



Students, parents or caregivers,

Please find below our school policies regarding academic accommodations. We encourage you to be in touch with the appropriate Dean or the Coordinator of the Learning Research Team if you have any further questions.

### **Accommodation Policy for Learning Differences and Other Disabilities**

Riverdale Country School (the "School") aims to support students with disabilities while maintaining the School's high standards. The School offers reasonable accommodations to students with learning and other disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, as amended (the "ADA") as well as other applicable state and local laws.

### **What is a Disability?**

The School's Policy applies only if a student has a limitation that is a "disability" as defined below, and in compliance with the ADA. The School may not accommodate certain learning differences, medical conditions, and other restrictions or impairments that do not meet the definition of a disability. The School evaluates each student's situation and all requests for accommodation on a case-by-case basis, using a deliberative and collaborative process that is responsive to the unique experiences of each student.

Disabilities can be either physical or mental impairments. To be disabled for purposes of the Policy, all of the following criteria must be met: (a) the student must have a physical or mental impairment; (b) the impairment must substantially limit one or more major life activities of the student; and (c) the student must be otherwise qualified to meet school standards with or without reasonable accommodation.

Physical impairments include physiological disorders and conditions, cosmetic disfigurement, or anatomical loss. The physical impairment must affect one or more body systems such as neurological, musculoskeletal, special sense organs (e.g., vocal cords, soft palate or tongue), respiratory, cardiovascular, reproductive, digestive, genitourinary, hematic, immune, circulatory, lymphatic, skin, and endocrine systems. Simple physical characteristics such as left-handedness or the color of one's eyes, hair, or skin are not physical impairments.

Mental impairments include mental or psychological disorders, such as emotional or mental illness and organic brain syndrome. Specific learning differences or disorders such as attention

deficit hyperactivity disorder or generalized anxiety disorder only sometimes meet the definition of disability under the Policy. Disadvantages attributable to environmental, cultural or economic disabilities that do not otherwise meet the definition of disability are not disabilities, nor are common personality traits such as poor judgment and quick temper.

A student with poor eyesight does not have a disability if he or she can cure the problem by wearing eyeglasses or contact lenses. Otherwise, the determination of whether an impairment substantially limits a major life activity is made without regard to the ameliorative effects of mitigating measures such as medication or hearing aids.

A disability also must substantially limit a major life activity. Major life activities include such activities as: caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, sitting, reaching, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, interacting with others, and working. A determination regarding the existence of a "substantial limitation" is made by comparing the person contended to be disabled to most people in the general population. Disabilities are assessed by comparing to most people in the general population the condition under which the individual performs the major life activity; the manner in which the individual performs the major life activity; and/or the duration of time it takes the individual to perform the major life activity, or for which the individual can perform the major life activity.

## **Making an Accommodation Request**

Parents and caregivers should direct requests for academic accommodations in writing to the MS/US Coordinator of the Learning Research Team who chairs the Document Review Committee (the "Committee"). In addition to the Coordinator of the LRT, the Committee includes the learning specialists and consulting psychologist. Depending on the situation, the Division Head, or the Director of Learning may also be present. The Committee will seek input from a student's teachers, Dean, and the school nurse. The Committee may use the services of academic researchers or other professionals retained by the School as consultants. The Committee may share testing reports and other documentation with such consultants.

It should be noted that while classroom teachers have great insight and may recognize students' difficulties, they are not qualified to recommend evaluations to individual students or parents. If they suspect that a student may have an unrecognized learning or other disability, they should be in contact with the student's Dean or the Coordinator of the LRT.

Generally speaking, the Committee meets once at the end of the month to review documentation received that month. Because the process of reviewing the documentation may be lengthy, it may take several weeks before a determination regarding an accommodation is made. Accordingly, the Committee is not able to consider requests for accommodation received after May 1st for the current academic year.

## **Providing Proper Proof of the Need for Accommodation**

For the Committee to consider any request for a disability accommodation, it must receive from the requesting student, parent or caregiver appropriate medical and/or psychological documentation of the disability, as well as current, medically certified proof of the need for the requested accommodation. Depending upon the circumstances, the Committee may require the parents or caregivers to provide additional information regarding the purported disability.

The Committee often requires students to undergo testing to establish the existence and extent of a disability. For example, the Committee generally requires a specialized learning disability evaluation for learning disabilities, as well as hearing tests, physical agility tests and vision examinations in certain circumstances. The School will consider reports and evaluations regarding student disabilities and accommodations only from medical professionals with the appropriate level of expertise who have actually performed the evaluation or examination. Reports and evaluations submitted to the School must be on letterhead, typed, dated, and signed. Such reports should address only issues relevant to the specified disability or request.

### **Obtaining an Evaluation**

The School requires a psycho-educational assessment before a student may obtain accommodations for a learning disability such as ADHD or dyslexia. Parents are entitled to an evaluation conducted by their local school district's Committee on Special Education at no cost. Additionally, the School maintains a list of individuals and clinical services through which such services are offered. A referral to an outside evaluator does not imply the School's endorsement of that evaluator, or any agreement by the School to be bound by the recommendations, policies, or procedures of the evaluator.

Professionals conducting such assessments and rendering diagnoses must have appropriate credentials. The School may require that a student who has never been evaluated for learning disabilities be tested only by persons with appropriate doctorates and medical degrees. The following professionals are generally considered qualified to conduct such evaluations: Licensed Clinical, Educational, School or Counseling Psychologists; and Neuropsychologists. An assessment that employs diagnostic terminology but has been conducted by someone lacking the appropriate credentials is not acceptable. Ethical standards in all applicable professions require that individuals not function outside their areas of competency. The School therefore requires that a professional with expertise in the specific area of evaluation conduct any assessment. In addition, current school employees may not evaluate students for learning disabilities. The School requires all reports regarding learning disabilities to be on letterhead, and to be typed, dated, and signed. Reports forwarded to the School should address only issues relevant to the student's educational program and planning. Finally, the School requires re-evaluation of all elementary and secondary school students with diagnosed specific learning disabilities every three years. Regarding psychological disability, in order for documentation to be current it needs to have been completed or updated within the past six months due to the changing nature of psychological disabilities.

Individual "learning styles," "learning differences," "academic problems," and "test difficulties or anxieties" do not necessarily constitute learning disabilities that require accommodation. Evaluations must rule out alternative explanations for problems in learning such as emotional or motivational problems that may be interfering with learning, but do not constitute a disability. In addition, the psycho-educational (or neuropsychological) evaluation for the diagnosis of a specific learning disability (including ADHD) must provide clear and specific evidence that a learning disability does or does not exist.

The comprehensive assessment battery and the resulting diagnostic report should include a diagnostic interview and assessment of aptitude and academic achievement. We encourage evaluators to solicit feedback from classroom teachers and administrators. Evaluators should contact the LRT to facilitate the distribution and return of documentation from Riverdale faculty and administrators.

The evaluator should provide a summary of the following:

- a description of the presenting problem(s);
- developmental history;
- relevant medical history including ruling out a medical basis for the present symptoms;
- academic history including results of prior standardized testing, reports of classroom performance and behaviors including transcripts, study habits and attitudes, notable trends in academic performance and post-psychological and educational evaluations;
- relevant family history, including primary language of home and the student's current level of fluency in English;
- relevant psychosocial history; and
- psychological, psychiatric and/or medical assessments that would rule out alternative or coexisting emotional, behavioral, neurological and/or personality disorders which may impact the individual's learning, along with a history of relevant medication and current use.
- Individual subtest scores and percentiles should be included in the report.

## **Determining the Appropriate Accommodation**

Once the Committee receives documentation of a student's disability and his or her ability to meet School standards-and-expectations with or without-reasonable accommodation, it will assess whether the requested accommodation is appropriate. Deciding what accommodations are reasonable and necessary is an interactive, cooperative process among the School, the student, and his or her parents. The School does not guarantee that it will implement a parent's, physician's, or outside evaluator's recommendations. The Committee will, however, discuss possible accommodations with the student and his or her family to attempt to reach a mutually acceptable resolution.

The Committee considers many factors when deciding whether and to what extent the School should accommodate student disabilities. These include the appropriateness of the requested accommodation; available alternatives; whether the requested accommodation unduly burdens the School; whether the requested accommodation fundamentally alters the School's mission or program; and whether the requested accommodation presents a direct threat to the health and safety of the student or others within the School community.

The Committee will inform the student, parent or other caregiver of its decision regarding the requested accommodation. If the Committee denies a request for an accommodation, or if it offers an alternative accommodation, it will explain its reasoning. Given the deliberative and interactive nature of the accommodations process, making decisions regarding accommodations can be time-consuming. The School, therefore, urges students and parents to request accommodations as soon as possible, so that there is sufficient time to assess the student's needs, to evaluate the School's ability to meet these needs, and, when applicable, to institute the accommodation. The process of seeking an accommodation for standardized tests (PSAT, SAT, ACT) is particularly lengthy and so the application for an accommodation on College Board or ACT testing should be sent to the school's SSD Coordinator at least six months in advance of the anticipated test date.

Parents should make sure to understand the SSD process and are responsible for reading and understanding the guidelines as stated by both College Board (<https://www.collegeboard.org/students-with-disabilities/typical-accommodations>) and the ACT (<https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act-educator/accommodations.html>).

While Riverdale does not obtain accommodations for standardized tests for students, the School will facilitate the process by sending documentation to the appropriate testing organization. The materials the School provides to the testing organization(s) in connection with a student's requests for accommodation are confidential.

In the limited situations where: (1) Riverdale supported a student's application to a testing organization for an accommodation; (2) the request for accommodation was rejected by the testing organization; (3) the student appeals the rejection; (4) the student and his or her parents require copies of letters submitted by School personnel in order to perfect their appeal and (5) the student and his or her parents make a formal request to the School for the letters submitted by School personnel, the School will provide such letters. The student and parents will be required to agree to hold the School and School personnel harmless in order to receive copies. The School reserves the right to limit or cease its participation in appeals to outside testing agencies if the School determines, in its discretion, that no new evidence has emerged.

Once a student receives an accommodation for a disability, it is the student's and his or her parents' responsibility to follow up with the Committee about changes to the student's disability status or need for accommodation. In particular, parents are responsible for promptly submitting

the materials necessary to conduct learning disabilities re-evaluation at the appropriate time for the individual student. The Committee reviews accommodations annually, and will notify parents if the accommodations granted are not being utilized. The School is not responsible for obtaining accommodations for students who take national standardized tests such as the PSAT, the SAT, or the ACT.

If a student is granted an accommodation, it is the responsibility of the student or his or her parents to make appropriate arrangements in compliance with the accommodation. This could include making arrangements for extended time with 24 hours notice or making and keeping regular appointments with a learning specialist or the consulting psychologist.

Any questions regarding this Policy should be directed to the student's Dean or the MS/US Coordinator of the Learning Research Team.

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