

## What Should I Do If My Child with Disabilities Wants to Go to College?

Many students who have been served in special education decide to continue their education past high school. For a student to become successful in postsecondary settings, the high school program can contribute valuable opportunities, such as the following:

- Developing student's study skills and learning strategies.
- Arranging job try-outs allows students opportunities to evaluate different career and vocational options.
- Arranging needed accommodations for college entrance exams. Students are entitled to assessments that do not penalize them for their specific disabilities. These accommodations include extended time, a reader, a scribe, a separate testing area, or shorter test sessions. The important thing is for the students to learn which accommodations work best for them and gain the needed documentation to support their requests for the accommodations in standardized testing, and, later, college classes. For help with documentation, your child can consult with the high school guidance counselor.
- College admission does depend on having at least the minimum qualifications for entrance. Because a student has a disability does not mean that all typical entrance requirements will be waived for him or her. Just like everyone else, students with disabilities can go to college if they have the intellectual capacity and educational background that prepares them to do well.
- Identify colleges that provide educational programs relevant to career interests. For any student seeking college admission, the planning should begin early in high school. For the student with disabilities, the choice might be more difficult because of issues related to special admissions and ensuring that the needed support services are available. Matching the desired educational program and level of needed support services is an important step in college selection. College catalogs typically list the types of student supports available. Most campuses have student support centers where eligible students can go to take tests orally, receive assistance with note-taking or reading textbooks. Many campus libraries have screen readers available for blind or print impaired students to use. Computer laboratories will sometimes also have available adapted keyboards and other access devices.
- Identifying the types of accommodations and support services that the student needs because of his or her disability. Colleges do not provide special education, but they do provide support services to assist students with disabilities. Provision of services is based on the individual institution's own choice of models. For this reason, it is very important for a student with disabilities to find out the specific supports offered in any particular postsecondary school. Supports may include note takers, interpreters, tutoring, special classes, liaison with faculty, community liaison, and support groups. To be eligible for these services and accommodations, a student must have proof of disability, such as a recent psycho-educational assessment or special education records.
- Assistance in the application process. Applying to colleges and for financial aid packages can be a daunting task, especially for students with disabilities. High school guidance counselors and resource teachers can be helpful in assisting students with filling out applications and writing the required essays. There are some college scholarships available for students with specific disabilities, especially sensory impairments like blindness or deafness. Directories of college scholarships provide information about disability-related financial aid.
- Assistance in preparing the documentation that the student can carry to the college. The high school setting provides many protections and coordinated services that are greatly reduced, if not eliminated, once the student graduates from high school. Documentation of the history of the disability and effective interventions represents a valuable resource that can guide college administrators and counselors in working effectively with students and reducing the apprehension and frustration they encounter in learning a new system. This documentation should include results of a recent comprehensive evaluation, a summary of previous evaluations, and, most important, information on the type and extent of services that have been provided.