

Differentiation Non-Negotiables

The Non-Negotiable	The Rationale
Summative assessments MUST be developed before instruction begins in any standards-based classroom, including classrooms where instruction is differentiated.	The three stages of standards-based teaching and learning are 1—identify desired learning; 2—determine appropriate assessments; and 3—design instruction. Instruction should be designed so teachers teach and students learn the intended knowledge, skills, and understandings; therefore, these should be ready before instruction begins. Otherwise, we might assess what’s been taught rather than teach the desired learning goals.
Preassessment is essential for differentiated instruction.	In order to differentiate content, process, product, and learning environment to meet the needs of different learners, we must determine the readiness levels, interests, and learner profiles for those learners. In other words, collect (both formal and informal) data about where students are before we can design instruction to meet their needs.
Formative assessment is essential for differentiated instruction.	Because students master content at different rates, we must continually assess their learning (both formally and informally) in order to determine the appropriate next steps for different learners. Formative assessment by definition is assessment that is used to guide classroom instructional decisions.
Differentiation is NOT the same as accommodations or modifications.	Accommodations and/or modifications are written into a student’s IEP and become part of the students educational program for the year (or until the IEP is amended). On the other hand, when instruction is differentiated, the content, processes, products, and learning environment are constantly changing, based on pre- and formative classroom assessment, to meet the needs of the different learners lesson by lesson, unit by unit.
Students have the SAME learning targets when instruction is differentiated.	Instruction is differentiated by readiness, interests, learner profiles and through content, process, product, and learning environment so that students CAN master the learning targets, just differently.
When instruction is differentiated, students will work in a number of different flexible groups over a short period of time.	Flexible grouping is always data-based. The data can be readiness data, interest data, or learner profile data and can be formal or informal; but to group students in order to meet their specific learning needs and desires, data must be used to form the groups. In addition, in order to ensure that flexible groups don’t default to ability groups, students must have opportunities to work with most if not all other students in the class over a relatively short period of time. When using readiness data, students can be grouped homogeneously or heterogeneously. In addition, students can be grouped by interest or by learner profile. Grouping students randomly is not differentiated instruction.