still measures a similar fitness component.	Knee, incline, or wall push-up; modified curl-up; walking the mile.	A closely related version of the movement is possible, but the standard version isn't.
Alternative Test	The task itself — a different assessment replaces the original test.	A seated isometric hold, a different mobility-based endurance measure, or another assessment chosen with the student's team.	No modification or adaptation allows safe or meaningful participation in the original movement pattern.

A Simple Way to Decide:

1. Can the student complete the actual test movement if you change how it's explained, cued, timed, or counted? Use a modification.
2. Can the student complete a closely related version of the movement with different equipment or positioning? Use an adaptation.
3. Is neither of those safe or possible? Use an alternative test, chosen together with the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP)/504 team or health professionals, depending on the disability or health issue.

How this maps to IEP/504 language: Under special education law, an accommodation changes how a student is assessed without changing what's being measured, while a modification changes what's being measured or expected. Most modifications and adaptations described above function as accommodations, and they can typically be authorized under a 504 plan or an IEP. An alternative test — since it measures something different from the original — functions more like a legal modification, which generally requires IEP-level authority and team documentation rather than a 504 plan alone. This is general guidance, not legal advice; procedures vary by school and state, so confirm specifics with your special education coordinator.

Working With IEPs and 504 Plans

Successful testing begins well before test day. Taking time to review IEPs and 504 plans, confirm approved supports, and collaborate with the people who know the student best helps create a more accessible and effective testing experience.

- Review each student's IEP or 504 plan well in advance of test day. Sorting out an accommodation on test day slows everything down and puts the student on the spot.
- Know who has authority to approve what: Accommodations and adaptations are generally within a teacher's discretion to apply from an existing plan, but a new alternative test should be discussed with the case manager.
- Document which modification, adaptation, or alternative test was used for each student, alongside their score. This matters especially for alternative tests, since those results aren't comparable to standard scores or award thresholds.
- Loop in the student's case manager weeks before testing. Securing equipment, increasing staffing, or having a team conversation often take longer than expected.
- Ask the student and their family directly what has worked for them before. They're often your best source of information, and it's more reliable than guessing from a diagnosis alone.

Build Your Team

You don't have to figure everything out on your own. The people who work with the student every day often have valuable insight into what supports are already in place and what strategies are most likely to help the student succeed.

- **Adapted PE teacher:** your primary resource for movement-specific expertise, if your district or school has one.
- **Special education case manager or teacher:** knows the student's IEP/504 details and can tell you what's already authorized.
- **School nurse:** manages health-related restrictions (asthma, cardiac conditions, seizure disorders, diabetes, and similar), medication access, and emergency planning.
- **Paraprofessionals or aides:** often already work with the student daily and know what supports actually work in practice.
- **Parents/caregivers and the student:** ask directly rather than assuming — coordinate before test day with a short meeting or shared notes.

Guidance by Need Area

There's no replacement for working with students, families, and their support professionals, but here's a quick guide, organized by disability category, to help you get you started.

◆ Deaf or Hard of Hearing

- Pair verbal instructions with visual cues or hand signals for start, stop, and pacing — especially important for timed tests like the 1-mile run, beep test, and plank, where auditory cues are central.
- Face the student when giving instructions so they can read your lips or see visual cues.
- Demonstrate the movement rather than relying on verbal explanation alone.

◆ Blind or Low Vision

- Describe the test, space, and equipment layout in detail, and physically orient the student to the space before starting.
- With permission, use hands-on guidance to demonstrate proper form.
- For running tests, consider a sighted guide or tether partner for orientation and safety.
- Use a consistent sound cue to mark a stationary point, like a turnaround or finish line.

◆ Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

- Break instructions into simple, concrete steps, paired with visual demonstration and cue cards where useful.
- Allow extra practice repetitions before the counted trial so the student is familiar with what's expected.
- Offer a quieter or less crowded testing space if sensory load or anxiety is a concern.
- Consider partnering students with IDD with another student or a volunteer when testing so the student can mirror pacing and form as they complete the test.

◆ Physical Disabilities

- Work with the student, family, and adapted PE staff to decide which fitness component each test should measure and whether an adaptation or an alternative test fits best — don't assume from a diagnosis alone, since individual presentation varies widely.
- Ask the student directly what they're comfortable with and capable of.
- Check that surfaces, transitions, and equipment (mats, bar height, running surface) are physically accessible before test day, not during it.

◆ Injuries

- Treat a current injury as a temporary medical restriction, not a long-term accommodation — follow any doctor's note or activity restriction exactly.
- When in doubt, exempt rather than modify.
- Reassess once the student is medically cleared, rather than defaulting them into a long-term alternative test.

◆ Asthma or Other Heart/Lung Conditions

- Review the student's asthma or cardiac action plan with the school nurse prior to test day, including symptoms to watch for and when to stop.
- Make sure rescue inhalers or other emergency medication are accessible at the testing location.
- Build in a full warm-up before vigorous tests like the 1-mile run or beep test.
- Allow self-paced completion (for example, a run/walk combination) for endurance tests, and stop testing immediately if the student shows any sign of respiratory distress.
- For a diagnosed cardiac condition, follow the physician's specific activity clearance exactly.