

Special Education Resources for Students and Their Families



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Working with early college students who learn differently

In an early college high school, students have the opportunity to take college courses while still in high school and to earn as many as 60 college credits at no cost to themselves or their families. Preparation for college success comes in many forms, including learning essential academic skills, study strategies, and work habits; developing independence and self-advocacy; and understanding the college campus environment. The information presented here highlights some things that students who learn differently, and their families, need to know about the transition to college.

SECTION 1:

How Does Understanding Your Learning Style Benefit You?

The way that most college courses, books, and assignments are designed is like a one-size-fits-all shirt. The design may work well for a few people, but it isn't a perfect fit for most of us. To make a course "fit" better for who you are as an individual learner, you need to know a lot about yourself, your learning preferences, and your academic strengths and challenges. Everyone learns differently, and we can all use strategies that help make academic work be a better "fit" for our individual learning needs.

"Cerebrodiversity," is the formal term for the idea that our brains are not uniform and we each learn differently. Understanding how you are unique as a learner helps in developing strategies that make it easier to be successful academically. For example, two students may get the same assignment to read a chapter in a textbook. For one student, an hour spent reading, highlighting, and taking notes on the text may be the best way to do that assignment. For another student, getting an audio version of the text to listen to, and pausing to stretch every fifteen minutes, may be the best way. Some students may not need a formal system to keep class materials organized. Other students know that to stay on track in courses, they need to enter every due date for assignments and tests into an electronic calendar that has alarms and reminders. Finding out which strategies work for you will help you to succeed in school and in the workplace. Spend time with internet resources, such as those listed at the end of this section, that will help you reflect on your learning style.

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Think about how you learn best as you study and work with family, instructors, and school staff. Some questions to consider are:

- Which classes are easy or enjoyable for you and why?
- Which classroom activities do you feel most confident doing?
- Which classes are challenging and why?
- What helps you stay calm in stressful situations?
- Which supports and accommodations help you the most?

As you understand more about who you are as a student and as an individual, you can more confidently explain to others what you need to succeed and how they can support you. You become better at standing up for yourself and your rights. Self-advocacy is the skill that college students with disabilities often say is a key to their success—understanding personal strengths and needs, identifying personal goals, knowing legal rights and responsibilities, and communicating these to others.

Getting actively involved in the annual IEP meeting at your high school is one way to begin practicing self-advocacy. Before an IEP meeting, you and your family can discuss what you want to share at the meeting and how you can actively participate in the discussion. No one is better qualified than you are to explain your goals, progress, challenges, and which supports are working for you. [Taking Part in IEP Meetings](#)

In addition to college preparation at your early college high school, the following websites can help you and your family to learn more about topics such as individual learning styles and self-advocacy.

“Stepping Forward: A Self-Advocacy Guide for Middle and High School Students” is an interactive site with surveys, videos, and other resources to help you to understand your disability and learning style, and to plan and goal-set for the future.

http://www.ct.gov/brs/lib/brs/pdfs/guidepostdocs/steppingforward_color_interactive_14.pdf

“Going to College” provides individual learning style tools and interest inventories, as well as planning and goal-setting activities that can help students with disabilities and their families to plan for college.

<http://www.going-to-college.org/index.html>

“Wrights Law” provides information about special education laws and self-advocacy issues.

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/self.advocacy.htm>

“Education Planner” provides self-assessments that help you discover your learning style through online quizzes: <http://www.educationplanner.org/students/self-assessments/index.shtml>

Landmark College, a private college in Putney, VT that serves students who learn differently, has developed a questionnaire to help students and families identify strengths and challenges in five key areas that relate to college readiness: Academic Skills, Self-Understanding, Self-Advocacy, Executive Function (mental skills that help the brain organize and act on information), and Motivation and Confidence.

https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/styles/iidc/defiles/INSTRC/Webinars/College-Readiness_Assessment.pdf

“Family Guide to Special Education Services for School-Age Children,” a guide for parents created by the NYC DOE, describes the continuum of services and supports available for school-age students with IEP’s.

http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/ronlyres/DBD4EB3A-6D3B-496D-8CB2-C742F9B9AB5C/0/Parent_Guide_for_Students_with_Disabilites_Updated_Web.pdf

SECTION 2:

Taking Part in IEP Meetings and Transitions Planning

It is productive for you and your family to have open and positive conversations about your learning differences, your strengths, and your challenges. You can build

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self-awareness and self-confidence by talking with people you trust about the characteristics of your disability, your individual learning style, and which supports and accommodations are most beneficial. If you are accustomed to explaining and discussing your learning needs at high school and at home, you will be ready to advocate for the supports you need in college courses with the Office for Disability Services.

Within the IEP, the transition plan section is an important legal document that outlines what a student plans to do after completing high school. It provides details about a student's plan to work toward their personal and career goals, and it lists who is involved in helping to meet those goals. High school staff gather information for the transition plan from a student and their family.

Everyone benefits when parents and students attend and participate actively in all IEP meetings. As a student, you can contribute to your IEP development and the IEP meeting by sharing your perspective on your own learning style, cognitive needs and preferred accommodations. Self-advocacy skills are a critical element of college success for students with disabilities. Students and families should identify opportunities to practice self-advocacy and responsibility. Early college high school offers a student chances to explore their comfort with taking on responsibility and independence.

Links to Useful Information and Resources:

A planning and resource guide for parents and students from the non-profit What Kids Can Do (WKCD) is available here: [Advice for parents from WKCD](#)

"Advocates for Children of New York" publishes an informative, comprehensive guide called "Transition Services: Helping Student with Disabilities Move from School to Adulthood." The guide contains details about the transition process for students and resources for parents.

http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/transition_guide.pdf?pt=1

"The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition" (NCSET) provides a "Parent Brief: Promoting Effective Parent Involvement in Secondary Education and Transition."

<http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=423>

"Stepping Forward: A Self-Advocacy Guide for Middle and High School Students" addresses self- advocacy and transition planning.

http://www.ct.gov/brs/lib/brs/pdfs/guidepostdocs/steppingforward_color_interactive_14.pdf

Early college high school staff and the college liaison will help you take the necessary steps to access supports on campus, which start with scheduling a meeting with the Office for Disability Services.

SECTION 3:

What Are the Differences between High School and College?

One of the main differences between high school and college for students who learn differently is that in college, students have greater responsibility to advocate for the services and supports they need. There are many different supports and accommodations available to students on the college campus, which students can access through the Office for Disability Services. This chart summarizes some of the other differences between high school and college for students with disabilities:

[Differences between high school and college for SWD](#)

As you prepare for early college courses, you, your family, and the staff at your high school can talk about when you should begin taking college courses and what supports you need to succeed in college courses.

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Early college high school staff and the college liaison will help you take the necessary steps to access supports on campus, which start with scheduling a meeting with the Office for Disability Services. The college can only receive information about your learning needs or disability directly from you, the student. You will need to bring current, up-to-date documentation, including your IEP and related testing or evaluations. You should be prepared to explain what accommodations or services you have been receiving, and what services you need for your college courses.

Some of the services and accommodations commonly provided in high school classrooms are not available on the college campus. For instance, the college is not able to provide paraprofessional services, integrated co-teaching (ICT), or small group instruction like Special Education Teacher Support Services (SETSS). For early college students, academic supports for college courses sometimes include IEP services provided by the high school staff and support services available on the college campus.

Sometimes students are reluctant to approach the Office for Disability Services, but the services provided through that office can be critical for your success in college courses. Talking with the staff of the Office for Disability Services is your first step to access support for college courses such as extra time on tests, distraction-free testing locations, or assistive technology.

When you have met with the Office for Disability Services and agreed on what services you will receive, the Office for Disability Services will typically provide a letter for each professor describing the services. Professors do not receive any background information or details about your disability, so you can decide if you want to share any additional information with your professors. Some students find it helpful to practice or prepare talking points before speaking with a professor about their disability. For a sample template, see: [Talking to My Professor](#)

College courses you complete as an early college student should be reflected in the transition plan in your IEP, because those course credits are an important part of your plan for what you will do after leaving high school.

Links to Useful Information and Resources:

"CUNY's Disability Resources and Services" provides information and resources for students with disabilities.

<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/sa/services/disabilities.html>

"CUNY's Disability Resources and Services Student FAQs" provides answers to frequently asked questions.

<http://www.cuny.edu/about/administration/offices/sa/services/disabilities/faqs.html>

"National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth" (NCWD/Youth) provides resources comprised by partners with expertise in education, youth development, and workforce development.

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>

"Association on Higher Education and Disability" (AHEAD) is a professional association committed to full participation of persons with disabilities in postsecondary education.

<http://www.ahead.org/students-parents>

"Action for Reform in Special Education (ARISE) Coalition" members have joined together to provide a collective and powerful voice on behalf of students with special needs in New York City. They seek to compel systemic reform to improve special education, promote greater transparency and accountability of the education system, and most critically, assure more positive outcomes and options for all students.

<http://www.arisecoalition.org>

"Advocates for Children of New York" has been protecting and promoting the educational rights of students with disabilities for the past 40 years.

http://www.advocatesforchildren.org/who_we_serve/students_with_disabilities

"U.S. Department of Education" provides explanations of the rights and responsibilities of college-bound students with disabilities.

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

"Advice for Parents: Helping Your Child Succeed in School and Life" by What Kids Can Do provides strategies for parents to help their children succeed.

http://www.whatkidscando.org/specialcollections/advice_for_parents/pdf/Advice_for_Parents.pdf

"National Center on Secondary Education and Transition" (NCSET) coordinates national resources, offers technical assistance, and disseminates information related to secondary education and transition for youth with disabilities in order to create opportunities for youth to achieve successful futures.

<http://www.ncset.org>

"The Learning Scientists" are cognitive psychological scientists interested in research on education and the science of learning. The site provides strategies for learning for students, teachers, and parents.

<http://www.learningscientists.org/downloadable-materials/>