The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools
Diverse Learners Resource Guide

Introduction

The University of Chicago Laboratory Schools’ core values include learning experientially, exhibiting kindness, and honoring diversity. These values are reflected in Lab’s commitment to supporting the needs of students with learning differences. This important work requires strong partnerships among teachers, parents/guardians, and students themselves, as together we assess students’ evolving needs while maintaining the integrity of Lab’s program across all four divisions.

Firmly committed to strong academic standards, a broad college-preparatory curriculum, and wide ranging co-curricular activities, Lab views all students as unique in their individual identities, learning styles, and special talents. Students are encouraged to express their potential for making positive contributions to society within a nurturing and facilitative environment. In turn, supporting students with learning differences is an opportunity for faculty, staff, students, and their parents/guardians to reflect on the variety of ways human beings acquire, process, and express academic and social skills, abilities, and knowledge. Approximately twenty percent of Lab students receive accommodations to support their success in mastering content, skill sets, and critical modes of expression. While Lab does not offer a comprehensive program oriented wholly toward educating students with learning differences, each division strives to be supportive of their academic and personal needs and is committed to helping all students fully participate in the life of the school.

In supporting students with learning differences, Lab is guided by best practices in education, the essentials of our program, and applicable legal standards. Thus, Lab seeks to accommodate students with diagnosed and disclosed “disabilities” as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) so far as our resources and the fundamental nature of our program permit. Lab educators work with students and their parents/guardians to assess a student’s needs, and determine reasonable accommodations which neither infringe on the essential requirements of, nor fundamentally alter, Lab’s mission and program.

This Resource Guide was created to help Lab educators, students, and their families take advantage of the processes, resources, and programs that serve our diverse learners. Below you will find general information about how to partner with Lab regarding learning differences, access additional resources and support services, and find answers to your questions. Throughout you will find links to applicable policies and division-specific information. We hope this Resource Guide will encourage open communication and partnership between all community members in support of our students with learning differences.
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Important Terms
The following terms are referenced throughout this document:

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**
The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) became law in 1990. The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public.

**504 Plan**
Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in any organization, including a school, which receives federal funding. A 504 Plan seeks to ensure that a student has equitable access to the learning environment. Teachers and specialists, informed by partnerships with parents/guardians, determine reasonable accommodations in a student's 504 plan.

**Individualized Education Plan (IEP)**
An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is an educational road map, outlining goals and milestones for all students with learning differences in special education in the public school system, based on their unique abilities. Lab may take guidance from an IEP obtained by a family from a public school district, but will make our own determinations about reasonable accommodations.

**Learning Disabilities**
The term "learning disabilities" is a legal term that covers a range of neurologically-based learning differences. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines “specific learning disability” as “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.”

**Assessments, evaluations, and diagnoses**
Cognitive assessments, which may include psychoeducational or neuropsychological evaluations, are of critical importance in determining the strengths, challenges, and needs of a diverse learner. Learning disabilities may be diagnosed by qualified educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, or clinical neuropsychologists who are trained and experienced in the assessment of learning disabilities.

A **neuropsychological evaluation** measures a child’s intellectual abilities, attention, learning, memory, visual-spatial skills, visual-motor integration, language, motor coordination and executive functioning skills such as organization and planning. It may also address emotional, social and behavioral functioning. An updated neuropsychological evaluation is required every three years to continue the accommodations defined in a student’s learning profile.

A **psychoeducational evaluation** is a comprehensive assessment of a student’s cognitive, academic, and socio-emotional functioning.
Learning Profile
Lab's individualized support plan for a student with diagnosed and disclosed learning differences is called a learning profile. The learning profile includes a summary of the student's strengths and needs, reasonable accommodations as determined by Lab, and recommendations for instructional, social, emotional, and/or behavioral support. Drafted by the student's Learning Coordinator, the learning profile reflects information gathered from a variety of sources including evaluations, input from the student, teachers, and parents/guardians, and observations by the School Counselor or Academic Specialist. Learning profiles are shared with teachers via Power School and are discussed with teachers on a case by case basis. Learning profiles are reviewed and updated annually or as new information becomes available. An updated neuropsychological evaluation is required every three years to continue the formal accommodations written in the learning profile.

Reasonable Accommodations
Reasonable accommodations are modifications or adjustments which support access to Lab's program by students with learning differences or other disabilities. Reasonable accommodations for diverse learners may include academic modifications or adjustments. Reasonable accommodations are neither formulaic nor predetermined, but are discerned by Lab on a case-by-case basis given a student's strengths, challenges, and needs, within the parameters of our program essentials and resources.

Lab's Legal Responsibility to Accommodate Students with Disabilities
The Laboratory Schools are a unit of the world-renowned University of Chicago. The University describes our legal obligation to provide accommodations for students with disabilities as follows: "Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibit colleges and universities that receive federal funding from discriminating against qualified students with disabilities in educational programs and activities. A 'qualified student with a disability' is a disabled student who, with or without reasonable accommodation (e.g., architectural access, communication aids/services, or modifications to policies and practices) meets the University's academic and technical standards required for admission or participation in the University's educational programs or activities. The University is committed to complying with Section 504, the ADA and amendments." Lab gladly accepts the responsibility to support students with diagnosed and disclosed learning differences within our resources and essential nature of our program. We engage in an interactive and comprehensive process to understand our students' needs, mitigate or overcome barriers to learning, and further access to our academic programs and activities.

Student Services at Lab: Learning and Counseling
Lab's Learning and Counseling team (L&C), in partnership with faculty and administrators, provides a continuum of services that helps all students maximize their potential, while making curriculum accessible and enriching the school experience for all students. Each division has its own Learning and Counseling team. L&C...

- Consults with teachers and parents/guardians on strategies to support all learners
- May teach and co-teach whole-class core content lessons or social-emotional learning lessons
• May provide small group instruction both inside and outside the classroom
• Collaborates with teachers on interventions for students who need supplemental support
• Provides small group and individual social and emotional support
• Monitors the progress of students who demonstrate notable learning challenges
• Collects data to identify areas for support
• Makes referrals for further evaluation and supportive services

The L&C team includes educators with various roles to serve the needs of each division. The Learning and Counseling webpage contains descriptions of each role, as well as a variety of parent/guardian and teacher resources. For more information about L&C and Student Services in each division, please follow the links below:

- 2023-2024 Early Childhood Handbook (Pages 28-30)
- 2023-2024 Lower School Handbook (Pages 38-40)
- 2023-2024 Middle School Handbook (Pages 17-29)
- 2023-2024 High School Handbook (Pages 33-47)

Accommodations: A Step by Step Process

When a parent/guardian, teacher, or L&C educator identifies and raises questions or concerns about a student’s learning, behavior, or social and emotional adjustment, Lab engages in an interactive process to discern the student’s needs, define and implement reasonable accommodations, and determine supportive measures and partnerships. To ensure a comprehensive review and response, we undertake a variety of conversations and explorations, which will vary given the particulars of a student’s situation.

Please see our documents describing Middle School Support Services and Accommodations and U-High Support Services and Accommodations for more specific guidance in those divisions. In general, we will follow these steps:

1. **Information Gathering.** L&C will partner with the parent/guardian and teacher to gather information related to the questions or concerns. This may include family and teaching team meetings, assessments, and student/classroom observations.

2. **Preliminary Interventions.** Based on the information collected, L&C may suggest interventions to implement in the classroom, as well as strategies and resources to support the student at home. L&C and the teaching team will monitor the progress of the student in response to the interventions.

3. **Evaluations.** If the student has made sufficient progress with the support of interventions, the interventions will remain in place. If the student has not made sufficient progress despite the interventions, L&C may request a neuropsychological or psychoeducational evaluation.

4. **Provisional Accommodations.** When, in Lab’s judgment, there is sufficient evidence of a student’s need for more individualized support, provisional accommodations may be put in place while the family and school await a planned neuropsychological evaluation.
Indicators for provisional accommodations may include an inadequate response to interventions, and/or persistent and severe academic, social, emotional, or behavior challenges. Provisional accommodations are finite; they are temporary measures intended to prevent a disruption to support services while an evaluation is pending. Reasonable accommodations will only be formalized in the learning profile upon receipt of the neuropsychological evaluation.

5. **Learning Profile.** If the evaluation results in the diagnosis of a learning disability, the Learning Coordinator will draft a learning profile, using the findings from the evaluation as well as other information previously gathered. The learning profile will include a summary of the student's strengths and needs, reasonable accommodations, and recommendations for instructional, social, emotional, and/or behavioral support.

6. **Family Meeting.** The Learning Coordinator will schedule a meeting with the student's parents/guardians to review the neuropsychological evaluation findings, share the learning profile, and address related questions. Other participants may include the School Counselor, Academic Specialist, teaching team, evaluator, the student (as appropriate), and school administrators.

As the student's educational journey continues, so does our interactive process. Learning profiles are reviewed and updated annually or as new information becomes available. Adjustments to a student's learning profile may be made to reflect new diagnostic information received. Ongoing partnership and communication between educators and families is very important to the student's progress through Lab.

Learning profiles remain in place throughout a student's enrollment at Lab. In preparation for students' transitions from one division to the next, L&C members from both divisions meet to review the needs and accommodations of the incoming cohort of students. L&C members in the next division also reach out to parents/guardians to connect about student support.

**Individual Education Plan (IEP) or 504 Plan through Chicago Public Schools**

Some Lab families choose to pursue an IEP or 504 plan through Chicago Public Schools (CPS) for a variety of reasons including:

- Interest in potentially transferring to a public school district and proactively securing support services;
- Interest in applying to Selective Enrollment programs in CPS, to ensure that the student receives accommodations for the admissions assessment;
- Seeking an evaluation at no cost to the family.

Public schools are required to identify, locate, and evaluate all children residing in their attendance area who may have a disability and be in need of special education services. This legal mandate also extends to children who attend a private school located within the city of Chicago (regardless of whether the student lives in Chicago). CPS will evaluate the student, determine eligibility, and draft an IEP or 504 Plan. The IEP or 504 Plan may be subsequently implemented if the student enrolls at a Chicago Public School. Students who are eligible for an IEP may also qualify to receive services from CPS regardless of where they are enrolled.

These instruments are not implemented wholesale at Lab, but a recent IEP or 504 Plan may be
used at Lab to draft a new learning profile or refine an existing learning profile. Families considering these processes should understand that for Lab students with an existing learning profile, an IEP or 504 Plan is unlikely to change the accommodations that are already in place, but minor adjustments may be made based on new information.

Families who wish to apply for an IEP or 504 plan are encouraged to contact the Learning Coordinator for more information and assistance with completing the application and submitting supporting documents.

**Additional Support Services, Programs, and Resources**

Lab is eager to help diverse learners and their families identify additional resources, tailor support opportunities to a student’s needs, deepen their experience of belonging at Lab, and explore opportunities for connection and community. Beyond learning profiles, the following may be helpful or supportive in any combination. Unless otherwise noted, please contact the student’s Learning Coordinator or School Counselor for more information.

**Affinity Groups (All Divisions)**
Each division provides opportunities for students with learning differences and/or diverse social and emotional needs. Affinity groups help students come together and build community, develop self-awareness, promote wellness, and learn coping skills.

**Push-in/Pull-out Support (Early Childhood; Lower School)**
Early Childhood and Lower School students with a demonstrated need for academic, social, or behavioral intervention may receive push-in or pull-out services in addition to daily instruction. Support may be provided individually by the Academic Specialist or School Counselor. Alternately, students may be grouped with peers who share similar skill levels and compatible learning, social, or behavioral goals. The Academic Specialist or School Counselor may join a class during whole-group learning to support the area of focus. Students who need significant intervention may receive support in another setting outside of the classroom.

**Resource (Lower School; Middle School)**
Students with diagnosed language-based learning differences may be eligible for Resource, a separate small-group learning environment that meets daily for one period. Students receive direct instruction, including core academic content and executive functioning skills, and individualized support to bridge gaps in understanding and to help them reach their full academic potential. Students enrolled in Resource opt out of World Language.

**Lunch and Tutorial Homework Help (Middle School)**
During lunch, tutorial, or at other scheduled times throughout the week, Middle School Students may drop in to receive homework help with a Learning Coordinator.

**Peer Tutoring (Middle School; High School)**
The Middle and High Schools provide opportunities for students to receive tutoring support from other students. Middle School students may receive after-school tutoring support from U-High students and U-High students may receive peer support. Tutors are selected and matched by academic departments and Learning Coordinators.
MindPrint (High School)
MindPrint provides parents/guardians with objective data to understand areas in which their child is most likely to excel, and where and why they might need additional support. It provides insight into the most likely reasons for behaviors and in-school performance. Mindprint also delivers concrete strategies to support students with studying, homework, and test prep, at school and at home.

Eye to Eye (Lower School - Grade 5; Middle School; High School)
Eye to Eye is a mentoring program serving students in grades 5-12. U-High students with learning differences mentor Lower and Middle School students with learning differences. Mentors and mentees come together weekly to engage in fun activities, build community, and learn skills that promote a healthy and enjoyable school experience.

Referrals for Private Support Services (All Divisions)
Each division has developed a list of private service providers with whom they have established collaborative relationships and based on positive feedback from families.

Financial Support for Private Support Services (All Divisions)
Students who have a diagnosed and disclosed learning disability, and whose families have demonstrated financial need through Lab’s need-based Financial Aid process, may qualify for Lab funding for private support services including neuropsychological evaluations, counseling, tutoring, and speech and occupational therapy.

Education Leave of Absence (All Divisions)
An Educational Leave of Absence (ELOA) provides an opportunity for a student to receive support in addressing an academic, social-emotional, or developmental concern in an appropriate educational environment outside of Lab. ELOAs may be recommended or, in some cases, required by the appropriate division Principal(s) with the approval of the Director of Student Services. Please follow this link for more information about the ELOA program. Please contact the Director of Student Services with questions.

Gratitude and Partnership
At Lab we take seriously our mission commitment to honoring diversity, including supporting the many diverse learners in our student body. Successfully discerning and effectively addressing a student’s needs requires strong partnerships and open communication between educators, students, and their families. Families can support their child at Lab by providing up-to-date and prompt information about the student’s strengths and challenges and communicating any observations or updates to the L&C team. At the beginning of each divisional Handbook you will find a directory of contact information for educators in Early Childhood, Lower School, Middle School, and U-High. We are deeply grateful to our parent and guardian community for your partnership.