

A vibrant, sunlit outdoor playground area with large trees and children playing. The scene is filled with lush green foliage and dappled sunlight on a paved ground. Several children are visible in the background, engaged in play near a climbing structure and a basketball hoop. The overall atmosphere is bright and cheerful.

GUIDE TO OPTIMAL LEARNING SERVICES 2026-27

GRADED
THE AMERICAN SCHOOL OF SÃO PAULO

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This guide provides a comprehensive overview of Optimal Learning Services (OLS) at Graded, offering a clear understanding of best practices and consistent implementation. It is intended to support the entire Graded community—including students, families, and educators—by clarifying the purpose and scope of OLS, the responsibilities of OLS specialists, and the interventions they employ. By outlining key practices, ethical considerations, and procedural guidelines, the guide promotes transparency and shared understanding. It also illustrates how OLS aligns with Graded’s mission, vision, values, and broader support structures, ensuring all learners have access to the tools and resources they need to thrive.

Graded – The American School of São Paulo is deeply committed to its core values—Intellectual Curiosity, Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, and Kindness. The Characteristics of a Graded Learner define the qualities the school strives to instill in students, encouraging them to be curious, creative, collaborative, driven, and ethical. These principles shape the development of students' social, emotional, and academic well-being, ensuring that every student is supported in reaching their full potential.



1. Purpose and Guiding Principles

Graded's OLS team plays a central role in supporting students with diverse learning profiles. Guided by the statement, *"We promote access to learning to foster student success and value neurodiversity and belonging for all,"* OLS embraces the principle that every student deserves equitable access to a rigorous and supportive learning environment. As part of the school's broader Student Support Services, which also includes Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Counseling, English Language Learners (ELL), and Intervention, the OLS team works collaboratively with teachers, families, and leadership to ensure that all students are provided with the tools, strategies, and services required for success.

2. Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS)

Graded uses a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework to organize student support across three levels.

Tier 1: Universal Supports

- All students benefit from high-quality, inclusive classroom instruction. Teachers implement strategies and collaborate with OLS on the selection of available accessibility tools and differentiation.

Tier 2: Targeted Supports

- Students who require additional help may receive targeted support through small group interventions or short-term pull-out sessions.
- These interventions are time-bound, data-informed, and designed to build specific skills in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

Tier 3: Intensive Supports

- Students with more complex or ongoing needs receive intensive support coordinated by the OLS specialists through a formal Student Support Plan (SSP) with individualized goals or an Accommodation Plan (AP).
- The SSP or AP is developed, reviewed, and monitored by the OLS teacher and may include academic support, curricular adjustments, and direct or indirect support from an OLS team member. Homeroom teachers, specialists, or subject-area teachers may be responsible for accommodations in the classroom, as documented in the student's AP or SSP.

3. Roles and Responsibilities

3.1 Collaboration

The successful implementation of OLS at Graded relies on strong collaborative efforts across multiple roles. The OLS team works closely with teachers, school leadership, counselors, interventionists, specialist teachers, and families to ensure that students receive equitable, effective, and individualized support. Each team member has a specific and complementary set of responsibilities that collectively shape a student's learning experience. When appropriate, OLS specialists also collaborate with external specialists to help address individual student needs.

Classroom teachers are essential partners in the student support process. They implement recommended classroom practices and accommodations outlined in student plans, provide timely academic feedback, monitor classroom performance, and raise concerns through the Student of Concern (SOC) process. Documented evidence and feedback from teachers is used in Student Support Team (SST) meetings, engage with families, and collaborate with OLS specialists to ensure effective support strategies.



The SST consists of OLS specialists, SEL counselors, ELL teachers, interventionists, divisional leadership, and, when relevant, classroom or subject-area teachers. This team reviews referrals, determines student eligibility, monitors intervention progress, and plans transitions, exits, or additional evaluations. SST meetings are also where decisions are made regarding academic accommodations, curricular modifications, and the need for external support or services.

The director of student support services (DSS) ensures strategic alignment and consistency in service delivery across the school. The DSS oversees support policies, contributes to complex SST cases, ensures compliance with legal and ethical standards (including Brazil's LGPD), and authorizes high-level decisions such as off-campus learning plans or curricular modifications.

Families play an integral role in the student support process. Their insights and observations provide valuable context for planning and decision-making. Families participate in referral and review meetings, provide written consent for support changes, and submit external documentation when applicable. Graded prioritizes transparent, respectful communication with families throughout the referral, planning, and service process.

3.2 Case Management

OLS teachers are responsible for assessing student learning profiles, supporting inclusive instructional practices, documenting Student Support Plans (SSPs) and Accommodation Plans (APs), delivering interventions, and providing indirect consultation. When acting as a case manager, an OLS specialist assumes a leadership role in coordinating student support. Some of the responsibilities below may be delegated to an OLS Classroom Assistant. Responsibilities include:

- Maintaining and updating the student SSP or AP.
- Collaborating with classroom teachers to ensure that accommodations are implemented consistently across settings.
- Monitoring student academic progress using data from classroom performance, standardized assessments, and teacher input.
- Designing and documenting approved curriculum modifications when necessary.
- Leading or co-facilitating SST meetings.
- Collecting and organizing learning data to inform decision-making.
- Acting as the primary liaison with the student's family and coordinating transition meetings across divisions. The case manager serves as the initial contact for families.
- Meeting and/or communicating with teachers to advise on how to best support their needs and ensure that teachers understand the recommended classroom practices and required accommodations in the student's SSP or AP.

- Maintaining specialized electronic records, including the student support notes in the student's folder.
- Creating and logging entries for all key case maneuvers.
- Communicating with the student's external provider(s) if it is deemed necessary.
- Collaborating with counselors and the director of student support services (DSS) to review and interpret external evaluations, develop and implement Functional Behavioral Analysis, and develop Behavior Intervention Plans.
- Ensuring all records are current and securely stored, updating the master student support services caseload, and recording key case maneuvers as log entries in PowerSchool.



3.3 OLS Service Delivery

Direct Services: In the direct services model, students have a Student Support Plan (SSP) with academic goals, accommodations, or modifications, and may be enrolled in the academic support class (grades 6–12) or pull-out support in the lower school. These students may receive regular, scheduled push-in support from an OLS teacher or classroom assistant in their homeroom classroom or subject classes.

Indirect services: OLS works through a collaborative model with students who have an Accommodation Plan (AP). The OLS team works indirectly by consulting with teachers and families, helping to ensure that accommodations are appropriately understood and applied. It is the responsibility of classroom teachers to implement the accommodations in their instructional and assessment practices. This model reflects our commitment to inclusive practices and to meeting students' individual learning needs through shared responsibility and ongoing communication.

Student Support Plans and Accommodation Plans are updated annually and signed by the OLS case manager, parents, the student (in upper school), and school leadership.

Accommodations

Accommodations are changes in **“how”** a student accesses the curriculum, designed to support learning without altering the academic standards or expectations.

Modifications

Curriculum modification is a change in **“what”** students are learning in terms of grade-level standards. Modifications should not be entered into lightly and are rare.

Modifications may be considered for students who:

- Demonstrate significant and ongoing challenges in accessing the grade-level curriculum *and* grade-level standards.
- Have an identified learning disability, developmental delay, and/or medical/physical condition.
- Have already received extensive differentiation, accommodations, and support provisions.

Modifications are used only when all supports (differentiation, accommodations, and support provision) have been fully utilized and shown to be insufficient in supporting the student to access the grade-level standard. The OLS case manager will provide documented evidence of a need for modifications to the divisional SST.

Modifications will be fully discussed with the parents, including future educational impacts. A signed agreement from parents, the divisional principal, and the director of student support services must be obtained before modifications can occur.

The OLS team is responsible for the design and documentation of the modifications. They will collaborate with the homeroom or subject teachers in this process. All modifications and data collected regarding student performance should be documented as part of the student's SSP.

Transitions

Transition meetings are held when students move from lower to middle school and from middle to high school. The purpose is to ensure continuity of care and support, and these meetings include the full divisional SST.

4. Eligibility and Exit Criteria for OLS Services

4.1 Eligibility Criteria

For students in grades K-12, initial eligibility to OLS requires the student to have a:

1. Current formal evaluation in English or be in the process of obtaining a formal evaluation that identifies a diagnosed learning difference or special educational need. A hypothesized diagnosis in the lower school is sufficient.
2. Identified learning need which has an adverse impact on the student's ability to access the curriculum.
3. School-based evidence that they are performing below grade-level academic expectations despite documented intervention is required.

Graded recognizes and honors formal plans from previous schools. Initial and continued eligibility for OLS services, as well as any changes to those services, is determined by the SST. The parent and student are notified of this change formally in writing.

4.2 Exit Criteria

A student will discontinue OLS (direct and indirect services) when the Student Support Team (SST) determines that the student:

1. Meets grade-level expectations independently in core subjects for a sustained period of time (at least one semester). Data should include MAP, teacher feedback, and student performance on grade-level curriculum.
2. No longer requires the accommodations or other services provided by the academic support teacher(s), even though the student may continue to have a diagnosed learning difference.

3. Has invalid or incomplete documentation, and parents have not provided the requested documentation.

The Student Support Team (SST) will decide when a student will leave the program after consultation with the family.

Monitoring After Exiting the OLS Program:

After exiting the OLS Program, the student is monitored by the OLS teacher for 12 months. During this time, the OLS teacher maintains contact with the student's homeroom or subject teachers to review classroom performance and progress. Monitoring includes reviewing report cards and, when appropriate, holding meetings with teachers to discuss the student's ongoing access to instruction. This monitoring period is intended to ensure a smooth transition and does not imply automatic re-entry into the program.



5. Student Support Referral Process within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework

OLS teachers and classroom assistants collaborate with teachers, school leadership, and student support teams to offer students appropriate support through the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. Referrals to OLS follow a structured process to provide a data-informed, collaborative approach to student success.

Tier 1: Universal Supports

- Teachers implement classroom-based strategies to support students struggling academically, socially, and/or behaviorally.
- If concerns persist despite differentiated instruction and multiple strategies over time, a Student of Concern (SOC) form/referral is completed.
- Parents must be informed of the concerns before the SOC form is completed.
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- The counselor, in collaboration with school leadership, will determine next steps, which may include whether to consult with a Graded specialist or gather more feedback from other teachers.



Tier 2: Targeted Supports

- If additional support is required beyond classroom-based interventions, an Intervention Plan is developed using a structured template.
- The plan targets academic, behavioral, or social-emotional areas and includes specific strategies, progress monitoring, and timelines.
- Interventions are implemented and reviewed regularly to assess effectiveness.
- If growth is insufficient, the case may be moved forward to an SST meeting for further review.

Tier 3: Intensive Supports

- If an intervention has been unsuccessful, an SST meeting is convened.
- The purpose of the SST meeting is to determine what additional services or accommodations are necessary for student success.
- Teachers present documented evidence of strategies implemented, interventions used, and student response data.
- The SST may recommend individualized support plans, including individualized student support plans, accommodation plans, behavioral plans, SEL accommodation plans, or referrals to external specialists.

By embedding the MTSS framework into the referral process, Graded provides student support that is collaborative and uses evidence-based or high-leverage practices. By following this process, Graded ensures students receive equitable, data-driven support tailored to an individual student's needs.

6. External Specialists

There is a plethora of external specialists within the São Paulo community. Graded values working collaboratively with external specialists to help meet students' academic and social-emotional school learning needs.

6.1 Referral to External Specialists

Referrals to external specialists (excluding confidential social-emotional/mental health referrals) are made through the SST process and must be based on SST team decisions with data-informed justifications. All external referrals, including confidential social-emotional/mental health referrals, must be formalized in writing on school letterhead and shared with the family through approved school platforms or in person. Only SST members can write a referral for an external specialist. Once the evaluation is completed, the family submits the evaluation to the student's case manager, who may be the counselor. Evaluations should be submitted in English (notarized or original).

6.2 Evaluation from External Specialists

Families submit any non-referred external evaluations to the director of student support services (DSS). A diagnostic evaluation or formal report does not automatically entitle a student to support or accommodations at Graded. External organizations, such as the IBO, require that concerns be based on teacher observations within the classroom. We always carefully consider evaluation reports and their recommendations. At Graded, an accommodation plan or student support plan is developed when there is a demonstrated school-based need.

At Graded, SST decisions are made based on professional expertise within the school and are not dictated by external specialists such as psycho-pedagogists, psychologists, speech therapists, medical doctors, or other private professionals. While external recommendations are considered, they are only implemented when the SST and school educators determine they align with Graded's support framework and student needs. Family communications alone do not influence these decisions.



The following steps are taken to ensure equitable support provision within Graded's student support framework:

1. Initial Review: The evaluation is sent to the director of student support services (DSS). The DSS and the SEL counselor review the report and determine next steps, including documentation. The SEL counselor logs the receipt of the report and files it in the student's folder.
2. Family Consultation: The DSS, SEL counselor, and lower school homeroom teacher (LS HRT) collaborate with the student's family to gather insights and explain the school's review process.
3. School-based Review: If necessary, the SST team, including the SEL counselor, DSS, LS HRT, and other relevant staff (e.g., OLS or AP), reviews the evaluation and additional student data to determine whether there is a school-based need for support.
4. Outcome Discussion: The SEL counselor, DSS, and LS HRT meet with the family to share the school's decision regarding support or accommodations before engaging with any external specialists.
5. External Consultation (if needed): If deemed appropriate, the team may arrange a meeting with the external evaluator for further discussion.

The SST and school educators hold the final authority on all student support decisions, including accommodations and modifications, even if external professionals provide differing recommendations. This authority is particularly relevant when addressing the needs of students with disabilities (federal law 13.146/2015), students with medical conditions (federal law 13.716/2018), and students requiring extraordinary support (federal law 14.254/2014).



7. Confidentiality & Data Protection

Graded is committed to safeguarding student privacy while ensuring that information is shared only when necessary to support a student's well-being and academic success, always with the student's best interests at the forefront of all decisions.

7.1 Student Confidentiality

OLS teachers are responsible for upholding students' rights to privacy while maintaining transparency in collaboration with necessary school personnel. They must follow school policies and legal standards, including Brazil's General Data Protection Law (LGPD), by securing student records and counseling notes exclusively within approved school systems, to store information and communicate about students. Confidentiality is a fundamental principle in supporting students with individual needs and must be upheld in all communications and documentation.

7.2 Requests for Student Information to and from External Specialists

A Consent to Receive and Release Information form must be signed by parents/guardians before any staff member can communicate with external specialists, including psycho-pedagogists, psychologists, speech therapists, and medical doctors. This practice ensures compliance with confidentiality guidelines while fostering collaboration to support student success. Consent is not required for communication with tutors.

When an external specialist, such as a speech-language pathologist (SLP), psychologist, occupational therapist, or psycho-pedagogist (excluding tutors), contacts an educator, the student's case manager must first verify that a Consent to Receive and Release Information form has been completed by the family. If this consent has not been provided, the counselor or case manager will reach out to the family to request completion of the form before any communication can occur. Once the consent form is in place, the counselor or case manager will authorize teachers to communicate with the external specialist or complete any requested forms. Additionally, efforts should be made to anonymize student data whenever possible to maintain confidentiality.



At Graded, we respect the valuable role specialists play in a student's development, and we recognize the importance of having a school-based perspective on student functioning. Due to data privacy and student confidentiality policies, we are unable to allow specialists to visit and observe students directly. We are happy to assist by collecting relevant data for specialists using a rating scale, classroom observation checklist, or other template.

We always invite and strongly encourage parents to attend specialist meetings that involve Graded professionals and external specialists—unless the meeting concerns a confidential mental health or confidential child safeguarding issue. Meetings with specialists include speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, psicopedagoga, psychologists, neuropsychologists, psychiatrists, and counseling therapists. The purpose of including parents is to build strong family partnerships and to provide meaningful opportunities for them to better understand their child's needs, the work of the specialists, how support is being coordinated, and how they may support their child at home. For reasons of confidentiality and data privacy, we do not use or allow the use of AI note-taking tools when meeting with external specialists.

8. Individualized Off-Campus Learning Plans

In rare and exceptional circumstances, a student may be unable to attend school for physical or mental health reasons. In such cases, an Individualized Off-Campus Learning Plan may be developed. This plan documents learning expectations, the support provided

during the student's absence, and the plan for re-entry. Approval must be obtained from both the principal and the director of student support services.

9. Individualized Trip Support Plan

Students who have specific needs, whether they are neurodivergent, environmental, or social-emotional, will receive an individualized trip support plan. This ensures continuity of care while they are away and allows us to proactively consider necessary supports in a new environment.

10. Confidentiality & Data Protection

Student Confidentiality

Graded is committed to protecting student privacy while ensuring that information is disclosed only when it is necessary to support a student's well-being and academic success, with the student's best interests at the center of all decisions. Faculty and staff must uphold students' rights to privacy while balancing the need for transparency in collaboration with necessary school personnel. We adhere to school policies and legal standards (e.g., Brazil's General Data Protection Law - LGPD) by securing student records and by only using school systems to store information and communicate about students.

