

## College Planning for Students with Disabilities

John Benson, Correspondent 1:56 p.m. EDT October 29, 2016



### Teacher and students in classroom

For families of children dealing with learning disabilities, much of the journey includes sleepless nights and frustrating days.

While a diagnosis provides clarity, parents must then turn their attention to schooling, which from kindergarten to 12th grade means either an Individual Education Plan or 504 Plan to ensure the child receives all of the help needed to reach their potential.

The National Center for Education Statistics shows that 2.4 million students are diagnosed with specific learning disabilities and receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which secures special education services for children with disabilities from the time they are born until they graduate from high school.

However, for those students who want to attend higher education, what options are there on college campuses?

### Plan ahead

In Licking County, Newark High School School Counselor Scott Koebel said parents can't start early enough prepping for what comes after their child's senior year.

"Get involved with curricular and extracurricular programs that build on a student's strengths," Koebel said. "Communicate with school officials — teachers, school counselors, principals — your child's desire to attend college.

"Seek their recommendations on opportunities that will best prepare your child for post-secondary education. What programs are in place in high school that will carry over to college? Individualized Education Plans and Section 504 Plans will carry over to college if the student

continues to show evidence of a disability. When researching colleges, it may be helpful to ask the college how they support students with special needs.”

In Richland County, Madison High School Principal Rob Peterson said his staff and administration make it a priority to work closely with parents of IEP or 504 students to address their child’s transition into not only college and the military but also the workforce.

“IEPs specifically have a transition section devoted to assisting the students in this area,” Peterson said. “Parents are able to request that a copy of the IEP, ETR (Evaluation Team Report) or 504 Plan be sent to colleges-universities to assist in the transition.

“In our building, the student’s case manager, who is an intervention specialist, is the liaison between the school and the parent-guardian of a student with an IEP, while a school counselor is the liaison between the school and a parent-guardian of a student on a 504 Plan.”

### **Standardized testing options**

For those students with learning disabilities, the notion of a massive standardized test such as the SAT or ACT plays right into issues dealing with not only basic reading, writing and math skills, but also abstract reasoning, time planning and organizational skills.

Luckily, both the SAT and ACT allow special accommodations, which range from having questions read out aloud to extra time and even seating arrangements. Even better is the fact the test score makes no reference to special circumstances.

### **Making the transition**

Ohio State University at Mansfield Coordinator Disability Services Michelle McGregor pointed out that while the IEP and 504 Plan technically don’t exist on a college campus, the documentation does help guide the school through the accommodation process.

However, it all begins with a very important first step.

“Students have to self-identify to receive accommodations on campus,” McGregor said. “So obviously they need to come to us and seek out the accommodations, unlike in primary schools where they have to seek out the individuals.

“I run into a lot of students who come to campus and they just assume that because they were on an IEP or 504 Plan that their accommodations just magically come over with their transcript for high school. Unless they self-identify, we don’t know they need these accommodations.”

## Get a head start

For college-bound learning-disability students, parents are best served making sure their child's testing is up to date. McGregor said usually that means three years or sooner.

"The other tip is before you get to campus, just seek out those services and know what's available to you," McGregor said. "Definitely advocate for yourself. On our campus, we really try to make sure there's not a negative stigma that goes along with disability services.

"I think sometimes on the high school side, there's this negative stigma or feeling around you from accommodations but we work with all kind of students here on campus through disability services."



<http://www.mansfieldnewsjournal.com/story/life/2016/10/29/college-planning-students-disabilities/92786634/>