

## About College

College life poses challenges for students with disabilities. When students enroll in college, they are considered responsible adults by faculty and staff. The expectations are that they will assume responsibilities for meeting their class requirements.

This added responsibility is coupled with a change in environment. Whereas the high school was a very structured environment with a set schedule, college schedules can vary dramatically. For the first time, many students may have considerable time between classes and frequently do not use this time wisely. Students must enforce their own attendance policies and accept consequences if they choose not to attend class.

- **Is my student ready to assume these responsibilities?**
- **If not, how will s/he learn these responsibilities?**

## Self-Advocacy

Another student responsibility is being a self-advocate. Students must become adept at realistically assessing their strengths, weaknesses, needs, and preferences. Also, they must become experts at communicating this information to other adults including instructors and service providers. Although services will be available to them through an office specializing in services for students with disabilities, students will be responsible for seeking these services and supports. Good communication skills and knowledge about oneself become crucial to success in college.

- **How well does my student describe disability information?**
- **How well does my student self-advocate?**

## Comparison of Services

### High School

- Services are delivered to the student
- Services are based on an agreed upon time allotment
- Assessment, physical therapy, or personal care are provided by school while in school
- Case manager acts as advocate
- Annual review & IEP
- Students are qualified for a public education by being the appropriate age and because they have a disability
- Entitlement law (IDEA)
- Educational and psychological testing is provided
- Parents are involved and entitled to private information about their student

### College

- Student must seek out services
- Services are based on situational/individual needs and are provided on a case by case basis
- Student is responsible for personal services, personal care, medical and related requirements
- Student acts as an advocate
- No annual review or IEP
- "Otherwise qualified" means students must meet all entrance and academic requirements whether accommodations are received or not
- Anti-discrimination law (ADA) and Civil Rights Law (Section 504)
- Usually educational and psychological testing are not provided, but students are expected to provide proof of their disability
- Parents do not receive private information about their student without written consent

Preparing for a successful college experience begins early in school. Nationally, only about 9% of students with disabilities pursue a post-secondary education and of those, only a small percentage graduate. If your student is going to be successful, you need to plan and support the decisions that lead to college success.

## Help Plan for College

*Check off items as completed*

- 1)** You must plant the idea that post-high school education is an important part of your expectations and that you will help your student prepare for the appropriate education for him/her.
- 2)** Preparation for postsecondary education needs to start early in your student's high school years. At an IEP meeting, you and your student should ask the high school staff for their suggestion of which postsecondary option (e.g., technical school, community college, 4-year college, or university) may be most appropriate for your student.
- 3)** Work with your student's high school teachers and support staff including the counselor, school psychologist, vocational and career counselor, transition coordinator, and vocational rehabilitation counselor. At an IEP meeting, ask about transition activities that would prepare your students for the postsecondary education most fitting for him/her.
- 4)** Your student should contact the admissions office of several postsecondary institutions. From them, information can be obtained that describes the admissions process for students with disabilities, how students must document their disability, and what services the school offers to students with disabilities. At this stage, you and your student will want to compare what is offered at each institution as well as school requirements (ACT scores, GPA, language and math requirements, etc.).
- 5)** Ensure that your student has recent testing which is required by postsecondary institutions to document a disability. This testing can be done during the senior year of high school. Have the assessment report and copies of your student's most recent IEP available for the postsecondary disability services staff.

**6)** Consult your student's case manager about a referral to vocational rehabilitation services to determine if he or she meets the rehabilitation services' disability guidelines. Rehabilitation services can help with financial and equipment support for some students with disabilities.

**7)** Your student could also contact the Social Security administration to see if s/he meets their guidelines for a disability.

**8)** If your student decides to take the ACT or SAT tests, s/he should learn the process for requesting testing accommodations. If s/he needs testing accommodations, the need must be documented, which can be supported by reports from the high school special education office.

**9)** You and your student should visit a few postsecondary institutions. Talk to the disability services staff about accommodations available.

**10)** Remember your student has the responsibility to notify the postsecondary institution that she has a disability and needs services. The postsecondary institution has the responsibility to provide appropriate accommodations so that students with disabilities are given equal access to courses, programs, and events.

Preparation before entering a postsecondary institution takes time and energy, but the effort put forth by you and your student will provide for a smoother transition from high school to postsecondary education.

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**This brochure is available in alternate formats upon request.**



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# A Parent's Guide to College

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A short guide to help you understand the transition process from high school to college for your student with a disability.

