



Pulaski Academy Learning Services

What does the Learning Services department do?

Pulaski Academy's Learning Services department is passionate about providing access to the school's rigorous curriculum through the use of accommodations. From the Early Childhood School through the Upper School, our Learning Services team strives to provide individualized support, academic resources, and extensive guidance for our students, parents, and teachers. Our collaborative approach to helping our students navigate PA's curricular expectations maximizes students' academic potential.

What is the process for students to receive learning services on campus?

The Learning Services process often begins with observations as a result of concerns expressed by a classroom teacher, a parent/guardian, and/or the School Head for students who are not meeting quarterly benchmark standards. As the concerns are being addressed, a referral process is initiated in which the student is observed by our Learning Services team and often recommended to complete an outside psychoeducational evaluation to help determine the source of a student's difficulty. In some circumstances, the evaluation process is initiated by the family or a child's medical doctor. On a case-by-case basis, students may be approved to begin working with a learning specialist while the evaluation process is taking place.

Using information from the formal evaluation report and with input from the classroom teachers and parents/guardians, the learning specialist will make suggestions for classroom support. The learning specialist will work directly with parents, teachers, administration, counselors, outside therapists, and educational psychologists to build the best collaborative learning support team for each student's individual needs.

What is a psychoeducational evaluation?

A psychoeducational evaluation is a process in which a student with a suspected learning disorder is given a series of norm-referenced assessments in the following areas: cognitive functioning, reasoning, and processing; academic performance; speech-language; and social-emotional functioning. In addition, the psychoeducational evaluation is accompanied by a collection of statements from the student's current teachers and his/her family and academic background. If a learning disability is identified, appropriate accommodations to provide for greater student success will be recommended. Our school staff will then use the report generated to create an accommodation plan from these recommendations.

Qualifying conditions such as anxiety, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, and epilepsy are considered medical diagnoses. A psychoeducational evaluation is not required for an accommodation plan for these medical diagnoses; however, it is a key tool used by our team to pinpoint a student's areas of need so that we are able to provide the most appropriate accommodations available to that student. For a student with a qualifying medical diagnosis to receive Learning Services support, a physician's report is necessary to provide information regarding the date of diagnosis, treatment plan, and any in-school recommendations.

What can families expect from the Learning Services program?

In the Early Childhood and Lower Schools, students with accommodation plans work with the learning specialist at the classroom teacher's discretion during the school day for one-on-one or small-group instruction, for reinforcement of information taught in the classroom, and for extended-time testing if recommended on the formal evaluation.

In the Middle and Upper Schools, the Learning Services department offers a dedicated class to students who have documented accommodation plans on file and desire the additional structure and support that this course provides. During this class time, students have access to a professional who specializes in the following strategies:

- Helping students prioritize assignments and create homework schedules utilizing organizational tips/tools
- Facilitating the scheduling of accommodated tests and providing those accommodations
- Connecting students to appropriate sources when concepts need to be retaught
- Communicating with teachers about upcoming assignments to help students develop a plan of action
- Assisting students in accessing audiobooks
- Confidentially communicating with teachers about student assignment and test grades to ensure that students are provided and successful with their allowable accommodations
- Fostering self-advocacy skills by helping students build working relationships with their teachers
- Grade monitoring and family conferences to discuss academic progress
- Coordinating additional tutoring and/or therapies as needed
- Reinforcing math and reading foundational skills

Which students are eligible for accommodations?

Any student with a diagnosed learning disability or medical condition requiring accommodations will be provided with an accommodation plan. The following is a sample of qualifying disorders that our department currently serves:

- Anxiety
- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
- Autism
- Communication/Speech Disorders
- Diabetes
- Dyslexia/Dyscalculia
- Epilepsy
- Executive Functioning Disorders
- Linguistic Impairments
- Slow Cognitive Processing
- Specific Learning Disorders in the following areas:
 - Listening Comprehension
 - Math
 - Oral Expression
 - Reading
 - Written Expression

What are accommodations, and how can my student use them?

Accommodations are strategies used to sidestep weak neurodevelopmental functions or academic skills (e.g., attention, memory, and language) and provide access to the same curriculum as all other students.

- All accommodations that are outlined in a student's psychoeducational evaluation or suggested by a medical/psychological professional will be considered by the Learning Services department.

- Accommodations are not designed to provide an extra advantage for students; rather, they even the playing field by allowing students to participate in typical learning activities while circumventing their weaknesses. For example, allowing audio versions of textbooks provides a child access to the same content as other students without disruption in the flow of information from the text to the student's working memory.
- Accommodations do not lessen curricular expectations. In fact, many accommodations are considered as a best practice by professional educators and benefit all students.
- Self-advocacy is one method of helping the students become more independent in their learning as they look forward to their post-secondary experience. As a student progresses through the Learning Services program, Pulaski Academy aspires for students to understand the need and purpose for accommodations and therefore become their own advocates.

What are some typical accommodations?

- Audiobooks
- Distraction-free environment
- Exam assistance (such as scribe, frequent breaks, extended time, small group, read aloud, and word banks)
- Extended time on assignments
- Key points or instructions written on the board
- Note-taking assistance (such as peer note-taker, use of computer/device, highlighter, notes outline, lecture notes, study guides, and recording device)
- Oral instructions
- Preferential seating
- Segmented assignments

Can my child receive accommodations on standardized tests?

Any student with a diagnosed learning disability or qualifying medical condition may apply for accommodations on various standardized tests. Accommodations for the CTP are provided for lower and middle school students who qualify through the learning services program. For accommodations on standardized tests through ACT (ACT and PreACT) and College Board (AP, PSAT/NMSQT, SAT), the Upper School counseling office must submit to the testing agency a student's psychoeducational testing, along with his/her school accommodation plan. Once a student receives approval for accommodations, the counseling office will ensure the student receives the necessary accommodations during school-based standardized tests; additionally, the student will be granted the same accommodations when testing at off-campus locations on national test days. If accommodations are denied by the testing agency, the counseling office can appeal, with parent permission. Testing agencies take weeks to render accommodation decisions, so a family should begin the application process with counselors well in advance of their student's first planned testing date. As testing agencies have tightened their approval process for accommodations in recent years, it is strongly recommended that students receive psychoeducational testing at three-year intervals and follow their academic plans on campus in order to demonstrate consistency for standardized testing accommodation approval.

What professional qualifications do PA learning specialists have?

Pulaski Academy is proud to provide five learning specialists campus-wide. All are certified special-education instructors, with most being certified dyslexia and reading specialists. Our learning specialists have direct experience in providing screening to help determine if outside evaluations are needed. Being able to interpret psychoeducational reports enables them to provide academic support and therapy to students with

a variety of learning differences. Training in a variety of multi-sensory reading intervention strategies and a deep understanding of the PA curriculum allows our learning specialists to meet the specific needs of our students at each school level.