

Opening Doors to Postsecondary Education



The process of selecting a postsecondary institution involves research, visits, comparisons, and self-analysis. Your goal as you start thinking about life after high school is to select an institution with the programs you want, an atmosphere you are comfortable in, and an academic climate that will enable you to achieve your goals. These processes and objectives are true for all families embarking on the college selection process. As a student with special needs, you must also analyze and compare the services and programs available as you may need to access these resources if you require support in order to reach your full potential. College is a major step toward independence and will require you to be your own advocate. Services and accommodations are available, but as an adult pursuing postsecondary education, you must identify yourself as a student with special needs and request them. By taking the initiative and working closely with your school counselor and special education teachers, you can feel confident that your next educational endeavor will be a successful one.

Preparing for College

- **Know yourself** and how you learn best to ensure you get the services you need to be successful
- **Research programs** as they will vary greatly from college to college
- **Be sure testing is complete** and up-to-date as it will be submitted to programs for evaluation
- **Start applying early** as space in comprehensive programs is often limited
- **Advocate for yourself** and learn to articulate your needs
- **Explain your accommodations** to ensure you receive necessary services

Step 1: Know Yourself

One of the first steps toward selecting the right school for you involves evaluating your needs as a student and determining what you will need to be successful in college. It is beneficial to work with your school counselor and your special education teachers from the beginning because they can help you recognize key accommodations, learning strategies, and resources that have helped you achieve success in high school. Your Junior Conference or Annual Review Meeting may be a good time to begin this discussion. Once you have clearly identified what you are looking for in a post-secondary institution, you can begin looking for programs that match your requirements.

Step 2: Research Programs

As you begin exploring various college options, you will find that all schools accommodate students with learning disabilities to some extent. They all have an Office of Disability Services and are required by law to provide reasonable accommodations. For some students, this may be all that is necessary. However, other students benefit from a more comprehensive program that addresses their needs and provides support in addition to their accommodations.

All colleges are required to provide reasonable **accommodations**, which are modifications that allow students to overcome or work around a disability. Typically, there are no significant changes to the curriculum or the overall expectations for the course. Examples of accommodations include assistive technology, extended time for exams, separate location for exams, use of a note-taker or reader, and class materials in an alternative format. To obtain accommodations, you must work with the Office of Disability Services at your college. The process typically involves the following steps:

- **Request disability accommodations** (student must self-identify)
- **File documentation with proof of the disability and need for accommodations** (Be sure testing is complete and up to date since it will be relied upon heavily to determine the need for accommodations.)

- **Work with the Office of Disability Services to determine appropriate accommodations**
- **Meet with each class instructor to discuss how the accommodations will be implemented**

In addition to providing accommodations, some colleges offer **comprehensive programs** specifically for students with learning disabilities. These programs may provide students with more individualized instruction, tutoring services, peer mentors, or an advocate on campus to promote accountability and to monitor progress. An additional application is usually necessary and is often reviewed after the student has been accepted to the college by the Office of Admission. Programs are often very limited in the number of students they can accept and therefore, quite competitive. Researching early is vital to ensure you do not miss application deadlines for programs you deem the best fit.

Step 3: Be Sure Testing is Complete

Check with your school counselor or school psychologist to ensure that all of your testing is complete and up-to-date. Recent testing is not only needed to receive accommodations in college, but for standardized tests including the SAT and ACT. Programs typically require that testing be completed within the past three years.

Although you may qualify for certain testing accommodations in high school, they are not automatically transferred to colleges or the private testing organizations that administer the SAT, ACT, Advanced Placement exams, and SAT Subject Tests. Register for exams early and submit the necessary documentation, including your SSD form, in case you need the extra time to gather data to support your request for accommodations. Even with additional materials, the testing company can deny your requested modifications.

Step 4: Start Applying Early

Be mindful of application deadlines as you narrow your list to ensure you submit all documentation in a timely manner. You are not obligated to reveal your disability on college applications, but you may choose to do so. You must meet admission standards to be accepted to college regardless of your disability and whether you choose to disclose. If you are applying to comprehensive programs for students with learning disabilities, space is typically limited and additional forms are required, so plan accordingly. The process of applying to comprehensive programs typically includes the following steps:

- **Apply to the Office of Admission** (standard application process; often requiring high school transcript, SAT/ACT, letters of recommendation, and college essay)
- **Apply to program** (often requires additional application specifically for program, recent psychological evaluation/testing, copy of IEP or 504 plan, letters of recommendation, and an essay discussing your disability and why you are a good fit for the program)
- **Interview** (if required)

Staying organized is key because most colleges will have you apply both to the Office of Admission and to their comprehensive program. There is more paperwork and documentation to keep on top of, but the effort is worthwhile if your goal is to enroll in a program that will enable you to be successful.

Step 5: Advocate for Yourself

Upon graduating from high school, the laws regarding disability services and accommodations change. Ultimately, the responsibility to identify and advocate for students with disabilities shifts from the school district to the student. The college process is a prime opportunity to begin advocating for yourself as a student since you will be required to do so in college. Take the initiative to meet with your school counselor or special education teachers, follow up on your applications, and take an active role in

the process. It is great practice for your future and will empower you to take change of your educational pursuits. A brief outline of the laws regarding special education is below:

High School	Postsecondary Education
Under the Individuals with Disabilities Act, all students are entitled to a free appropriate public education regardless of ability. Districts are required to identify students with disabilities through free assessment. Special education services are individualized to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. These services are provided in accordance with an Individualized Education Program, which is specifically tailored to the unique needs of each student.	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act require that colleges provide accessibility and reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. Students are responsible for disclosing their disability and providing the appropriate documentation. The college will then determine reasonable accommodations to ensure equal access and participation. There are no formal special education services or Individualized Education Plans.

Step 6: Explain Your Accommodations

Be sure that you feel comfortable articulating exactly what you need in an education setting. If you are applying to comprehensive programs, the application will typically require that you identify your needs and explain what you require to be a successful student. However, it is important that you also feel comfortable speaking about them. As a college student, you will likely have to meet with a representative from the Office of Disability Services or from your program to determine necessary accommodations. Knowing how to advocate for yourself and justify your needs as a student will help ensure that you receive the accommodations and support you need. Be sure to do this at the beginning of the semester and resist the temptation to put it off until the end. Once your accommodations have been determined, you may also have to speak with your professors directly if you will receive accommodations in their class.

Resources

[ACCES-VR \(Adult Career and Continuing Education Services- Vocational Rehabilitation\)](#) works with students, families, and school districts to coordinate appropriate services for students with disabilities who are leaving secondary education and entering adult vocational rehabilitation and related services. Make contact with ACCES-VR before graduation; ideally no later than your junior year. This program offers a variety of services to eligible students such as vocational assessments, job placement, job coaches, book money, etc. Not all students with special needs qualify for services.

[College Success for Students with Learning Disabilities: Strategies and Tips to Make the Most of Your College Experience](#), by Cynthia Simpson and Vicky Spencer

[Learning Outside The Lines: Two Ivy League Students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD Give You the Tools for Academics Success and Educational Revolution](#), by Edward M. Hallowell (Foreward), Jonathan Mooney, and David Cole

[Self-Advocacy Skills for Students with Learning Disabilities: Making it Happen in College and Beyond](#), by Henry B. Reiff

[Survival Guide for College Students with ADHD or LD](#), by Kathleen G. Nadeau

The K&W Guide to College Programs & Services for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, 11th Edition, by Princeton Review, Marybeth Kravets, and Imy Wax

ThinkCollege.net is an excellent online resource that allows you to search for programs by state or program type.

Colleges with Comprehensive Support Programs

[Adelphi University](#) Learning Resource Program

[Adelphi University](#) Bridges to Adelphi

[Alfred University](#) Center for Academic Success

[American University](#) Learning Services Program

[American International College](#) Supportive Learning Services

[Austin Peay University](#) Full Spectrum Learning

[Barry University](#) Center for Advanced Learning Program (CAL)

[Beacon College](#) Empowering Students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD

[Bellevue College](#) Autism Spectrum Navigators

[College of Charleston](#) REACH Program

[Concordia College](#) Concordia Connection Program

[Curry College](#) Program for Advancement of Learning (PAL)

[Dean College](#) Arch Learning Community

[Defiance College](#) ASD Affinity Program

[Dowling College](#) Academic Access Program

[Eastern Illinois University](#) Students with Autism Transitional Education Program (STEP)

[Eastern Michigan University](#) Autism Collaborative Center

[Eastern University](#) The College Success Program for Students Living with Autism Spectrum Disorder

[Fairleigh Dickinson University](#) Regional Center for Learning Disabilities

[Fairleigh Dickinson University](#) COMPASS Program

[Gannon University](#) Program for Students with Learning Disabilities (PSLD)

[George Mason University](#) Learning into Future Environments Program (Mason LIFE)

[Georgian Court University](#) [The Learning Connection \(TLC\)](#)

[Hofstra University](#) The Program for Academic Learning Skills (PALS)

[Iona College](#) College Assistance Program (CAP)

[Kings College](#) First Year Academic Studies Program

[Landmark College](#) Integrated Approaches for LDs including Dyslexia, ADHD, ASD

[Lesley College](#) The Threshold Program

[Long Island University](#) Academic Resource Program (ARP)

[Lynn University](#) Institute for Achievement and Learning

[Marist College](#) Learning Disabilities Support Program

[Marshall University](#) Autism Training Center

[Marymount Manhattan College](#) Academic Access Program

[McDaniel College](#) Student Academic Support Services (SASS)

[Mercyhurst College](#) Autism Initiative at Mercyhurst

[Mercyhurst College](#) Learning Differences Program

[Misericordia College](#) Alternative Learners Project (ALP)

[Mitchell College](#) The Bentsen Learning Center

[Mount Ida College](#) Student Achievement Program (SAP)

[New York Institute of Technology](#) Vocational Independence Program
[Northeastern University](#) Learning Disabilities Program (LDP)
[Nova Southeastern University](#) Access Plus Support Program
[Rochester Institute of Technology](#) Empower Program
[Rochester Institute of Technology](#) Spectrum Support Program
[Rutgers University](#) College Support Program for Students on the Autism Spectrum (CSP)
[Seattle Central College](#) Supported Academics and Independent Life Skills Program (SAILS)
[St. Thomas Aquinas College](#) Pathways Program
[Taft College](#) Transition to Independent Living Program
[Texas Tech University](#) Burkhardt Center for Autism Education & Research
[University of Alabama](#) ASD College Transition and Support Program
[University of Arizona](#) Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques Center (SALT)
[University of Arkansas](#) Autism Support Program
[University of Connecticut](#) Beyond Access
[University of Denver](#) Learning Effectiveness Program
[University of Tennessee](#) MoSAIC Program
[Virginia Polytechnic Institute](#) Stepped Transition in Education Program for Students with ASD (STEPS)
[Western Kentucky University](#) Kelly Autism Program
[Wright State University](#) Raiders on the Autism Spectrum Excelling (RASE)