

Frequently Asked Questions

1. *Why choose the Academic Achievement Center?*

Our Academic Achievement Center is perhaps the purest expression of our teaching and learning philosophy. It grew directly out of our school's mission and our Episcopal ethos to respect the dignity of every student. The AAC serves students who wish to identify their strengths and to receive support where needed. This is accomplished by working with an academic professional to develop strategies for success.

A wide range of learners attends Heathwood Hall, and the AAC helps the natural-born scholar as well as the student who might be struggling with learning challenges. Each learner possesses aptitude as well as challenges. And each learner can benefit from careful attention and a close connection with a trusted mentor who brings new insights to the learning experience. The AAC is located in the center of the campus and is available to students before, during, and after the school day.

2. *Who can refer students to the AAC?*

Anyone, including parents, teachers, administrators, or students themselves, may refer a student for support services offered through the AAC.

3. *Are there costs for services offered through the Academic Achievement Center?*

Yes. Fees are charged for each type of service. Please contact Tripp Garick, AAC director, for a current list of services and rates available to individual students.

4. *Do you accept insurance or provide scholarship assistance?*

Unfortunately, we do not accept insurance or have any scholarship assistance for AAC services. However, we are happy to assist with any paperwork accepted by an individual's insurance company.

5. *What is a language-based learning difference?*

Language-based learning differences include difficulty in processing language in its various forms. This may include problems with receptive and expressive oral language, with reading, with writing, and with spelling.

6. *What is a psycho-educational evaluation?*

A psycho-educational evaluation is a comprehensive assessment of a student's functioning in three primary areas that impact learning and academic functioning: learning aptitude, basic academic skill development, and personality/adjustment factors. It also yields recommendations relevant for educational planning. Sources of assessment data include background information, educational history, records and data from tests of intelligence and educational achievement, and ratings tests of attention, behavior and emotions, and adaptive behavior.

The evaluation provides the parents and the school with a diagnostic-prescriptive profile of a student's unique learning strengths and/or weakness and can offer suggested interventions and accommodations for

parents and teachers. Psycho-educational evaluations must be completed by a certified/licensed school psychologist or clinical psychologist and must be consistent with the College Boards standards. All testing must be provided and interpreted by Heathwood's school psychologist for eligibility for accommodations and must be updated every three years as mandated by national standards. The student must meet criteria for and be given a diagnosis of a DSM-IV learning or attention disorder in order to be eligible for formal accommodations. Learning profiles are developed for all students with diagnosed learning differences.

The AAC works closely with families in the referral process for psycho-educational testing. The director of the AAC will meet with families to answer questions and guide them through the process of an evaluation. The director is the primary contact person for consulting psychologists during the evaluation process to insure that documentation requirements are met and confidentiality is maintained. Consulting psychologists are welcome to come on campus to meet directly with teachers, tutors, therapists, and administrators.

7. *What is a learning profile?*

After a student has been given the diagnosis of a learning disorder, he or she will have a learning profile specifically written to address the unique learning needs of the student. The learning profile will include identified strengths, as well as weaknesses, of the student, along with affinities and suggested accommodations and intervention strategies. A conference will be scheduled with the parents, teachers, administrators, and director of the AAC to develop a plan to address the student's learning needs. The plan will be reviewed periodically and is expected to change as the student develops stronger skills and as his or her academic and behavioral needs change over time. Teachers are kept informed of new psycho-educational testing results and work closely with learning specialists to identify strategies to assist the student in the regular classroom.

8. *What is the difference between accommodations and modifications? What are examples of accommodations offered to students at Heathwood Hall?*

Accommodations are adjustments made in how a student with a disability is taught or tested. Accommodations do not alter the content of assignments, give students an unfair advantage or change what a test measures. They do make it possible for students with learning differences to show what they know without being impeded by their learning difference. Once a student has been formally identified with learning difference (based on psycho-educational testing), the student or parent may request accommodations. Common examples of accommodations are: audio books, large print materials, parallel note-taker, guided lecture notes, extended testing time, or preferential seating. (see question #9 regarding modifications).

9. *Does Heathwood Hall allow for modifications in a student's academic curriculum?*

Heathwood Hall does NOT provide modifications for students with disabilities. All students are required to complete the same requirements for graduation and modifications are not made in the curriculum. Modifications change the level of instruction provided or tested and create a different standard for the student receiving them. Heathwood Hall maintains high standards for all students at all grade levels in the academic curriculum.

10. What is a learning specialist?

The faculty of the AAC consists of a diverse group of specialists devoted to supporting the superior academic environment of Heathwood Hall while meeting the individual needs of students. Learning specialists in each division are specially trained professionals who work closely with teachers, parents, and students to support the learner. The role of the learning specialist is to discuss ways that teachers and families can support children by using strategies and accommodations specific to their learning needs. Heathwood's learning specialists work across all grade levels and provide continuity from year to year for students, parents, and faculty. Their expertise and skill have a positive impact at all levels in the community: students, faculty, parents, and even alumni.

Learning specialists must complete a full application process, including a background check and interview with the director of the AAC. All learning specialists work under the auspices of the AAC.

11. What types of workshops and resources do you offer parents and families?

During the school year, the AAC is proud to sponsor workshops for parents, teachers, and the Columbia community. Previous workshops have included Understanding Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder, Medications and ADHD, Early Intervention Strategies for Struggling Learners, and Differentiated Instruction. We have also welcomed nationally renowned educational consultant on learning disabilities, Dr. Rick Lavoie, who presented a two-day workshop based on his book and PBS DVD, *"The Motivation Breakthrough: 6 Secrets to Turning on the Tuned-Out Child."*

The AAC has a small library of educational books, pamphlets, and videos to share with parents on a variety of topics ranging from Dyslexia to ADHD. Video series include *All Kinds of Minds*, *Fat City*, and *Understanding Learning Disabilities: How Difficult Can This Be?* Related web-links can also be found on this webpage for further information.

12. What types of assistive technology are available to students?

Different types of assistive technology are available for students, including Inspiration Software and Dragon Naturally Speaking. These software programs, along with other learning apps, can be downloaded to student IPADS or laptop computers. Additionally, Heathwood has a membership to Bookshare and Learning Ally, online libraries of copyrighted content for people with qualifying print disabilities. Students with diagnosed reading disabilities may access audiobooks from either organization. In addition, families can utilize the services of the Assistive Technology Program at the University of South Carolina. Further information can be found by contacting the director, Dr. Carol Page: Carol.Page@uscmcd.sc.edu.