

A Transition Guide For Students With Disabilities



Students should be aware that colleges and universities are not all alike. Their missions or purposes, entrance criteria, programs of study, and requirements for certifications, associate degrees, and baccalaureate degrees vary. Similarly, students with disabilities are not all alike. Their goals, strengths, and weaknesses vary. Students with disabilities, who will choose to continue their formal education beyond high school, need to take a variety of preparatory steps to get ready for college while in high school. In addition, they need to make real choices regarding their goals after high school well before their senior years to maximize their options.

Key Areas for Successful Transition

Developing Self Knowledge

Developing knowledge about one's self the nature of one's disabilities as well as one's personal and academic strengths and weaknesses is vital in getting ready for college. Students need to become familiar with how they learn best. Many successful students with disabilities acquire compensatory strategies to help them plan, complete, and evaluate projects and to take an active role in shaping their environments. They need to learn how to apply strategies flexibly, and how to modify or create strategies fluently to fit new learning situations.

Practicing Self-Advocacy

Self-advocates are people who can speak up in logical, clear, and positive language to communicate about their needs. Self-advocates take responsibility for themselves. To be a self-advocate, each student must learn to understand his or her particular type of disability and individual strengths and weaknesses. They must be aware of their own learning styles. Most importantly, high school students with disabilities need to become comfortable with describing to others both their disability and their academic-related needs. At the college level, the student alone will hold the responsibility for self-identification and advocacy.

- **Practice self-advocacy while still in high school.** For example, some students with learning disabilities develop self-advocacy skills through participating in the discussions to determine the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and/or the Support for Accommodation Request (SAR).
- **Develop strengths and learn about areas of interest.** Students, with or without disabilities, often participate in sports, music, or social activities after school. Others try working in a variety of jobs or community volunteer projects. Activities in which a student can excel can help to build the self-esteem necessary to succeed in other areas.

Understanding Legal Rights and Responsibilities

High school students with disabilities and their parents must understand their rights under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the ADA (which guarantee the civil rights of persons with disabilities) and how these differ from the rights and services they received under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Under IDEA, which is the legislation that guarantees a free appropriate public education and governs the provision of special education services to students with disabilities in elementary and secondary schools, the school is responsible for identifying students with disabilities, for providing all necessary assessments, and for monitoring the provision of special education services. These special education services, which are described in detail in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), could significantly alter the requirements of the "standard" high school academic program. Requirements for high school diplomas may be changed under IDEA, as well. For example, dependent on their particular disabilities, some students' programs of study under IDEA may not include certain language, mathematics, or science courses that are usually required courses for a diploma.

However, IDEA does not apply to higher education. Colleges and universities do not offer "special" education. Under Section 504 and the ADA, colleges and universities are prohibited from discriminating against a person because of

disability. Institutions must provide reasonable modifications, accommodations, or auxiliary aids which will enable qualified students to have access to, participate in, and benefit from the full range of the educational programs and activities which are offered to all students on campus.

Examples, which may assist students with disabilities, include, but are not limited to, the use of readers, note-takers, extra time to complete exams, and/or alternate test formats. Decisions regarding the exact accommodations to be provided are made on an individualized basis, and the college or university has the flexibility to select the specific aid or service it provides, as long as it is effective. Colleges and universities are not required by law to provide aides, services, or devices for personal use or study.

Unlike elementary and secondary schools, postsecondary institutions are not required to design special academic programs for students with disabilities. Postsecondary institutions are required to provide accommodative services so that qualified students with disabilities will have equal access to the regular academic program. After equal access is provided, it is everyone's own responsibility to do well, or not do well. Section 504 and the ADA do not require postsecondary institutions to alter their requirements for either admissions or for graduation.

Changes in Level of Responsibility

Students with disabilities need to know that the level of responsibility regarding the provision of services changes after high school. As mentioned above, throughout the elementary and secondary years, it is the responsibility of the school system to identify students with disabilities and to initiate the delivery of special education services. However, while Section 504/ADA require postsecondary institutions to provide accommodative services to students with disabilities, once admitted to a college or university it is the student's responsibility to self-identify and provide documentation of the disability.

	High School	Two-Year College
Identification of Disability	School is responsible	Student self-discloses
Assessment of Disability	Education and psychological testing is provided by the school	Student is responsible for setting up and paying for appropriate evaluations
Requesting Services and Service Delivery	School staff deliver agreed upon services to student	Student must seek out services by requesting them from appropriate college personnel
Service Duration/Frequency	Services are based on an agreed upon time allotment and menu of choices	Services are based on situational or individual needs and can change each term
Advocacy	Case manager or parents act as advocates	Student acts as advocate
Review of Services	Annual review and IEP meetings	No annual review or IEP meetings; student must provide feedback regarding progress or problems
Parents' Role	Regular parent contact	No parent contact
Purpose of Services	Entitlement law (IDEA); student success	Anti-discrimination law (ADA); equal access
Funding of Services	Schools must pay	Schools must pay, except for personal attendants/items

Transition Planning for College

Leaving high school is an eventuality that all students face. Under the IDEA preparing for this transition has been formalized by requiring that the IEP for each student receiving special education services include a statement of the transition services needed. It documents the student's disabilities, describes specific courses for the student to take, accommodative services for the school to provide, notes post-high school plans, and identifies linkages with relevant community agencies, such as Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Students with disabilities planning to go to college are encouraged to be active in the transition planning process.

Choosing a college...

these are some questions you should ask the Disability Services Office.

1. Does this college require standardized college admissions test scores? If so, what is the range of scores for those admitted?
2. For how many students with disabilities does the campus currently provide services?
3. What are their major fields of study?
4. What types of academic accommodations are typically provided to students with disabilities on your campus?
5. Will this college provide the specific accommodations that I need?
6. What records or documentation of a disability are necessary to arrange academic accommodations for admitted students?
7. How is the confidentiality of applicants' records, as well as those of enrolled students, protected?
8. How is information related to the documentation of a disability used? By whom?
9. Does the college have someone available who is trained and understands the needs of adults with disabilities?
10. What academic and personal characteristics have been found important for students with disabilities to succeed at this college?
11. What is the tuition? Are there additional fees for disability-related services?
12. If so, what services beyond those required by Section 504 and the ADA do you get for those fees?

You can lend support to your college student!

Setting Demands

Keep in mind that the college demands will be different and often greater than in high school. These demands include the need for greater organizational skills, assertiveness, and use of self-advocacy skills. Students must be prepared to handle a complicated course schedule and make more time for studying and completing assignments. Mastering learning strategies and study techniques will make college coursework more manageable. Because adults will not be seeking the students out to offer assistance, students cannot be shy about asking for help.

How to Lend Support

You can support your child entering the college setting in a number of ways. First, be knowledgeable about the rights and responsibilities your son/daughter has under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Your son/daughter is responsible for using the information. Prior to enrollment, make sure that your son/daughter has all the paperwork needed to obtain services. Once you have gathered the necessary paperwork, make copies and turn it over to your son/daughter as the first step toward he/she assuming responsibility (make sure that you keep a copy in a safe place).

Further Support

Beyond taking care of paperwork, consider these steps:

1. Encourage the development and use of self-advocacy skills;
2. Help your son/daughter understand his/her disability;
3. Talk about it comfortably. Once your son/daughter has a class schedule, discuss how his/her strengths and weaknesses will be affected by each class and what kinds of services he/she might need in order to be successful;
4. Once the semester is underway, ask questions about progress, but remember that your son/daughter is ultimately responsible for his/her success;
5. Listen and ask questions when you sense a problem is occurring;
6. Realize that the coursework will be more difficult and time consuming than during high school;
7. If your son/daughter is living at home, make sure he/she has a quiet place to study and ample time to finish assignments.