

Preparing your High School Student for College: Tips for Parents

College life poses different challenges for students with disabilities. When students begin college, they are considered adults by college faculty and staff, and it is assumed they will begin to manage their daily lives independent of parents, school teachers, staff or administrators. The transition from high school to college can be very stressful and there are ways to prepare your student for those changes.

- Preparation for college starts early in your student's IEP meetings. Ask for a transition plan for your student to begin to take on some of the responsibility and self-advocate, especially by the senior year. One-on-one tutoring and personal aides are not provided by the college, so your student should be managing their own school work by senior year, requesting assistance only when needed.
- Students need to be able to communicate their strengths, weaknesses, needs and preferences to the disability services staff, university faculty and tutors as needed.
- Ensure your student will have the necessary recent testing needed to document a disability. This testing can be done during the senior year of high school, but needs to be scheduled early. Check with the college's website for specific disability documentation requirements and remember that the IEP is not usually sufficient documentation.
- Contact the California Department of Rehabilitation or the Department of Labor to determine whether your student meets the disability guidelines for assistance. DOR services may help finance college tuition and/or help with equipment/technology needed by students with disabilities that is not provided by the college.
- If your student's college requires entrance exams to be taken such as the SAT or ACT, find out how to request testing accommodations from the testing company directly. If your student needs testing accommodations, the need must be documented and provided to the testing company.
- Make sure your student knows how to use the needed accommodations such as computer software for speech recognition or screen readers.
- In college, emphasis is placed on equal access, not success. Make sure your student has learned the skills required to be successful and happy in college. These include note-taking skills, reading comprehension skills, organizational skills and time management skills.
- If your student is living on-campus, ensure your student knows how to do their own laundry, manage finances for meals and manage and store their medication (if applicable).
- Your student is responsible to determine if they will register with disability services. The college has the responsibility of providing accommodations to ensure equal access and not to identify students with special needs, as is the case in the K-12 level.
- Help foster your student's career exploration. Encourage them to not only consider what they want to study in college but what they think they may want to do afterwards.
- When your student is applying to colleges encourage them to become familiar with each institution's disability services center and the registration process for each.
- An intentional and gradual increase of your students independent decision-making and autonomy as they approach college age will put them in a far better position for early success at the postsecondary level, than arriving to the college environment with a "floodgate" of new found freedom.