

# NJCLD

National Joint Committee on  
Learning Disabilities  
[www.njclld.org](http://www.njclld.org)

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## Considerations for Transition from High School to Postsecondary Education

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) affirms the importance of transition as a critical component of successfully progressing from secondary school to college or university for students with learning disabilities. Although NJCLD has addressed secondary to postsecondary education transition planning in a previous paper (NJCLD, 1994), several challenges remain. This paper includes information about the laws that affect students with learning disabilities at each level, documentation required, key participants, and programs and resources to assist in the transition process.

### Introduction

Although the transition from high school to postsecondary education is an important milestone for any student, it can be particularly challenging for students with learning disabilities (LD<sup>1</sup>). There are many hurdles that exist and many questions that students will need to confront, in addition to a new environment that they must learn to navigate.

The environment students enter when they leave high school is starkly different from their K–12 educational environment. Students transitioning to postsecondary can choose whether or not to disclose their disability. For students with LD who elect to request services, this is the first time that they must actively disclose their disability, meet new disclosure and documentation requirements, learn about different relevant laws, and navigate a new system of disability services in order to receive accommodations (Office of Civil Rights [OCR], 2020a, 2020b). Students can disclose at any time; however, the postsecondary institution will not provide disability support services until the student self-identifies to the relevant office and the granting of such services are not retroactive. When students and their parents/guardians begin the college search and application process, they must first find information about the accommodations process as well as the types of services and supports that college campuses make available.

Common questions might include the following:

- Should the student disclose the disability?

- Where does the student find information on services for students with disabilities at the college level?
- Is the office staffed by qualified professionals who have the training to work with students with LD?
- Does the college or university offer services specifically for students with LD?
- How will academic accommodations be decided upon and disseminated?
- What accommodations would the student be eligible to receive?
- What range of services are available?
- What documentation does the student need to provide?
- Who helps the students pick out their classes? For example, some colleges have special advisors, some students are advised by faculty, and some students with disabilities are advised by the Services (DSS) office.
- What assistive technology (AT) options exist, and does the college provide training on AT use? What is the process for qualifying for support services?

With the right support and accommodations, many students with LD can achieve at grade level. Yet, we know that few enroll in college and complete their program (Newman et al., 2011). Studies point to many factors that can influence this trend, including stigma (de Cesare, 2015); difficulty with the documentation process (NJCLD, 1999, 2007, 2010; Horowitz et al., 2017 [Executive Summary]); lack of resources and information (Horowitz et al., 2017; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2019); and more. Certainly, greater coordination and improvements in practice related to K–12 transition planning, as well as disclosure and documentation in postsecondary programs, can increase the number of students who successfully navigate this transition and complete a college degree.

It is important for students and their parents/guardians to have robust information about the legal and practical landscape surrounding the transition to postsecondary education. This paper (a) provides an overview of the various laws that govern PreK–12 and postsecondary education and (b) offers practical considerations and resources for students who aim to pursue a college degree.

## The Laws

### Public Secondary Setting

In public secondary education, there are primarily three laws that affect students with LD.

#### 1. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

IDEA guarantees students with disabilities the right to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), including an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**2. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Subpart D (hereafter, shortened to “Section 504 – Subpart D”)**

Section 504 - Subpart D applies to schools that receive federal financial assistance and requires a school to “provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to each qualified handicapped [sic] person who is in the recipient’s jurisdiction, regardless of the nature or severity of the person’s handicap [sic]” (34 C.F.R. § 104.33). “[I]n order to provide a free appropriate public education, [the school] must design the ‘regular or special education and related services’ provided to students with disabilities ‘to meet [the] individual educational needs of [those students] as adequately as the needs of non[-disabled] persons are met’” (34 C.F.R. § 104.33). The Section 504 – Subpart D regulations on FAPE (34 C.F.R. § 104.33) also require adherence to certain procedures intended to facilitate provision of a FAPE, including testing and evaluation, and notice to parents of educational plans for their children.

**3. Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA Title II) [reauthorized as the ADA Amendments Act in 2008, hereafter referred to as the “ADAAA”]**

ADAAA applies to governmental entities and mandates that a public entity (1) cannot deny participation in, or exclude people with disabilities from, the benefits of programs because of inaccessible facilities; (2) must ensure that communications with applicants, participants, members of the public, and companions with disabilities are as effective as communications with others; and (3) entity must furnish “auxiliary aids and services” for example, sign language interpreters, assistive listening devices, and alternate format materials (28 C.F.R. § 35).

IDEA is an education law. Section 504 – Subpart D and the ADA are nondiscrimination, civil rights laws. Both IDEA and Section 504 - Subpart D require that a school provide a student with disability FAPE.

## **Postsecondary Education Setting vs. Public Secondary Setting**

When a student moves from public secondary education to a postsecondary education setting, the laws that apply to students with disabilities differ. IDEA does not apply to postsecondary education settings, and a different section of Section 504 applies. The laws that apply in the postsecondary education setting are Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Subpart E (hereafter, shortened to “Section 504 – Subpart E”) and ADAAA. These laws apply to all students with disabilities; they are not specific to students with a learning disability.

### **FAPE**

A key difference between the laws that apply to a student with a disability in the public secondary education setting and those in the postsecondary education setting is that in secondary education the school must provide a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Some differences exist between FAPE under IDEA and FAPE under Section 504; however, what is central is that the secondary school has an affirmative duty to provide a free education to a student with a disability.

In the postsecondary education setting, the institution is not required to provide FAPE to a student with a disability. Instead, postsecondary education providers must provide equal access and must not discriminate against individuals with disabilities.

### **IEPs and 504 Plans Do Not Follow a Student to College**

Another key difference is that in the postsecondary education setting, a student will not have an IEP or a Section 504 plan (hereafter, shortened to a 504 plan). Neither an IEP nor a 504 plan will follow the student to college; rather, as described more fully below, the college will make its own determination of whether the student is eligible for services due to a disability, as well as engage in the interactive process to determine appropriate accommodations and support.

### **Modifications Versus Accommodations**

It is important for students, parents/guardians, and college disability services providers to understand the difference between *modifications* and *accommodations*. The term modifications refers to a change in the curriculum that allows a student to be successful. Accommodations, however, allow the student to have equal access to the material being taught but do not change the nature or content of what is being taught nor do accommodations alter the expectations for the student's mastery of the material.

The difference between a modification and an accommodation is more fully addressed at the "IDEAs that Work" website:

<https://osepideasthatwork.org/>

For example, a student in high school with an IEP and modifications may take an English class and be required to read only six instead of eight novels and only write three instead of four papers. This is a modification of the curriculum. However, for example, if a student with a 504 plan has a reading disability, the college can provide the audio version of the novels, but they are still required to "read" all eight novels and write all four papers. Providing the student with the audio version of a novel is an accommodation, not a modification.

Students with LD who had an IEP in secondary school may have had modifications to the curriculum in high school. They may also have had accommodations. However, students with LD who had a 504 plan in secondary school may have had accommodations to allow them to access the curriculum without modification of the curriculum.

In the postsecondary education setting, students are routinely provided with accommodations but are not always offered modifications. An example of an accommodation might include extended time for testing. Neither the ADA nor Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act 1973 require postsecondary institutions to lower or substantially modify essential requirements. For example, although students with LD are sometimes not required to take a foreign language (known as a waiver) in high school, postsecondary schools are not mandated to offer the same modification of the curriculum. Colleges and universities must engage in the *substitution process* to determine if the student is eligible to take an alternate course, such as a computer

programming class or a culture class (Rothstein, 2018; Thomas, 2000). They are not required to provide an alternate course if that accommodation will create a fundamental alteration of a program or imposes an undue financial or administrative burden (OCR, n.d.).

Section 504 – Subpart E regulations do not require a federally funded educational institution to allow modification of academic requirements. Rather, they must “make such modifications to its academic requirements as are necessary to ensure that such requirements do not have the effect of discriminating, on the basis of handicap, against a qualified handicapped applicant or student” (34 C.F.R. § 104.44, titled “Academic Adjustments”).

However, the regulations go on to further explain that “academic requirements that the recipient [college] can demonstrate are essential to the program of instruction being pursued by such student . . . will not be regarded as discriminatory within the meaning of this section” (34 C.F.R. § 104.44). This rule was affirmed in the Boston University (BU) case in which the court upheld BU’s foreign language requirement (*Guckenberger v. Boston University*, 1997).

There may be cases where a student with a learning disability might have difficulty with an academic requisite, such as a math or foreign language requirement. In such instances, before matriculating at a college, the student should investigate the college waiver or course substitution process for modifications of academic requirements (Forsbach-Rothman et al., 2005).

## Complaints

A significant difference between the laws that apply in the public secondary school setting and the postsecondary setting is how a grievance is handled. At the secondary school level, IDEA provides clear, established procedures that every district must follow, and Section 504 requires districts to establish a procedure for grievances and a due process procedure. In addition, parents/guardians have the right to (a) file a complaint with the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and (b) file a civil lawsuit.

How to file a  
discrimination  
complaint with OCR:

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html>

At the postsecondary level, IDEA does not apply; therefore, that avenue toward resolving a grievance does not exist. At the postsecondary level, institutions are required to have a grievance process, and a student may also file a complaint with OCR using the same procedure available under Section 504 at the secondary school level. A student may also file a civil lawsuit.

## Privacy – Educational Records

In the public secondary school setting, a parent/guardian has access to all of the student's educational records. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA; U.S. Department of Education, 2021) gives parents/guardians access to their child's or children's education records. These rights transfer to the student when that student reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the secondary school setting. However, a parent may access the student's education records until the child graduates from secondary school.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA):

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html>

When a student attends a postsecondary education institution, FERPA rights are transferred to the student. Access to the student's information, including courses and grades, must be granted to the parent/guardian in writing by the student. This is the case even if the student is financially dependent on the parent/guardian, including when the parent pays all expenses for attending the college. However, if a student with an IEP is enrolled in both high school and college (known as *dual enrollment*), federal funds may be used to support the student and provide a FAPE. Vocational Rehabilitation funds may also be used to support the transition process. The student must work with the DSS office at the college, as well (U.S. Department of Education, 2019a, 2019b).

## Transition Process and Procedures

The transition process formally begins at the secondary level but could begin at the middle school level. For students with LD and their parents/guardians, the transition from secondary to postsecondary or other settings can be challenging and is often quite overwhelming. Collaborators can assist students with LD and their parents/guardians in the process of transitioning to higher education using a variety of important steps (U.S. Department of Education [ED], 2020).

### Key players in the transition process include:

#### 1. Students and Parents/Guardians:

Students need to be involved in the discussion and planning process. IDEA requires that the student participate in establishing the IEP goals related to postsecondary transition.

#### 2. IEP Team and Other Related Professionals:

According to IDEA 2004, the transition process must begin for a student with an IEP by age 16. Some school districts will begin the process earlier, at around age 14. The IEP team plays an essential role in assisting the student in deciding the next steps beyond high school. This role includes choosing courses while in secondary school that are suitable for admission and success in higher education. The most important member of

the IEP team is the student. Students with a 504 plan also need to be involved in deciding their secondary school courses and next steps. In both cases, three elements are key to a student's success: (1) understanding accommodations; (2) understanding modifications; and (3) developing self-determination, self-advocacy, and self-awareness skills while still in high school. Other relevant key personnel, if they are not already members of the IEP Team, can include guidance counselors, social workers, educational consultants, school psychologists, and advocates.

### 3. Parent Center:

Most states have a Parent Center. There are approximately 100 Parent Training and Information Centers and Community Parent Resource Centers throughout the US and Territories. Parent Centers work with parents of children with disabilities ages birth to 26. Parent Centers can provide information about rights and responsibilities, disabilities, and advocacy. They can assist parents/guardians in participating effectively in their children's development and education. In addition, Parent Centers partner with professionals and policy makers to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment specifically focuses on assisting parents/guardians, students, and professionals on transition topics.

### 4. Vocational Rehabilitation:

Through the State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program, funds are provided to every state to assist with operating statewide vocational rehabilitation programs. Although their mission and goals are the same, the names of vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs vary from state-to-state. For example, New York's program is called the Adult Career and Continuing Education Services – Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR); Pennsylvania's program is known as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR); and Maryland's program is called the Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). The VR programs are designed to provide services for individuals with disabilities, consistent with the strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice, so that the individual may prepare for, and engage in, competitive, integrated employment and achieve economic self-sufficiency. VR services may not begin until the student graduates from secondary school, but the VR representative can be a participant in the IEP transition process while the student is still in high school. VR services can include helping a student attend a college or university as a form of vocational training. For the postsecondary student with a learning disability, VR services can include such support as helping to pay for books, assisting in obtaining transportation, and aiding in updating diagnostic evaluations. The student is also obligated to maintain adequate performance while enrolled in the postsecondary institution.

US Department of  
Education -  
Rehabilitation Services  
Administration

<https://rsa.ed.gov/about/programs/vocational-rehabilitation-state-grants>

## 5. Colleges and Universities:

Colleges and universities can play a major role in assisting the student with LD navigate the transition to higher education. This can be accomplished before and after the student is admitted. For example, representatives from the DSS can assist in the transition process prior to the student's admittance to the college while the student is still enrolled in high school. The name of the office can vary from institution to institution, but the functions remain the same. Some postsecondary DSS staff work closely with the Secondary Transition Coordinators to assist in providing information and preparing students and parents/guardians for the transition process. Some colleges offer well-structured transition information programs that include transition information fairs and workshops. Bridge programs provide students with academic, social, and career preparedness skills, especially during the summer. Finally, some postsecondary schools offer special orientation programs for incoming freshmen with disabilities on campus prior to the arrival of other students. Today, there are also accredited postsecondary associate degree and bachelor's degree awarding bodies that exclusively enroll students with learning differences and disorders (e.g., Beacon College, Landmark College) and embed support services at an institutional level.

## Documentation

Currently, many institutions of higher education set eligibility requirements for access to accommodations for students with disabilities. Postsecondary institutions can request documentation that is not burdensome to determine the need for "reasonable" accommodations to "otherwise qualified" individuals. This is not an "entitlement" but an "eligibility" process. To determine eligibility for services, an institution of higher education will request documentation to determine the impact or functional limitations of the disability in the academic setting from a qualified diagnostician. Individuals are required to follow the guidelines, policies, and procedures established by the institution. It should be noted that while all postsecondary institutions must abide by the same federal laws, guidelines for documentation may vary at different colleges and universities. In addition, college entrance exams (e.g., SAT or ACT) or professional qualifying exams (e.g., Praxis tests) may have different documentation requirements for requesting accommodations. If more current documentation is required, it could be difficult for some students to comply.

Students who are both English Language Learners (ELLs) and have LD often face even more challenges regarding appropriate documentation (Thomas, 2000). Students who were eligible for special education services in high school under IDEA (i.e., via an IEP) or accommodations or modifications under Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (i.e., via a 504 plan) are not automatically eligible for accommodations in college or university settings. Each institution of higher education sets eligibility requirements for reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities according to that institution's developed guidelines for documentation.



Colleges and universities must abide by Section 504 of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the ADA of 2008. Two key tenets of Section 504 are that postsecondary institutions cannot ask students, prior to admission, whether they have a disability, and students should never be denied admission just because of their disability (OCR, 2020a, 2020b). Additionally, it is up to the individual to decide whether or not to disclose their disability. Unlike a secondary school, a postsecondary institution will not seek out students with disabilities (OCR, 2020a, 2020b; Rothstein, 2018; Thomas, 2000). The point of contact is usually a DSS office, though these programs at many postsecondary institutions have a variety of names. For example, the University of Michigan's DSS office is called Services for Students with Disabilities, whereas the Jamestown Community College's DSS Office is called Accessibility Services. On campus websites, many of these offices appear under the umbrella of Student Services; however, if it is not readily apparent, the Admissions Office is a good point of contact.

College Students and Disability Law:

<http://www.ldonline.org/article/6082/>

Office for Civil Rights – Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education:

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>

When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, the Summary of Performance (SOP) was added as a requirement for secondary school IEP teams to develop for students transitioning to postsecondary education, a career, or other setting beyond high school. Although the SOP has the potential to contain a breadth of information about the student, and the services and accommodations that they received in secondary school, unfortunately, IDEA did not specify exactly how an SOP should look. Therefore, there is no consistency across states regarding the rigor or comprehensive quality of the document.

Three elements are required:

1. A statement of academic achievement;
2. A statement of functional performance; and
3. Recommendations to help the student achieve postsecondary goals.

However, the SOP does not address the documentation requirement at the postsecondary level. In 2005, a group of nationally represented organizations, the National Transition Documentation Summit, developed a comprehensive *Nationally Endorsed Summary of Performance Template*, which was made available to all states for adoption. This comprehensive document was adapted from the SOP developed by the Council for Educational Diagnostic Services, a Division of the Council for Exceptional Children. Approximately nine states have adopted the model SOP template, and some have insisted that disability documentation needs to be attached. Yet other states have developed brief versions of the SOP with very little supporting information. Given the inconsistencies in the content of SOPs submitted to postsecondary DSS offices, there is contention about whether an SOP is sufficient documentation to provide accommodations for students with disabilities (Shaw et al., 2010).

Documentation at the secondary level often is focused on eligibility, instruction, and intervention, while documentation at the postsecondary level tends to be centered more on eligibility, access, and accommodations (NJCLD, 2007). The ADA indicates that individuals must have a record of their disability or be perceived to have a disability. In some cases, postsecondary disability service providers narrowly interpret those guidelines. Postsecondary institutions may require that a student produce documentation within the previous three to five years that demonstrates a specific diagnosis with a clearly established functional limitation in a major life activity. In addition, many also require that an evaluation include standardized, adult-normed measures of aptitude, achievement, and information processing (Gormley et al., 2005; NJCLD, 2007).

There still exists a disconnect between assessment data gathered in secondary school and requirements at the postsecondary level. This includes, but is not limited to, professional qualifications of evaluators, areas of diagnosis, age-appropriateness of test instruments, use of IQ–achievement discrepancy, currency of the evaluation, and the functional impact on major life activity and academic accommodations (Gormley et al., 2005; NJCLD, 2007). While research supports using a response to intervention process first to identify and help students who fall behind academically, a cognitive evaluation for a learning disability may be considered after a number of rounds of well-executed interventions have failed (Reschly, 2014; Schneider & Kaufman, 2017). Nonetheless, a cognitive assessment is not required to identify a specific learning disability and, therefore, cognitive data may not be readily available to inform postsecondary support services.

Examples of reasonable accommodations at the postsecondary level include, but are not limited to, extended time (not unlimited time) for exams or projects, alternate location for testing, access to AT, or access to lecture notes. Accommodations at the postsecondary level do not include such things as tutoring, purchase of personal equipment (e.g., hearing aids), or modification of the curriculum. In some cases, such as the Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL) at Curry College, the curriculum may be specifically designed for students with LD, but this is unique.

Keeping this in mind, at many postsecondary institutions, the DSS office can, and does, advise students with LD. Sometimes, students are assigned to professional advisors or faculty who advise students with and without disabilities. Many colleges and universities are making concerted efforts to train faculty and professional advising staff on better understanding how to assist students with LD. Students with LD may be offered priority registration and/or reduced course loads, which are considered reasonable accommodations (OCR, 2011; Rothstein, 2018).

## **Academic Preparedness and College Readiness**

Two terms that are often bandied about regarding students who are transitioning from secondary school to a postsecondary setting are *academic preparedness* and *college readiness*. These are similar, but distinct skills.

Academic preparedness refers mostly to the skill sets that include academic proficiency in reading and mathematics at the college level. The National Assessment Governing Board spent more than a decade evaluating the results of the 12th grade administration of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as an indicator of academic preparedness for college and job training and found that, on average, results on the NAEP were similar to many college admissions and placement tests (Fields, 2014). Students with LD who participate in academic statewide assessments are considered able to participate in NAEP, and may use accommodations such as extended test time, writing directly in the booklet, having directions and/or test questions read aloud in English, taking breaks, participating in small group or one-on-one administration, and using a calculator for certain parts of the test (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). For students with LD transitioning to a postsecondary institution, such standardized assessments may not tell the whole story of their ability to handle college-level reading and/or math material.

The concept of college readiness includes the academic skills needed for success in college, but also addresses the behavioral aspects related to potential success in college, such as perseverance, time management, high school curriculum, self-determination skills. When the Every Student Succeeds Acts (ESSA) was signed in 2015, a significant goal was preparing students for success in the transition to college and careers. However, the perception of college readiness as addressed in ESSA focuses almost exclusively on academic development and opportunity (ED, 2020). For students LD, college readiness incorporates a myriad of factors beyond just academic preparedness. One study in particular concluded that a number of academic and behavioral factors affect students with LD in the area of college readiness, and that perseverance is one of the primary components of potential success (Milsom & Dietz, 2018).

## **Considerations for a Successful Transition from High School from the Secondary Perspective**

For most students, high school is an exciting and challenging time. There is so much to learn and so much to do that it is difficult to keep an eye on long-term goals. As mentioned above, students with LD and their parents/guardians not only have the typical concerns about leaving high school, but they also might worry about how to manage LD in college, vocational programs, or employment.

A terrific start for implementing a transition process is focusing on, talking about, and researching appropriate career directions at an early age. Identifying general fields of work or interest (science, business, arts, service industries, etc.) will impact course selection in high school and facilitate the transition process to postsecondary and/or employment. Having direction facilitates the process and allows the student to develop career goals. Career guidance early during high school is appropriate. There are four components that make up a successful and smooth transition from secondary to postsecondary education: (1) documentation, (2) IEP, (3) Individual Transition Plan (ITP), and (4) SOP.

## 1. Documentation

Many schools and employers expect documentation for postsecondary schooling and/or training to be appropriate to expectations at the adult level to clearly identify strengths and weaknesses, and list appropriate academic accommodations. What works in a high school setting may not be appropriate at the college level or in a work environment. Public schools, largely because of new policies and a lack of available resources, may not provide LD testing for students at the end of their high school careers; therefore, it is best practice to complete testing before the student graduates from high school. Once the student leaves the secondary setting, or beyond 21 years of age, the secondary school is not responsible for testing.

## 2. Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Likewise, IEPs need to be current and comprehensive. Students can and should be included in IEP team meetings. They should be familiar with the documentation and be able to explain the needed accommodations and why those accommodations work. Only they know intimately what can help and what does not work. It is important to make sure they have a say in determining which accommodations they need and making sure that those accommodations are part of the IEP. It is imperative for the secondary-level teachers and members of the Transition Team to help prepare the student as required under IDEA. This should include transition information collected from each state as outlined by the Office of Special Education Programs through *Transition and Post-School Outcomes*, designed to guide State Education Agencies in their implementation of IDEA, Part B (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative [NTACT:C], 2020).

## 3. Individual Transition Plan (ITP)

The next IEP meeting after a student turns 16 must include the development of an ITP. An IEP team can, however, decide to implement an ITP earlier. In fact, some states mandate earlier ITPs, usually around age 14. Like IEPs, ITPs should be reviewed annually. The ITP should detail the student's academic and career goals and identify the steps needed to provide the right academic base for achieving those goals after leaving high school. Recommendations for support services can be included.

An ITP can include information about developing life skills, self-advocacy, self-determination, self-awareness, and self-confidence skills as well as developing appropriate social skills, including effective communication for school, work, and other environments. Job shadowing can also be included in an ITP as well as college/technical/vocational school visits. For students who are having a hard time deciding on a postsecondary environment, experiencing different campuses and talking with both students and teachers in various fields will help students identify an environment that is suited to their academic, career, and social needs, as well as help them choose a career path. An ITP can include assistance with preparing and applying

for admission and college preparedness testing (SATs, ACTs, etc.). Referrals to VR services or other adult services may be appropriate to supplement ITP efforts at school.

#### **4. Summary of Performance (SOP)**

High schools typically prepare an SOP document when the student exits the school system either by graduating or by aging out. A comprehensive SOP provides the student, parents/guardians, agencies (e.g., VR), and colleges and training programs with concise information about goals, academic achievement, functional performance across different environments, and self-sufficiency (self-care, mobility, safety and self-determination). Unfortunately, because there is no national template required, every state has developed its unique SOP, which does not guarantee that it will be very comprehensive.

### **College Applications, Academic Preparedness Tests, and Financial Aid**

Most students need guidance in applying for colleges or other training programs. The application forms themselves and the timelines often present daunting barriers. Filling out forms may be a relatively new experience for many students. Reading directions carefully is necessary. Some of the responses needed may involve writing an essay or a short autobiography. Some schools no longer require college preparedness exams for admission. Consequently, students should find out if the tests are necessary for the school of their choice. Most two-year schools (community colleges and technical schools) have their own protocols for entrance and preparedness testing.

It is important for students to know LD cannot be a factor in the acceptance process at a college (or training program). Colleges are not allowed to consider disability criteria in the decision-making process for academic or vocational programs. Each student is admitted based on meeting the same criteria as all other students.

Documentation requirements for accommodated testing are stringent. If new or more testing is needed, adequate time for testing and receiving test results has to be figured in when developing a timeline to meet application deadlines. Students should check to see if the deadlines for registering for accommodated testing are different.

#### **Financial Aid**

Applying for financial aid, like applying to college, is complicated for everyone. Parents/guardians will need to be involved in the process if the student is still considered a dependent. Independent students will have to supply all the information needed for financial aid applications themselves. Other than federal and school-based financial aid awarded through the school, students should be apprised of other resources such as VR, Veterans Affairs Benefits, work-study programs, private scholarships, or other types of grants. Support in filling out those applications may again be necessary.

### **Assistive Technology (AT)**

Some type of AT for students with LD is typically available on most campuses. Examples of typical AT available on most campuses include, but are not limited to, text-to-voice programs (e.g., Texthelp Read & Write, Kurzweil Firefly); tools to aid with notetaking (e.g., Smartpens, Sonocent); writing software (e.g., Inspiration); and voice-to-text software (e.g., Dragon Speech Recognition). The student's own smart devices and computer may also have rather sophisticated accessibility software available, including sticky keys, notetaking, zoom/enlarging, speech-to-text, calendars, timers, and other self-management tools. An ITP could also include help with learning the features of the mobile devices that students already have. Agencies such as VR may be able to help with purchasing and learning how to use new devices and software.

### **Self-Advocacy, Self-Awareness, Self-Determination, and Executive Function Skills**

Students need broad self-advocacy skills (Daly-Cano et al., 2015). Being in a new environment, especially without familiar systems and support, can exacerbate a lack of self-confidence, anxiety, and other emotional manifestations. Postsecondary institutions will not, and cannot, legally ask about disability or the need for accommodations. It is the right of the students to choose to identify themselves (or not) to the appropriate department, provide the needed documentation, make the request for accommodations, and elect whether or not to use the accommodations. Some students choose to not self-identify, at least, initially. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 study reported that the majority (69%) of students with LD did not consider themselves to have a disability, and thus did not inform their institution of higher education (Newman et al., 2011). The need to blend in and not be involved with support services is strong. Students must understand the implications and consequences of not using services. Students who have strong self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-determination skills can often mitigate the issues surrounding the decision to self-identify. Discussions regarding self-identification during high school can be very helpful.

Students can practice while in high school by talking one-on-one with teachers, discussing their disability, articulating their specific needs, and being able to explain how the accommodation will make a difference (Adams & Proctor, 2010). At many colleges and universities, students are required to be a part of the interactive process relating to accommodations, and this may include providing a copy of the accommodation plan to their individual faculty. High school and college faculty do not need to know the diagnosis or specific information from the LD documentation to provide appropriate accommodations. They only need to know that the student has a disability and is eligible for accommodations, and that there is documentation supporting the requested accommodations. Additionally, because postsecondary students can choose to disclose, similarly they may choose whether or not to inform their college or university faculty of the need for an accommodation. There are many factors that contribute to a student's choice to disclose or not disclose. A student with LD could self-identify to the DSS office, help develop appropriate and reasonable accommodations for each class, and then ultimately decide not to follow through with the faculty member or members. However, it should be noted, legally, that accommodations are not retroactive. In other words, if the student decides to withhold accommodation documentation for a math class and then fails a test, the student can start receiving accommodations at that point but would not be able to demand prior accommodations for the failed math test. Note that a faculty member could

choose to offer retroactive accommodations (Rothstein, 2018). The overarching goal of transition services is to help the students become successful, independent, and contributing members of the community as adults. Executive function skills, self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-determination skills are vital to that success.

School personnel can be very helpful during high school in developing executive function skills and self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-determination skills. The bottom line, however, is that students need to know themselves, be able to articulate their needs, have a fairly clear idea of what they want in the future, and be willing to work towards those goals.

Executive function skills are used to manage oneself in any setting, and they include paying attention, having the ability to plan and prioritize activities, having the ability to start tasks and stay focused until the task is completed, understanding different points of view, regulating emotions, and self-monitoring. Other skills that can be considered under the executive functioning umbrella are problem solving, use of verbal and non-verbal working memory, and inhibition. Learners have some executive functioning skills; however, some students have executive function skill deficits that affect their learning and behavior. Students with these difficulties may need explicit support and encouragement to learn strategies that will help them develop these skills for a smoother transition to, and success in, higher education and beyond.

## **Postsecondary Transition Programs Held at Institutions of Higher Education**

IDEA 2004 mandates that transition planning begin at the age of 16. However, transition planning can begin at any time during the student's education in the PreK-12th grade. There are formal programs designed to address transition to postsecondary education. These programs can occur before high school, during high school, after high school, and during college. Although there are transition programs specifically designed for students with LD, it is important to note that some of the transition programs are for students with disabilities in general and may be fee based.

An example of a transition program for students with LD that occurs during high school is Beacon College's *Summer for Success* for rising juniors and seniors. *Project Access* at Howard Community College provides a summer transition program for college-bound students in grades 9-12 with all disabilities and who are receiving accommodations. The *Thames Academy* at Mitchell College is a unique secondary transition program for students with LD that takes place on campus at Mitchell College. Woodward Academy's *Transition Learning Program* is an example of a high school curriculum specifically designed with the goal of students with LD transitioning to college. In addition, there are a number of secondary school programs, such as the Gow School, that offer a college preparatory program for students with LD and also provide postsecondary transition advising. An example of a transition program for students with LD that occurs after high school is at Landmark College for college-bound high school graduates.

Transition programs that occur during college are often targeted towards students who have already been admitted to that institution. Two examples of a transition program for students with LD that occur during college include Curry College's *Summer PAL Program* and Muskingum College's *PLUS Early Connection Program*. However, other colleges offer transition programs for

all students with disabilities that would address the specific needs of the individual. For example, McDaniel College offers the *Step Ahead Program* for incoming students with all disabilities. Because new programs are added and some programs end, the HEATH Resource Center at The George Washington University has put together a list entitled *Summer Pre-College Programs for Students With Disabilities*. Appendix A contains examples of the different types of transition programs.

## Summary

This paper provides an overview of the various laws that govern Pre-K-12 and postsecondary education and affect much of what governs the process parents/guardians and students with LD follow in preparation for a successful transition to college. In addition, practical considerations and resources for students who aim to pursue a college degree are included. Throughout this paper, thoughtful preparation is encouraged, as the process must start no later than the completion of the ITP, at the age of 16 and preferably earlier, when goals are set for postsecondary planning so that the student takes the necessary prerequisite academic path in secondary school.

This paper emphasizes the importance of understanding the difference in the laws in Pre-K-12 and postsecondary. Whether the applicant received services under IDEA or Section 504, or are dual enrolled, colleges operate under Section 504 E and Title II of the ADA of 1990/ADAAA of 2008 (ADA Title II). Students who were served under IDEA and were guaranteed FAPE no longer have that guarantee. The same is true with students who have LD and were served under Section 504. Therefore, IEPs, 504 plans, and SOPs might not be considered sufficient documentation in postsecondary institutions.

The differences in accommodations and modifications are also explained in this paper. Students with LD might not be determined eligible for any modifications to the curriculum, but they may be granted accommodations if they present documentation that demonstrates a need for those services. Additionally, at the discretion of the college, students may have the opportunity to apply for a course waiver or to substitute an alternate course. The postsecondary institution must have a course substitution policy and is not obligated to waive a course requirement that is essential or integral to the student's program of study.

Parents/guardians should start postsecondary planning with the end in sight. They should begin the process of preparing for their child's future when their child is first identified with a LD. Although the college will not issue or follow an IEP or 504 plan, it will view the student's educational history in determination of whether they qualify for accommodations at this level. The institutions have policies and procedures for the individuals requesting services. It is the responsibility of the student to follow those procedures. When rules and procedures do not entitle a well-qualified student whose documentation does not meet the threshold for eligibility, DSS personnel can identify steps the student needs to take in order to receive those accommodations. Although some DSS offices may have an LD specialist on staff, this is not typical since many offices serve students with all disabilities.



A comprehensive list of resources is listed in this paper, students, families, preK-12 providers, and transition professionals are encouraged to review them. Preparing for and applying to college can be stressful for the family as a whole but can be especially so for the student. The more knowledgeable and organized a family and their student are in this process, the less family turmoil and student frustration will occur. The student's records must be updated and available either in hard copy or online if accommodations are needed for SATs or ACTs and for submission to DSS if the student chooses to disclose a disability.

Another theme in this paper is that self-determination, self-awareness, and the ability to advocate for accommodations is vital to the student's success. By knowing their accommodation needs and clearly explaining how they help, students can self-advocate and will also be more comfortable explaining accommodations received to their college faculty. By the time the student enrolls in college, they will usually be 18 or older, so parents can only *advise* the college student as appropriate.

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*This is an official document of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD). The following are the member organizations of the NJCLD: Academic Language Therapy Association, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Association of Educational Therapists, Association on Higher Education and Disability, Council for Learning Disabilities, Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness, Division for Learning Disabilities, International Dyslexia Association, International Literacy Association, Learning Disabilities Association of America, National Association of School Psychologists, and National Center for Learning Disabilities.*

*The mission of the National Joint Council of Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) is to provide multi-organizational leadership and resources to optimize outcomes for individuals with learning disabilities.*

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## Appendix A - Additional Resources

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## Appendix B - Legal Requirements in Secondary and Postsecondary Education

	Secondary	Secondary	Postsecondary
The Law	IDEA	Section 504, Subpart D	ADA/Section 504, Subpart E
Which students are covered?	Pre-K through Secondary School	Pre-K through Secondary School	Postsecondary School
Does the law require the school provide FAPE?	Yes	Yes	No
Does the law direct who at the school is responsible for the school's compliance with the law?	Yes	No (The law requires an individual but does not specify who in the building is responsible)	No
Does the school have a duty to identify a student with a disability?	Yes	Yes	No
Is the student required to self-identify in order to receive accommodations?	No	No	Yes
Is the school required to evaluate a student suspected of having a disability?	Yes	Yes	No
Is the student required to provide documentation of disability?	Not required, but permitted; School provides documentation	Not required, but permitted; School provides documentation	Yes
Does the student have an Individualized Education Program (IEP)?	Yes	No	No
Does the student have a 504 Plan?	No	Yes	No
Is the student allowed modifications to the curriculum?	Yes	Yes, under certain circumstances	Yes, under certain circumstances
Is the student allowed accommodations so they may access the curriculum?	Yes	Yes	Yes



## Appendix C - Example Transition Programs

<p><b>Transition Program During High School</b></p>	<p>Beacon College’s Summer for Success for rising juniors and seniors  <a href="https://www.beaconcollege.edu/admissions/beacon-college-high-school-program/">https://www.beaconcollege.edu/admissions/beacon-college-high-school-program/</a></p>		
<p><b>High School Curriculum Designed for Transition to Postsecondary</b></p>	<p>Thames Academy at Mitchell College  <a href="https://mitchell.edu/thames/">https://mitchell.edu/thames/</a></p>	<p>The Gow School  <a href="https://www.gow.org/">https://www.gow.org/</a></p>	<p>Woodward Academy’s Transition Learning Program  <a href="https://www.woodward.edu/academics/transition">https://www.woodward.edu/academics/transition</a></p>
<p><b>Summer Transition Program</b></p>	<p>Project Access at Howard Community College  <a href="https://www.howardcc.edu/services-support/academic-support/disability-support-services/project-access/">https://www.howardcc.edu/services-support/academic-support/disability-support-services/project-access/</a></p>		
<p><b>Post-High School Transition Program</b></p>	<p>Landmark College for college- bound high school graduates  <a href="https://www.landmark.edu/summer/summer-college-readiness-program">https://www.landmark.edu/summer/summer-college-readiness-program</a></p>		
<p><b>Transition Programs During College for Admitted Students with Learning Disabilities</b></p>	<p>Curry College’s Summer PAL Program  <a href="https://www.curry.edu/academics/program-for-advancement-of-learning/pal-summer-program">https://www.curry.edu/academics/program-for-advancement-of-learning/pal-summer-program</a></p>	<p>Muskingum College’s PLUS Early Connection Program  <a href="https://www.muskingum.edu/plus">https://www.muskingum.edu/plus</a></p>	
<p><b>Transition Program During College for Admitted Students with All Disabilities</b></p>	<p>McDaniel College - Step Ahead Program  <a href="https://www.mcdaniel.edu/academics/programs-degrees/academic-resources-support/student-accessibility-support-services/step">https://www.mcdaniel.edu/academics/programs-degrees/academic-resources-support/student-accessibility-support-services/step</a></p>		