

Learning Support at Academia Cotopaxi



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Our Philosophy and Vision

Academia Cotopaxi is an inclusive school, driven by our mission to serve an international community that values diversity.

As such, we accept children with a broad range of learning and developmental disabilities. We believe that high quality education is a basic human right for all children, and that including children who learn differently or at different rates enhances the education of all children.

Since our creation in 1959, students with mild to moderate special needs were welcomed into our school. Then in 2014, our Board and community made a long-term commitment to expanding our Learning Support Services to provide for a managed number of students representing the full range of learning differences and language diversity. We are committed to a planned and carefully managed approach to including students with special learning needs. Over the next few years, AC will develop a comprehensive Learning Support Program with the appropriate staffing, curriculum, facilities, and instructional resources to address a spectrum of learning needs. We believe that developing both the capacity and the will to serve students with learning needs is critical to our overall commitment to excellence. Our goal is to cultivate in our community a heightened awareness and appreciation for students with learning differences, value-added instructional strategies and resources to meet a variety of student needs, and an ongoing conviction towards serving these students to the best of our ability.



“Over the past 30 years in the world of international education, schools have been tentative about admitting students with special needs, often citing their lack of staff, facilities or programs for such students. This perspective is changing around the world and many more voices are now advocating for social change around this issue. Academia Cotopaxi has made a strategic decision to be an inclusive school, and we are committed to accepting a managed number of students across the full range of learning needs over the next few years. Our mission drives us to develop in all of our students a sense of empathy and appreciation of diverse perspectives. We believe that direct, first-hand experiences with students with learning differences is an incredible opportunity to build empathy and to value diversity. We also believe that access to appropriate social and academic models enables students with learning differences to function brilliantly in the world. Strengthened by such experiences, our students will go out into the global world equipped to work in diverse teams, appreciating that all people have intrinsic value and potential. We want to engage our community in confronting the barriers, perceived or real, to our vision of the future. We are excited about collaborating with colleagues around the world in the distinguished goal of education, transforming individual lives and eventually society.”

Madeleine Maceda Heide

Director, Academia Cotopaxi

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supporting a wide range of needs across all ages and grades.

This team of qualified and skilled professionals provide an incredible resource to our community and are champions of our inclusive programming.

Our Learning Support Department has had experience with students with the following challenges: specific learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia; speech and language processing difficulties, nonverbal, executive functioning disorders; attention deficits; developmental disorders or delays, pervasive developmental disorder, sensory integration disorder; autism spectrum disorder and Asperger's; cognitive, emotional and behavior challenges; physical and motor disabilities such as cerebral palsy, hearing loss, or visual impairments; as well as exceptionality in the area of gifted and talented education.

The Learning Support Department

Our Learning Support Department includes Learning Specialists, Paraprofessionals, and Guidance Counselors and a School Psychologist, all of whom are qualified and experienced professionals. They possess academic training and professional experience in the field of Learning Disabilities, Learning Differences, Special Education, Guidance and Counseling, and School Psychology. Each of them is assigned to a specific division – Elementary School (Prek-G5), Middle School (G6-8) and High School (G9-12), where they work closely with the Principal and the classroom teachers. Our Guidance Counselors are certified mental health professionals with substantial experience in supporting students with emotional, behavioral and academic needs. Our School Psychologist is a well-established professional in our community. Having been trained in the United States, and working at our school for over 20 years, she has extensive experience

"At AC, each student is looked at individually to provide appropriate support. Every other week I meet with each teacher and we discuss personalized approaches for each student. Anything from emotional, behavioral, or academic support is considered and discussed. We generate creative learning approaches and take all of our resources into consideration to support our students. I am proud to be a part of this whole-student collaborative approach."

Vanessa Weber, AC Learning Specialist Teacher



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Admissions Process for Students with Learning Differences

We desire to work closely with parents in determining how to support a student with special learning needs to the best of our ability. The Admissions Process is the first step in our partnership with parents. Parents of students with identified learning needs are invited to submit an application form to our Office of Admissions. It is important that parents share as much information as possible regarding the student's needs in order to help us accurately provide a program that will meet individual needs and facilitate high quality learning. When information is withheld from the school, this delays the process and hinders our ability to understand and meet a student's needs. Parents should provide all relevant assessment reports or evaluations that clarify their child's educational needs, such as behavioral assessments, psycho-educational reports, Individualized Education Plans from the previous school, as well as official report cards and school records. Once the application is complete, an Admissions Committee will review the information carefully. The Committee may request further assessment information, or may wish to interview the parent or the student, and may wish to contact the previous school. In cases where there is no formal written evaluation, the School may require such testing as a condition for admissions or for re-enrollment.

Our Approach to Determining a Program of Support

Once a student with an identified learning need has been admitted, the Learning Support team will develop an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) and/or an accommodation plan. Classroom teachers,

parents and students (when appropriate) are invited to provide input into the ILP. Intervention and support strategies may be carried out by either the classroom teacher or the Learning Specialist, or both. Meetings take place on a regular basis to review strategies, discuss observations and assessments, and generally ensure that each student is making progress. Parents are kept updated about services provided and are encouraged to be active partners in this process.

Students currently enrolled in Academia Cotopaxi may also be referred by their classroom teacher to the Learning Support Department at any time. Teachers may notice additional areas of need or changes in behavior, and are encouraged to bring these to the attention of the Learning Support Team. The Team will review the referral and make a decision whether formal intervention is needed from the Learning Support Services.



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Academia Cotopaxi provides a range of support services according to the student's needs – mild, moderate and intensive support.

Mild Support Services

Students who need mild support are those who require no more than one period of support per day. These students typically require support in reading, writing, or mathematics, as well as attentional, behavioral and/or socio-emotional support. These students benefit from specific skill-building support, such as improving processing speed, short-term auditory memory, on-task behavior, etc. The goal of this support is to close the learning gap and to teach students how they learn best so they can become their best advocates and independent learners. This support is usually provided by the Learning Specialist through consultation, accommodations, small group instruction and/or in-class support.

Students with identified mild learning needs often require accommodations as specified in their Individual Education Plan. Accommodations are instructional adaptations that allow a student to demonstrate what he or she knows without fundamentally changing the target skill that's being taught in the classroom or measured in testing situations. Examples of accommodations that we make are adapting the format of delivering instruction or assessment, changing the expected task completion, quantity of work, and/or material utilized to support these students. Accommodations allow a student who has a mild disability to participate in a course and get the necessary support without fundamentally altering or lowering the standard or expectation of the course.

Moderate Support Services

For students with identified moderate learning needs, we provide accommodations and curricular modifications as specified in their Individual Education Plan. Modification is a change in the course, standard, expectations that allow the student with a moderate disability to participate in a particular course. The standard and curriculum expectation of the course is modified. Students who fall under this category are those who require two or more periods of support from the Learning Specialist. These students typically require a combination of co-taught and specialized small group instruction. These students might require specifically designed courses, social skills support, assistive technology, coaching, and coordination of services with professionals who provide therapeutic support outside of the school, such as Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Counseling.

Intensive Support Services

Intensive support is given to students with cognitive, developmental disabilities, and/or cognitive disabilities. Intensive support is characterized as a self-contained program with a lower student-teacher ratio depending on student need and the nature of the disability. A small group of 2-4 students with one Learning Specialist provide a supportive environment for specific learning. Students work with a team of specialists and mainstream teachers. There is an emphasis on social inclusion and maximizing academic inclusion based on student's strengths. As High School graduation approaches, there is an increased emphasis on independent life skills. Students in this program graduate from Academia Cotopaxi with an Individualized Diploma. The student's Individualized Learning Plan outlines individually designed inclusion opportunities, functional academic and life skills, pre-vocational skills, social skills, adaptive physical education, music, art.

Highly Able Support

Highly able students can usually have their learning needs met within the regular classroom setting. Their learning plan often includes differentiated instruction, using alternative resources and opportunities for self-paced research projects. When needed, they receive individual attention from a Learning Specialist or another appropriate mentor.

Coordination of Other Services

We collaborate with external providers to offer targeted interventions, such as Physical Therapy, Speech and Language Therapy, Sensory Integration Therapy, and Emotional Therapy. These services are often fundamental for students with learning differences and our collaboration with external providers allows families to receive efficient, coordinated, and balanced programming that meets the wholistic needs of students. The cost of these additional services are charged directly by providers to parents.

Use of Technology

We provide our faculty with ongoing professional development regarding the appropriate and effective use of technology in the classroom for all of our students. Through our Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) program, our teachers and educational technology specialists help students identify and make use of tools specific to their needs, beyond what we use in class together. This is, of course, especially useful for students with special needs. As our program develops, we will continue to explore assistive technologies and tools for students with special learning needs.

"We aim to empower the student, teaching them how to make the most of technology tools."

David Muniz, AC Director of Technology

"Our experience at the school has been wonderful and exceeded our expectations. We have felt supported and that there is genuine interest in improving various aspects of the life of our son be it physical, intellectual and emotional. For example, things as basic as "circle time" can be a challenge in finding the correct position for our son's spine. With the school, we tried various solutions and we were able to find some puff pillows where our son can sit perfectly. We also feel greatly satisfied when we take our son for assessments outside the country and we realize that the school is using precisely the tools that they are using. Not only is our son happy at the school but we are surrounded by teachers and classmates that care for him and respect his differences without feeling any less nor any unsurmountable challenges for a person with his capabilities. At AC, he is just another child...a child that uses a walker to get around."

Sayuri Ozeki, AC Parent

