

# SLD community sheds light on program

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Reporter

The Student Learning Differences Program provides 18% of the High School student body with the support they need to succeed at school, according to Learning Specialist Heather Statz. Director of Student Support Services Belinda Nicholson said the program works to accommodate the diversity of learning differences held by students.

## Types of student support

Nicholson said the SLD program offers three types of SLD support to accommodate the diverse needs of students: full-time, part-time and accommodations-only.

Annesley Potchatek ('24) said she has been a full-time SLD student since Grade 3. Full-time students take a year-long course that fulfills the place of one of eight academic blocks. She said she uses the class to catch up on work and talk to teachers.

"Most days, I'm just catching up on work, and asking my SLD teacher for help," Potchatek said. "I also use the block to go talk to teachers."

Similar to full-time students, Nicholson said part-time students are also enrolled in a year-long course. However, the difference is only two of the four blocks in an eight-day cycle are spent in SLD, while the other two are given as a study hall.

Rohan Schonfeld ('26) said he is the final type of student, which is accommodations-only. These students are not enrolled in a dedicated SLD course, but the program provides them with specific support needed to achieve academic success, such as 50% extra time and a separate test-taking environment.

"You don't have an actual SLD period, but you are assigned an SLD teacher and then you just get to come in for tests," Schonfeld said.

## Learning profiles

In order to be admitted into the SLD program, Statz said students need to have an evaluation that is periodically reassessed.

"You need a full neuropsych evaluation that will always be on file," Statz said. "Every three years, it needs to be updated because everyone's always growing, changing,

and learning, so we need updated information."

Statz said learning profiles are detailed transcripts of each student's learning style that consist of their individual challenges, strengths and which actions best help them. The majority of a student's learning profile is drawn from the evaluation, which tests various skills such as listening, memory, writing and math for approximately five to eight hours.

Nicholson said the school works with many different people to admit students into SLD.

She said following the evaluation, the learning profile is read over by the Student Support Team, which consists of a group of Administration members, one counselor, one of the SLD instructors and other teachers who decide the accommodations best suited to help the student.

## Day-to-day class structure

Statz said small classes are essential for students to build a strong relationship with their SLD teacher and receive individual attention.

"The wonderful thing about the SLD program at ASL is that we are able to work one-on-one with students because we have small classes, which helps to get to know the student very well and being able to respond and be incredibly flexible, given that every day brings something different and unique," Statz said.

Although SLD classes change annually, students will stay with the learning specialist they are assigned to when admitted to the program. Each classroom, designed to support all students' social and academic differences has two to four students and one out of the four SLD teachers.

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- Annesley Potchatek ('24)

Potchatek said over time her SLD teachers have taught her more about her learning difference and how it is different than others.

"My SLD teachers have helped me learn more about what differences I have and how that affects me and how it differently affects me compared to other people with the exact same difference," Potchatek said.

Furthermore, Statz said the classroom structure is very specific for different groups of students to make sure they are receiving the necessary support.

"We're always trying to do the best fit possible with learning specialists and students as well as other students in the room,"

Statz said. "It's very intentional, and it's also a process."

## Accommodations

Clay Olsen ('24) said his accommodations support him with managing test-taking.

"They really helped me as well to make my way through a test," Olsen said. "One of my accommodations, extra time, is able to help a lot in many ways as fixed timings can be stressful for people."

In addition to test-taking support, some examples of accommodations include frequent breaks and preferential seating, although the most common accommodations are extended time and separate settings.

Students with separate settings are given the ability to test in SLD or in O-319. These rooms are quiet and designed to make it easier for students to focus.

Schonfeld said extended time on tests allows him more time to thoroughly think about his answers.

"[It] gives me extra time to think about things," Schonfeld said. "[Before having extended time,] I was really rushed through on tests."

Ultimately, Annesley Potchatek said not only does the SLD program support her, the caring and welcoming environment further helps her succeed.

"I know somebody else in SLD is going to understand what I'm going through," Potchatek said. "An amazing thing about SLD is the community, not only the support."

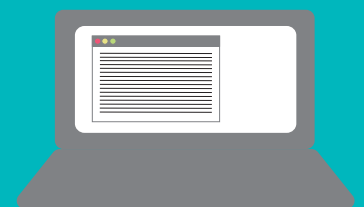
## Five most common accommodations



Separate setting for test-taking



50% extended time for assessments



Computer use for essay writing



Four-function calculator



Stop-the-clock breaks

Graphics by Eva Marriott-Fabre  
According to Learning Specialist Geoff Richman

