

College is possible when parents, students are prepared for changes

Forty-six percent of students with disabilities graduating from high school pursue some type of formal postsecondary education. Due to families' rising expectations for their youth, the availability of accommodations, and colleges embracing the idea, more and more students with disabilities are exploring postsecondary education. Needless to say, additional education can lead to positive benefits such as higher incomes and fulfilling careers.

With this good news in mind, it's important for parents to understand how the college and high school environments differ for students with disabilities. When parents are aware of these differences, they can work with their student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team in high school to help their son or daughter build the skills needed to succeed in the college environment.

So what are the differences? A college's academic expectations of students with disabilities may differ greatly from a high school's expectations, and the law concerning students with disabilities also changes.

"It's important for families to understand that college is academically rigorous, and that doesn't change when you are a student with a disability," says Scan Roy, PACER's Projects Director, Transition and Workforce Partnerships.

All college students are expected to complete the same course work, regardless of disability. The way infor-



mation is taught, and the setting it is taught in, may pose a new challenge to students. Differences in college include:

Less contact with instructors

Instructors in a college setting generally do not expect to have much contact with students outside of class time. Students should seek study groups or learn study strategies that work for them.

Expectations to achieve independently

Students must take full responsibility for attending classes, taking notes, completing all assignments, studying during non-class hours, and demonstrating their knowledge during tests.

A higher academic rigor

Generally, college students are expected to possess a level of academic competence that allows them to complete the assigned coursework. Students are expected to be able to read college-level text books, express thoughts through writing, and have a certain amount of mathematical proficiency. Parents and students should understand the role of accommodations and assistive technology that can help remove barriers a disability may cause.

Fewer tests cover more information

As a general rule, college students don't have as many opportunities to demonstrate the knowledge they have acquired in class. A student's grade for the college semester may be based on three papers and two tests, or even three large tests alone. Students are responsible for learning a great deal of information and applying that information in a test or essay format. This may be a significant change from high school.

No resource rooms

Some students who receive special education services may have access to a resource room while in high school. These rooms might offer intensive academic or behavioral support. Parents and students need to understand that resource rooms do not exist in colleges. There may be academic supports available, but generally not on the same level as in high school. Students who utilized resource rooms in high school will need to find other ways to access supports in college.

No IEP or IDEA in college

Does the IEP play any role in what services or accommodations a student will receive in college? The answer is not exactly.

The IEP is a document that governs special education services in elementary through high school under the Individuals with Disabilities Education

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Act (IDEA). When a student moves on to college, IDEA no longer applies. A college or university is under no obligation to "follow the IEP" since technically the student no longer has an IEP.

However, the IEP might be used as part of the disability documentation process or in helping to identify academic accommodations that work for an individual student. Students are encouraged to identify needed accommodations while in high school and think about how those same accommodations might be used in college.

Students who receive special education services in high school often have many services available to them that assist in achieving educational success. Students may have a classroom aid, access to a resource room, and curriculum modified to meet their needs. Parents and students may grow accustomed to having these services.

Those same levels of services do not exist in a college setting. Colleges need only provide academic accommodations so the student with disabilities has the same access to coursework as other students, and curriculum will not be modified.

"This is a big change for students and parents," Roy says. "This is why it is so crucial that students prepare for the unique environment and expectations of college."

That preparation includes researching how Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) provide for accommodations at the college level.

The main source of assistance for students with disabilities is the college's Disability Student Services (DSS) office. These offices may go by other, similar names, but their purpose is the same: to assist students with disabilities in gaining accommodations and other supports so they can access the same course work as all students. DSS offices may also be able to provide other supports such as help with study skills, organizing workloads, and identifying other supports. Services can vary greatly from school to school.

In PACESETTER's next issue, parents can learn about self-determination and self-advocacy skills that can help students succeed at a postsecondary level.

For more information about the transition from high school to postsecondary training, see [PACER.org/tatra/resources/postsecondary.asp](https://www.pacer.org/tatra/resources/postsecondary.asp). ■

Opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities

There's a growing trend of students with intellectual disabilities attending postsecondary education programs on college campuses. Parents' high expectations for their children and the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 make these opportunities more of a possibility than ever before. One national effort that focuses on

identifying postsecondary opportunities for youth with intellectual disabilities is the federally funded Think College, which provides training, conducts research, and provides resources on this subject. Podcasts that answer questions families might have about postsecondary opportunities are available at www.thinkcollege.net.