



Preparing for Postsecondary Education

Preparing for College While Still in High School

If you are planning to go to college, it is essential to remember that in order to apply, you will need to obtain a high school diploma or a General Education Diploma (GED). An IEP diploma will not be recognized by institutions of higher education.



Make sure that all standardized tests have been taken; both ACT and SAT, and SAT subject tests. Some colleges will require these for admissions. If you think you may need extra support taking standardized tests, oftentimes accommodations can be arranged. In order to ensure that the right accommodations are in place, you and your parents or guardians should work with the school to fill out the necessary disability paperwork to make these requests. Be mindful that this needs to be done several months in advance of sitting for the examination.

Find out if colleges that you may be interested in require IQ or achievement test scores to receive accommodations under Section 504 (see more information about Section 504 later in this kit). Your high school may be able to arrange for this while you are still under IDEA. Assess if you need any learning support classes before going on to college. Some students do this at college, while others spend an extra year in high school, sometimes called “post-graduate” program or PG. Summer courses may be an option for you if there is a college in your area. These classes can help to prepare you for the upcoming transition.

Work closely with your guidance counselor to begin to explore all available options. One option is dual enrollment. A dually enrolled student is a student who is still officially a student at high school, but is also taking one or more classes at a college for credit. Transition teachers from the school will work with you outside of school. Your weekly schedule might include taking classes, looking for a job or working, learning to use public transportation and working out at a health club. Dual enrollment allows you to begin to get used to the college setting, life and workload, while still in high school.



Choosing the Right Program

It is essential to ask the right questions as you explore postsecondary education options. The Autism Transition Guide: Planning the Journey from School to Adult Life by Carolyn Bruey and Mary Beth Urban gives the following advice:



Photo courtesy of Keelin Daly from the ABILIS program in Greenwich, CT.

- ☐ *Talk to the guidance counselor at your school.*
- ☐ *Attend local college fairs and ask about disability support services.*
- ☐ *Ask your teacher about where some of their past students have attended college.*
- ☐ *Ask other students with ASD or their parents.*
- ☐ *Consult local autism organizations to see about listings of colleges that offer supports.*
- ☐ *Make sure to arrange visits to any potential schools where you can speak with staff and students. The school may also be able to help connect you to other students with ASD and their families.*
- ☐ *Investigate if the school has the proper supports and services available for you to have the most successful and rewarding experience possible.*
- ☐ *Keep in mind that there are many different types of institutions that you could possibly attend. These include: vocational school, community or junior college, technical institutes, state schools or liberal arts schools.*
- ☐ *Be sure to understand the difference between 2-year versus 4-year programs.*
- ☐ *Factors that come in to play when selecting a college can also include location and finances.*
- ☐ *You and your parents should not hesitate to visit the selected college and the one you will eventually attend as many times as you need to in order to familiarize yourself with the college.*



Below is a checklist of topics that you and your family may want to take into consideration when discussing the transition from high school to college.

The checklist is adapted with permission from Jerri Roach Ostergard, Transition Specialist, Worcester (Massachusetts) Public Schools as found on the Think College website. You can see the checklist [here](#).

- ☐ *Research and understand what choices you have. Visit programs, talk to other students, families, watch videos, etc.*
- ☐ *Set postsecondary education and career goals through the use of person-centered planning.*
- ☐ *Ensure that you are enrolled in academic courses throughout high school that will prepare you for college courses. While not a requirement, experience tells us that students with more inclusive academic experiences in high school do better once in college.*
- ☐ *You and your parents should know the difference between the laws that govern education at the secondary level (IDEA = entitlement) and at the college level (ADA = otherwise qualified).*
- ☐ *You may want to participate in and, if possible, lead your own IEP. Participation means planning the meeting, working with a teacher to identify your own goals and supports, presenting your goals at the meeting, welcoming the team or learning about the forms.*
- ☐ *Learn to advocate for yourself while in high school, which will prepare you for when it needs to be done in college.*
- ☐ *Obtain college catalogue(s) and review them carefully with your parents and with support from high school staff (e.g. guidance counselor, transition coordinator) as needed. Visit campus activities while in middle or high school, sports, recreational, entertainment activities.*
- ☐ *Ensure that documentation of your disability is up-to-date. This may be required by the college.*
- ☐ *Discuss with your parents the nature of your disability and how it affects your school work. Practice how you refer to your disability and identify what supports you need.*
- ☐ *Encourage teachers to document what accommodations and technology you use now and what you may need in college (e.g. reader, note taker, scribe, books-on-tape, speech-to-text software, screen reader, tape recorder, PDA, etc.). Create a list of these accommodations and supports.*
- ☐ *Visit colleges with your parents so you have good information to make a final choice.*



- *You should meet with college Disability Services Office (DSO) staff to talk about documentation and learn about how accommodations in college are different from those in high school.*
- *If there is a specific program on the campus for students with intellectual disabilities, arrange to meet with the staff. Find out how participants in the program participate in general college life and academics.*
- *Discuss goals, learning needs and how to access specific accommodations that are available for all students, including academic supports (e.g. tutoring, writing support), with your parents and DSO staff before classes begin.*
- *Figure out and set up transportation prior to the start of school (e.g. driving, car-pooling, learning to use public transportation, travel vouchers).*
- *Be aware of financial aid resources available to your family and make sure that funding for all costs is arranged before school starts (e.g. tuition, books, fees, transportation). Identify how financial support you may receive impacts other benefits (e.g. SSI, SSDI).*
- *Know what services are available through adult human service agencies (e.g. Vocational Rehabilitation – tuition, books, transportation, employment supports – One-Stop Career Centers, Individual Training Accounts, Developmental Disability agencies). Representatives from these groups should be at the transition IEP, PCP, etc. You should have the phone numbers for relevant agencies in their cell phone.*
- *Be prepared for the fact that your family needs written consent from you to obtain access to your records at the college level.*



The following chart provides a clear illustration of the differences between high school and college with respect to expectations of students:

HIGH SCHOOL

COLLEGE

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| 1. Teachers will usually grade and check completed homework. | 1. Professors may assume homework is completed and that students are able to perform on a test. |
| 2. Teachers may remind students of incomplete assignments. | 2. Professors may not remind students of incomplete assignments. <i>(Hint: It's up to students to check with their instructor to see if the course requirements are being met.)</i> |
| 3. Teachers may know students' needs and approach students when they need assistance. | 3. Professors are usually open and helpful, but they expect students to ask for assistance when they need it. |
| 4. Teachers may be available before, during or after class. | 4. Professors may require students to attend scheduled office hours. |
| 5. Teachers have been trained in teaching methods. | 5. Professors have content knowledge but have not necessarily received any training in teaching methods. |
| 6. Teachers often provide students with information missed during absence. | 6. Professors often expect students to get information from classmates when they miss a class. |
| 7. Teachers present material to help students understand what is in the textbook. | 7. Professors may not follow the textbook, but lecture in order to enhance the topic area. <i>(Hint: Students need to connect the lectures to the textbook.)</i> |
| 8. Teachers often write information on the board or overhead to be copied for notes. | 8. Professors may lecture nonstop. If they write on the board, it may be to support the lecture, not summarize it. |
| 9. Teachers often teach knowledge and facts while leading the students through the thinking process. | 9. Professors often expect students to think independently and connect seemingly unrelated information. |
| 10. Teachers often take time to remind students of an assignment and/or test. | 10. Professors expect students to read, save and refer back to the course syllabus. <i>(Hint: Syllabi are an important way of knowing exactly what is expected, when assignments are due, and how assignments will be graded.)</i> |



Seeking a Suitable College or University

by Stephen Shore, Ed.D.

Some of the many variables to consider when choosing the right college include size, type of campus, geographical location, suitable programs and courses of study. These are the same aspects everyone else looks for. Those individuals with autism and other disabilities must add on the facet of determining whether the disabilities office can provide for their needs. Here are some things to consider regarding the disabilities office.

Some answers to look for include what documentation is needed. Some will require a recent full-scale neuropsychological exam whereas others will be satisfied with a note from a qualified professional stating the diagnosis. Find out how recent the documentation must be. Documents suggesting reasonable accommodations will be helpful.

It is also important to know what type of assistance is needed. Staff members at disability offices understand and are prepared to provide academic accommodations. Assistance related to independent living skills or social interaction is much less common.

If you continue to run into barriers at several disability offices amongst colleges then it might be possible that you are not quite ready for college.

Different Strokes for Different Folks



Some colleges and universities have programs specifically for individuals with autism and other disabilities providing services beyond what is available at the school disability office. Referred to as “internal” programs, these campus-based organizations offer fee-based added assistance including support groups for social interaction, academics, and sometimes vocational. Students may be housed in dormitories whereas others may live off campus. Some examples of the many “internal” programs available include *Bridges to Adelphi* at Adelphi University in New York, the *College Program for Students with Asperger Syndrome* at Marshall University in West Virginia and the REACH program at the University of Iowa.

Based off campus, “external” programs provide additional support in the areas of schedule and financial management, nutrition, what to do with leisure time and community involvement. Students attending these programs tend to live in housing provided by the organization as well. Costs are higher because of the more intensive nature of these programs. Some examples of these programs include the *College Internship Program* and the *College Living Experience*. No program or model is inherently better than the other. It’s more of a question of what is the best fit for you!