

Different, Not Less



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My position is an Autistic Support Case Manager for students in 7th-9th grades at Pennbrook Middle

School. While all of my students have autism, they represent the spectrum as they vary greatly in their needs and abilities. Some take the PASA, while others take the PSSA. Some need four sensory breaks to get through the day successfully, while others only need one. Some have severe cognitive deficits, yet others are gifted. Some require behavior plans to be successful in a general education classroom, but others are rule followers who have trouble understanding how a rule could ever be flexible. Temple Grandin, a college professor and author, would say that my students are "different, not less".

Each of my students is learning to navigate Middle School successfully because of Pennbrook's ability to make the necessary accommodations and modifications. There are many things we do to create this type of environment, as my students are learning about their individual needs. We role play situations, for example, speaking up to a teacher, answering a peer's question, and presenting

suggestions to their IEP teams. I appreciate Pennbrook's staff for supporting our students to advocate for themselves.

The Special Education Assistants typically help me create data sheets and visuals, based on their experiences with the students. This has allowed us to collect data as we faded out certain modifications in an attempt to foster a student's independence.

For some students I visit their classrooms at various scheduled times to support them and their staff members, while I am present daily in other classes. Accommodations and modifications set the students and staff members up for success. A team approach is critical. We work together to modify tests or homework, create alternative assignments, and determine how to best support student participation in group activities.

Pennbrook's ability to embrace creating appropriate accommodations and modifications for students in the general education classroom, has allowed the staff and neurotypical peers to see that students with autism belong in academically challenging classes. It has also truly taught my students that it is wonderful to share their "different" minds with the world.