

Deerfield Academy Policy on the Documentation of Learning Issues and the Granting of Accommodations¹

I. Introduction:

In keeping with our goal of granting accommodations to students with documented disabilities in a fair and reasonable way, Deerfield adheres to the following guidelines in accepting documentation and granting accommodations for learning disabilities, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, and for psychiatric disabilities.

This policy will be effective September 2003, and we therefore strongly advise parents with students currently receiving accommodations or who are investigating the possibility of accommodations for a learning disability, for

¹ Adapted from the following Educational Testing Service policies:

“Policy Statement for Documentation of a Learning Disability in Adolescents and Adults” June 1999; www.ets.org/disability/ldpolicy.html.

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“Policy Statement for Documentation of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder in Adolescents and Adults” June 1999; www.ets.org/disability/adhdplcy.html.

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“Guidelines for Documentation of Psychiatric Disabilities in Adolescents and Adults” July 2001; www.ets.org/disability/psyplcy.html.

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Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, or for a psychiatric disability to pursue documentation that complies with the guidelines outlined below. While a student may have been granted accommodations at a previous institution, this alone does not constitute grounds for continued accommodation without current and adequate documentation following the accompanying guidelines.

In order for accommodations to be in place for the start of the school year, documentation must be received by **August 1**. Any documentation received after that date will be reviewed in due course, but please be aware that decisions on accommodations, if warranted, may not be finalized and in place for the start of the school year.

The requirements for documentation listed below are adapted from policies used by the Educational Testing Service. When granting accommodations on standardized tests, ETS asks that testing comply with the standards listed below. ETS also seeks to establish, when granting accommodations, that Deerfield has granted similar accommodations for academic work, and that the student takes advantage routinely of the accommodations for academic work.

The following guidelines are for the purpose of verifying eligibility for accommodations in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. 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 the disability substantially limits a major life activity, such as learning.

The following guidelines give, as an example, the documentation requirements specific to the documentation of a learning disability. Documentation requirements for Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and for psychiatric disabilities follow a similar basic template, especially insofar as

- 1. a qualified professional must conduct the evaluation**
- 2. documentation must be current**
- 3. documentation must include a specific diagnosis**
- 4. documentation to support the diagnosis must be comprehensive**
- 5. a rationale for requested accommodations must be provided.**

For more specific documentation requirements for ADHD and for psychiatric disorders, including criteria for diagnosis and acceptable rationale for accommodation, please see ETS policies on the documentation of ADHD and psychiatric disabilities. These policies are listed at the bottom of the first page of this document.

II. Documentation Requirements for Learning Disabilities:

1. A Qualified Professional Must Conduct the Evaluation: Comprehensive training and relevant experience with an adolescent LD population is essential. The name, title, and professional credentials of the evaluator, including information about license or certification (e.g., licensed psychologist) as well as the area of specialization, employment, and state in which the individual practices must be clearly stated in the documentation.
2. Testing Must Be Current (Within the last 3 years for LD or ADHD diagnosis; 6 months for psychiatric disabilities)
3. Documentation Necessary to Substantiate the Learning Disability Must be Comprehensive: Prior documentation may have been useful in determining appropriate services in the past. However, documentation must validate the need for services based on the candidate's current level of functioning in the educational setting. A school plan such as an individualized education program (IEP) or a 504 plan is insufficient documentation in and of itself but can be included as part of a more comprehensive assessment battery.
 - A. Diagnostic Interview: An evaluation report should include the summary of a comprehensive diagnostic interview by a qualified evaluator. A combination of candidate self-report, interviews with others, and historical documentation, such as transcripts and standardized test scores, is recommended. Other factors deemed relevant by the diagnostician should also be included such as a description of the presenting problem(s); developmental history; academic history including results of prior standardized testing; relevant family history, relevant psychosocial history.
 - B. Assessment: The evaluator must provide clear evidence that a learning disability exists. Diagnosis must be based on a comprehensive set of tests that cover, minimally, the following areas (examples of suggested tests follow in parentheses; for more complete listing of acceptable tests, see ETS website: www.ets.org/disability/ldpolicy.html):
 - Aptitude/Cognitive Ability - (*Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale - III (WAIS-III), Woodcock-Johnson-III - Tests of Cognitive Ability, Kaufman Adolescent and Adult Intelligence Test, Stanford-Binet IV*)
 - Academic Achievement – (*Scholastic Abilities Test for Adults (SATA), Stanford Test of Academic Skills (TASK), Woodcock-Johnson-III - Tests of Achievement, Wechsler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT)*)
 - Information Processing - (*Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude - 3 (DTLA-3), Detroit Tests of Learning Aptitude - Adult (DTLA-A)*)

- C. Documentation Must Include a Specific Diagnosis: Nonspecific diagnoses and general observations on learning style do not constitute a learning disability. Alternative explanations for learning issues, such as emotional or other personal considerations, while they may constitute an impediment to learning, do not necessarily constitute a learning disability. Direct language in stating a diagnosis is more helpful than vague terms such as “suggests” or “is indicative of.” If the data indicate that a learning disability is not present, the evaluator must state that conclusion in the report.
- D. Actual Test Scores from Standardized Instruments Must be Provided: The test findings must document both the nature and severity of the learning disabilities. Direct observations by the evaluator offered in conjunction with specific test results may help in clarifying and reinforcing the results.
- E. Each Accommodation Recommended by the Evaluator Must Include a Rationale: The diagnostic report must include specific recommendations for accommodation(s) as well as a detailed explanation of why each accommodation is recommended. The evaluator should support recommendations with specific test results or clinical observations.

A prior history of accommodation, without demonstration of a current need, does not in and of itself warrant the provision of a like accommodation.

Deerfield will make the final determination as to whether appropriate and reasonable accommodations are warranted and can be provided to the individual.

- 4. An Interpretive Summary Must be Provided: A well-written diagnostic summary of the evaluation process is a necessary component of the report. Tests and the data they provide do not diagnose; it is essential, therefore, that professional judgment be used in the interpretative summary. A clinical summary should
 - 1. rule out alternative explanations for academic problems, such as poor education, poor motivation and/or study skills, emotional problems, attentional problems, and cultural/language differences
 - 2. indicate how patterns in cognitive ability, achievement, and information processing are used to determine the presence of a learning disability
 - 3. indicate the substantial limitation to learning presented by the learning disability and the degree to which it affects the individual in the testing context for which accommodations are being requested

4. indication of why specific accommodations are needed and how the effects of the specific disability are mediated by the accommodations.

The summary must also include any record of prior accommodations, including information about conditions under which the accommodation(s) were used.

5. Confidentiality: Deerfield will maintain confidentiality of evaluations and will not release any part of the documentation outside of the school context without the candidate's informed consent. Sharing the evaluation and the accommodations with the teachers and advisor who work with the child within the academic setting of Deerfield will help derive the full benefit from the testing and the accommodations.

III. Process:

The Academic Dean and Assistant Academic Dean, in consultation with the school physician where appropriate, will be responsible for reviewing the documentation to see that it complies with the guidelines and then to determine if recommendations warrant accommodation in the context of Deerfield Academy.

If accommodations are granted, the Assistant Academic Dean will communicate to the student as well as to the teachers and advisor of the student an explanation of the accommodation(s) granted. This communication will include guidelines for the accommodation to help clarify the terms and conditions for both teacher and student. Information is released on a "need-to-know" basis. In these situations, it is our practice to work closely and on a case-by-case basis with families.

In cases where a family wishes to appeal a decision regarding a request for an accommodation, a letter of appeal from the family should be directed to the Headmaster.