

Special Learning Needs

Students with special learning needs have the same options available to continue their education after high school as their classmates. Careful preparation will result in finding a college program that meets the student's educational interests and provides the right kind of supports that the student needs to be successful. This overview will discuss three aspects of this process:

- Setting Goals for After High School
- The Difference Between High School and College Learning Environments
- How to Look for a College Program with the Right Support Services

Setting Goals for After High School

There are several steps that students and parents can begin to take early in high school to set goals for after graduation. Using available resources can help students identify their learning styles, interests, and personality characteristics. Based on these qualities students should explore and identify careers that interest them, learn about the education they will need after high school, and then develop an academic plan to reach their post-graduation goals.

Under the 2004 Amendments to IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) transition planning for post-secondary goals must be included in the first IEP completed after the student turns 16, and then reviewed annually. As part of this transition planning, students with IEPs can participate in assessments appropriate to their age, interests, and skill levels that help the student and their families determine possible post-secondary education and career paths.

The Difference Between High School and College Learning Environments

There are many differences between high school and college that apply to all students making the transition into post-secondary education. Students in college are in class much less time each week than in high school, have more reading and study time requirements, and have significantly more freedom and responsibility to decide how they use their time.

For students with disabilities, there is also a shift in the way support services are provided at colleges compared to the services they received during high school. The most significant difference is that the student is required to *self-advocate and assist* with obtaining the support services s/he needs. While students are not required to disclose to the college program if they have a disability, if the student wishes to use the college or training program's disability support services, the student must provide documentation for the disability, and work with the staff to set up the accommodations and access the supports they need to be successful.

Differences between High School and College Requirements

Two federal laws: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, often referred to as a "504", and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (referred to as "ADA"), provide protection for students with disabilities. Students are admitted to colleges programs using the same admissions requirements. Once admitted, these laws insure that students are not discriminated against because of their disability, and students have access to the same opportunities to learn and to demonstrate their learning as students without disabilities. Note that under these laws,

colleges are required to provide “appropriate academic adjustments” to insure that a student is not being discriminated against because of his/her disability. These accommodations might include having a note-taker, receiving extended time, or using audible books.

How to Look for a College or Training Program with the Right Support Services

The process of finding the “right” college begins with the same list of factors and research that most students consider. Information under *College Planning* on this website helps students identify potential college programs based on factors of size, geographical location, types of academic programs, costs and financial aid, and housing and social opportunities.

Choosing a College

Once the student begins to assemble a list of possible colleges, s/he will want to dig deeper to learn more about the support services that are available. Although all campuses provide some type of support to students with learning needs, these programs vary in terms of the extent of support available. One place to begin is to search for “disability services,” or “academic support services,” or on the website of the college. Students/parents can follow up with an email or phone call to ask questions about how services are provided. It is important to visit the campus to actually see the facilities, make an appointment to meet with staff, and also ask to meet with one or more students who have used the support services.

Many resources are available to help guide the search process. Please refer to the shortlist of recommended websites and resources below.

Resources

[ADDA College Information](#)

[College Steps for LD Students](#)

[NAMI College Information](#)

The K & W Guide to College Programs & Services for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Princeton Review, Kravets and Wax, 2012

Colleges With Programs for Students With Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders, Peterson's 2007.

Preparing Students With Disabilities for College Success, ed. by Shaw, Madeus, et.al., 2009.