

Phillips Academy  
ANDOVER

Student Accessibility Services  
Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: What constitutes a disability and need for accommodations?**

A: Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), individuals with disabilities have certain protections and the right to reasonable accommodations and equal access to programs and services. To access these rights, an individual is required to furnish documentation that includes a diagnosis and demonstrate that a physical or mental impairment substantially limits a major life activity such as hearing, moving, seeing, learning, etc. Test-taking is *not* considered a ‘major life activity’ under the ADA. There are students at Phillips Academy with a wide range of disabilities, such as learning disabilities, ADHD, chronic health conditions, sensory-based impairments and/or temporary conditions that may substantially limit a major life activity such as concussions or injuries to a limb or dominant hand.

**Q: What documentation is needed to show evidence of a disability and the need for accommodations?**

A: At Andover, we have specific documentation requirements based on the type of disability, and these are posted on The Hive under Student Support. Regardless of the disability, the documentation must describe how the disability *functionally limits a major life activity*. A diagnosis does not, in itself, constitute a reason for accommodations. For ADHD and learning disabilities, a full neuropsychological evaluation report is generally required to show a functional impact on a particular area of learning, or a change in performance under timed conditions. Other documentation is necessary for certain types of health or physical disabilities that impact learning. In most cases, a doctor’s note is *not* sufficient documentation for accommodations. Disabilities that are treatable and variable will require updated documentation from a qualified provider every 6 months to a year. We do not accept documentation from a student’s relatives or family members.

**Q: What is the process to apply for accommodations?**

A: There are four steps necessary for parents/guardians to register their students with SAS and request accommodations of an academic or residential nature:

1. Review our documentation guidelines posted on The Hive.
2. Complete a Request for Reasonable Accommodations form located on the "Forms" tab in the Medica Health Portal.
3. Upload required documentation through the Medica Health Portal and/or email it to [studentaccessibilityservices@andover.edu](mailto:studentaccessibilityservices@andover.edu).
4. After review, the Accommodations Committee will send out a determination letter via email, which will include any approved accommodations and if updated documentation will be necessary, a timeline for additional information. If accommodations are not approved, then you will also be notified.

After approval by this committee, the student will meet with a member of the SAS team to review their plan, to talk through their accommodations and how to access them. SAS will also review any other recommended support measures, such as counseling, meetings through our Academic Skills Center, or consultations with our nutrition or medical teams.

**Q: Will Andover assist families in understanding the process of applying for accommodations at the school?**

A: Yes. Our process and documentation guidelines are posted on The Hive under Student Support. We are happy to talk with you about this over the phone or via Zoom. Please reach out to Laura Warner, Director of Student Accessibility Services: [lwagner@andover.edu](mailto:lwagner@andover.edu)

**Q: When should I apply?**

A: Accommodation requests are accepted on a rolling basis throughout the year, and we strive to respond in a timely manner. Please note that there may be specific timelines depending on the nature of the request. For example, any requests for housing-related accommodations must be received by May or June 1<sup>st</sup> of the year prior. We can talk with you at any time about this process. For students new to Andover, we ask that you submit your request for accommodations prior to June 1<sup>st</sup>, so that our Accommodation Committee can review it prior to the summer and so we can have a plan in place for your child when school starts in the fall.

**Q: What types of accommodations are available to Andover students who qualify?**

A: The academic accommodations offered at Andover for students with diagnosed learning disabilities, ADHD, or other psychological and health-related disabilities include, but are not limited to:

- Up to 50% extended time for in-class, graded assessments (tests, quizzes, etc...)
- Use of a laptop for in-class writing
- Use of audiobooks, digital text and/or text-to-speech software to access information
- Preferential seating in the classroom.
- Use of Soundfield/RedCat systems to improve sound quality
- Breaks as needed, or access to food and drink

Requests for reasonable accommodations for physical and other health, nutrition or sensory-related disabilities are considered by an accommodations committee, who decide on a case-by-case basis based on the documentation provided and what is reasonable within the context of our academic and residential program.

**Q: What if the evaluation lists other accommodations that aren't approved?**

A: Sometimes evaluations list accommodations which are not reasonable, unnecessary, or not compatible with Andover's academic and/or residential program. For example, evaluations will often recommend that a student be allowed to take tests separately in a "distraction-free" environment. Given our small class sizes, the logistics of our schedule, our physical space and our staffing in the Academic Skills Center, this accommodation is not one that we can offer. We believe that students do best when they can ask their instructor questions during an exam, and when they are taking a test in the location where they learned the material.

**Q: How is information about my child's disability and need for accommodations shared with members of my child's team? Who will know about this disability or their medical condition?**

A: We create a formal accommodation plan for each student with a diagnosed and documented disability. This profile includes accommodations for which the student is eligible along with information on the student's areas of strength, challenge, how those challenges may

impact the student's experience in the classroom, and recommended strategies for the student and the instructor to address those challenges. Members of a student's team (instructors, house counselors, advisors, cluster dean, coaches) may access a digital copy of the plan through a secure portal, and may refer back to it at any time during the term. *We do not share diagnoses.*

Any documentation you provide to us is considered protected health information, and will be stored in the student's medical health record and in a password-protected site for our SAS team. A student's instructors, house counselors or advisors do not read evaluations or access this type of documentation, but they do read the accommodation summary.

**Q: Who is responsible for providing the accommodations?**

A: Accommodations that are classroom-based are provided by the classroom instructor, in conjunction with the SAS team. It is important for a student to communicate with instructors regarding the best way to use an accommodation. As necessary, students should communicate with the SAS team for help using or accessing an accommodation.

Students with approved classroom-based accommodations learn to advocate for themselves by having each instructor sign an accommodations form at the beginning of each term. This process also will prepare them to utilize accommodations in college, as most higher education institutions have a similar process. Additionally, students who receive accommodations of extended time for in-class, graded assessments are required to contact each instructor at least 24 hours before a scheduled in-class assessment to plan for when the student will use the extended time. When necessary, the SAS will assist instructors and students in the provision of accommodations.

**Q: Do all students with a documented disability and accommodations meet with someone in the SAS?**

A: All students with an accommodations plan are required to meet with a member of SAS every year to review their accommodations summary and to complete forms, if necessary. Students may also meet with a learning specialist weekly for individual support. Any student may request an appointment with a learning specialist at any time in the term.

**Q: Does Andover evaluate students for or diagnose students with disabilities?**

A: No. However, we do keep an updated list of evaluators in the Andover and Greater Boston/Metrowest area. This listing is posted on The Hive under Student Support. We can also talk with you about other diagnostic options, including requesting an evaluation through your home school district, working directly with your primary care provider and/or working with a psychiatrist. Our Sykes Wellness team can also be a resource to families who have questions about medically-related diagnoses.

**Q: Does Andover provide language waivers for students with a language-based learning disability?**

A: No. We have had students move through our language program with much success. Students may complete Andover's language requirement by taking advantage of our "2 + 1" option, where they can take two years of one language and one year of another (one must be a 'less commonly taught' language). This allows students the possibility to opt out of a 300-level language class and still complete the language requirement.

**Q: Does Andover modify graduation requirements, the curriculum/books, or the content of assessments (tests, quizzes, and final exams)?**

A: No.

**Q: Is there assistance within the classroom for students with learning disabilities, such as team teaching, 1:1 assistance, or small group/pull out instruction?**

A: No. Our instructors design a variety of activities in the classroom to engage all students. Students may meet with a specialist in the ASC/SAS for individualized support for a transitional period, and we can focus on bolstering skills such as reading comprehension, note-taking and/or planning/prioritizing, but we do not provide remedial content-based assistance. (see ASC FAQ for more information about our services)

**Q: How do formal accommodation plans at Andover differ from IEPs or 504 plans in public schools?**

A: Andover does not create Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). An IEP is put in place for students who need individualized and special educational services or related services such as OT, PT or speech language services in order to make progress in a general education curriculum in a public school. We do not provide in-class or separate modified instruction and do not have separate options for students who cannot access our curriculum. Andover does not use or create 504 Plans. Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act applies to schools that receive federal financial assistance, of which Andover does not. A "504 plan" provides services and changes to the learning environment to enable students to learn alongside their peers. 504 plans track who provides each type of special service and includes yearly reviews. We do not offer occupational therapy, speech language therapy or specialized individual or group instruction in our content areas.

At Andover, we write "formal accommodation plans" that include a summary of student strengths, areas of relative challenge, required accommodations, along with strategies for both the student and the teacher to implement. We do not track progress towards goals, although we encourage students to set goals and check-in about them with us, and we do not hold yearly meetings with families to review our plans. We *do* review plans with students at the start of every year, and we make edits/changes as necessary, based on the student's development. Our plans do not include specialized services such as remedial instruction, speech language, OT or PT, and we do not have special education teachers in our classrooms or in our offices. We *do* work with students with learning disabilities and other identified disabilities, but students must be able to meet our Essential Elements of Student Life, with or without reasonable accommodations, and without specialized instruction. As an independent school, we expect students to be self-advocates and will work with them to build this skill, as this is often a big shift from middle school. We are happy to consult with families, as appropriate, and will partner with you to support your child.