

Transition to Postsecondary Education or Training: What Parents Can Do Now

Students with disabilities who are currently preparing for postsecondary education and training have an exciting road ahead of them. Consideration of many different factors will lead to a successful experience.

Takeaways from this handout:

- Your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) will end when your child graduates.
- Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) are important laws to know about.
- There are several options to consider for postsecondary education and training.
- The postsecondary educational institution has no responsibility to locate persons with disabilities.

Parents should know that **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ends and Section 504 and the ADA take over**. IDEA and your child's IEP no longer apply after your child graduates from high school (consult your state's laws for specifics about graduation and diploma or diploma options). Federal laws governing disability services in the postsecondary setting are **Section 504** of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the **Americans with Disability Act Amendments Act (ADAAA)**, two antidiscrimination laws.

How do parents begin to plan?

Your child should have a specific plan for postsecondary education or training in place when he or she exits public school. This is a required part of the special education transition process so your child's IEP team will help.

Many factors play a part in deciding the right postsecondary program for your child.

- Possibilities include full- or part-time vocational programs, two-year colleges, four-year universities or colleges, certificate programs, or specific job training experiences.
- A school's location or size may not fit your son or daughter, even if the program is perfect in other ways.
- Whether the school will provide the specific accommodations your child will most likely need is another consideration. Not all programs provide the same accommodations, and colleges are not required to make modifications to alter academic requirements.

In addition to choosing a postsecondary education or training option, *your child will also need to **develop specific skills to prepare for this journey after high school***. For example:

- If your child decides to attend college and live away from home, **organization and time management** may be a challenge.
- Your child will need to learn to **understand his or her disability**, know the accommodations needed to address the disability in a postsecondary setting, and have the **self-advocacy skills** needed to request and obtain those accommodations.

- **Daily living skills**, such as money management and self-care, are also skills your child will need to know to be more independent.

Working with your child at home and with the IEP team will help your son or daughter develop these skills before leaving home and will increase his or her chances of success in a postsecondary setting.

Explore Postsecondary Education or Training Options

Your son or daughter can take many different routes to arrive at a destination. Start by considering the following options:

- **Certificate or trade school programs:** These programs are typically completed in less than one or two years. Some examples include carpentry, culinary, cosmetology, dental assistant, and nursing assistant.
- **Two-year technical school or community college:** These schools have a variety of admissions requirements. Those with open admission typically accept anyone with a high school diploma or General Education Development (GED) diploma.
- **Four-year college or university:** These schools tend to look at grade point averages, academic preparation, and scores on standardized college admissions tests. They also typically consider volunteer and community work and require personal essays.
- **College experiences for students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities:** A few two- and four-year colleges are making efforts to include students with all types of disabilities by offering transition programs located on campuses. Think College (thinkcollege.net) has information regarding those postsecondary education programs.
- **Other postsecondary and training options:** In addition to colleges and technical schools, options include Adult Basic Education classes, workforce training, apprenticeships, Job Corps experience, military training, or Day Training and Habilitation (DT&H) which offers training in life skills and work-related activities.

Many institutions have specific offices for students with disabilities

It will be your child's responsibility to identify his or her disability, provide documentation, and request assistance. The educational institution has no responsibility to locate persons with disabilities. Find out in advance what documentation is needed and what kind of supports the office provides. If you can, talk to students who receive help from the office as their experiences can be helpful.

You can help your child narrow postsecondary education choices by considering:

- **Student Support Services:** Colleges are required to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, but they are not required to modify academic expectations. What is considered reasonable may be different from college to college so it is important to ask. Students work with support services and make choices regarding services using an interactive process, rather than having a team decide for them. It is the student's responsibility to let the college know (self-disclose) that they have a disability, provide documentation of the disability, and request assistance.
- **Living choices:** Some schools and programs have dorm rooms for students; others (such as most vocational programs) do not. Talk to your child about living options.
- **School size:** Some programs have large classes and little interaction with professors; others have small classes and many opportunities to interact with professors and staff. Ask your child what option he or she prefers.
- **Urban, rural, or other places:** Does your child want to be in a big city with an array of cultural and extracurricular activities? What are the cost implications? Does he or she plan to spend most of the time on campus studying and meeting new people? What kind of support systems are in place? What are your child's transportation needs?

School staff on your child's IEP team can help explore options for programs, services, and choices that will meet the needs of your child.

Keep in mind that not all students will be ready to continue their education through a postsecondary or training program. Your son or daughter may choose to take time off from formal education. Working to save money or gain work experience before attending college or another training program may be an option to consider. This option might be attractive if your son or daughter already has an interesting job and can continue it after high school or has limited or no work experience.

There are resources to help:

- You or your child can access online programs, such as PACER's Teens Succeeding with Technology (TeST). This program's four training videos incorporate innovative, web-based technologies and resources to help high school students with disabilities transition successfully to postsecondary education and careers, especially in science, technology, engineering, and math. The TeST program helps students explore career possibilities; create a transition plan; learn about self-advocacy, rights, and accommodations in high school versus postsecondary education; and take a virtual college tour using a variety of multimedia tools. More information can be found online at PACER.org/stc/TeensSucceedTech.
- For more information see "A Guide to Preparing Your Child with a Disability for Life Beyond High School" at PACER.org.
- Ask your child's IEP transition team if there are specific resources in your state.
- "Mapping Your Dreams" PACER.org/transition/resource-library