

Preparing *for* College

*A Resource
Guide
for Students
with Learning Disabilities*





2007

Radnor Township School District
135 S. Wayne Avenue, Wayne, PA 19087 • www.rtsd.org

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Preparing for College

A Resource Guide for Students with Learning Disabilities

Deciding to go to college is both an exciting and anxious time for any student, let alone a student with a learning disability. Students with learning differences, however, are attending colleges, universities and other post-secondary institutions in greater numbers today than ever before. Twenty years ago, there were approximately 32 support programs across the country; today there is an office of disability services in almost all post-secondary schools.

Studies have shown that obtaining a college degree narrows the gap in employment. However, the drop-out rate for students with learning disabilities is two times higher than the general population.

In general, students with learning differences are expected to fulfill the same requirements, both in admissions and in academic work, as non-disabled students. One of the biggest differences for families to understand is that public schools are an “entitlement” system: under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), students with disabilities are provided an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which ends on graduation from high school.

Colleges operate under a system of “eligibility”: students with disabilities are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This act provides some accommodations, given appropriate documentation for a specific disabling issue or condition.

The process of selecting, applying to, and surviving college can be very stressful for students with learning disabilities. The information in this handbook is designed to provide a realistic look at some of the factors required for success in college, to offer suggestions for getting started now, and to offer help in answering the question, “How do I prepare for college?”

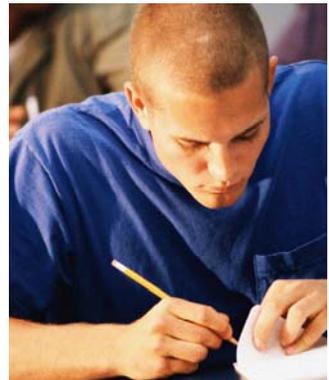
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Getting Ready

If college is in your future, there are many things you can do to prepare. Your case manager and counselor can guide you toward good decisions.

- Select high-school courses that will prepare you for the general studies portion of the college curriculum.
- Advocate for yourself.
- Take the most academically challenging program in the most integrated setting possible, when appropriate.
- Take the same college-prep curriculum that college-bound peers are taking, when appropriate.
- Take courses where the same academic standards are met using reasonable and appropriate accommodations.
- Take advanced courses, when appropriate, if you are interested in a specific major (e.g., more math and science courses for a nursing major).
- Develop an understanding of the nature of your disability and learning style.
- Avoid temptation of “retreating” to lower-track classes.
- Be able to articulate your needs and the support you require.
- Be wary of course waivers and carefully consider the implications of these choices.
- Know your responsibility for documentation requirements at the postsecondary level. (See “Documentation” on page 7).
- Avoid using your learning disability as an excuse.



Questions to Ask Colleges



Almost all schools provide some type of support *services*. Assistance is provided, but much of the responsibility falls on the student.

A support *program* is more comprehensive and is for students who require a great deal of structure and support.

Here are some questions to ask to find the appropriate level of support to meet student needs:

- Does the school have a support program or support services for students?
- What does the service program include?
- What placement tests/documentation are needed to access this support?
- Are there summer/transitional courses offered for learning support services?
- Are course substitutions or waivers granted to students because of their disability?
- Are there support groups for students with disabilities?
- Are there any special costs involved?
- Who will be their academic advisor? Does the advisor have any training in special education?
- What types of accommodations are available?
- Are there special admissions considerations for students with disabilities?

The Application Process

Post-secondary students are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which makes it unlawful for post-secondary educational institutions to discriminate against students on the basis of disability.



Students with disabilities applying to a college must meet the entrance standards of that college, including minimum SAT scores, regardless of disability.

Legally, the student does not need to reveal a disability, nor can colleges ask.

Students may choose to write a personal essay revealing how their disability has impacted them and put a positive spin on how they have grown from their personal challenge.

High-school teachers can also write letters of support, commenting on overcoming obstacles. The personal essay and/or letters can reveal to the admissions committee how the student is determined to be successful in the college setting. Upon acceptance, students can send documentation to the appropriate service provider/office of disability services.

Documentation

A big surprise to parents and students is that the familiar Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Evaluation Report (ER) or 504 plan are not relevant documents in the higher-education setting. While it may have identified services that were effective for the student in a high-school setting, it generally is not sufficient documentation for colleges. This is because post-secondary education presents different demands than a high-school education, and what is needed to meet these demands may be different.



Once a student has been accepted at a college and requests academic accommodations, they must submit current documentation. Documentation by a qualified evaluator (medical doctor, psychologists or other qualified diagnostician) should include:

- Background and history of the disability, including relevant medical and social history;
- Diagnostic interview including candidate self-report and interviews with others;
- Transcripts and standardized test scores;
- Assessment of aptitude, academic achievement, information processing (Learning Disability/Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder/Traumatic Brain Injury);
- Medical or psychiatric assessments, where appropriate;
- A specific diagnosis;
- Functional limitations of the disability (i.e., how does the disability substantially limit a major life activity?);
- Current medication regimen and possible side effects;
- Identification of how the disability substantially limits the student in the college setting (e.g. in the residence hall, classroom, extra-curricular activities, etc.);
- Recommendations for reasonable accommodations per 504/ADA guidelines as applied to college setting.

Neither the high school nor the post-secondary school is required to conduct or pay for a new evaluation to document disability.

It is the student's responsibility to provide the necessary documentation to the disability service provider. Documentation should also be recent. "Recent" depends on the nature of the disability; e.g., medical or mental health disabilities of a changing nature may require more frequent assessments and/or updates.

Self-Advocacy

Managing your disability: a big change and surprise to parents is that they are no longer the primary advocate for their children in the higher-education system. In fact, teachers cannot communicate with parents without a signed release from the student.

This is a good thing: it's a time for students to learn to advocate for themselves.

Here are some reminders:

The Student is the Responsible Party

- The student has the responsibility to self-identify as a student with a disability, if assistance is desired.
- Higher education does not use team decisions as is done at the secondary level (no IEP/504 Plan/ER).
- The student has to request accommodations.
- Decisions regarding requested accommodations are a result of collaboration between the student and the disability service provider.

The Student Decides When or If to Disclose the Disability

- The student retains the right to decide to disclose to professors. (Disability service provider does not always notify professors.)
- The student may need accommodations in some courses, but not others.
- The student need only disclose the disability when accommodation requests specifically involve the professor; e.g., test accommodations.
- The students must take the initiative.
- The students must contact teachers in a timely manner, at least 48-72 hours notice in advance. (Don't forget college professors are not on campus all day.)
- Teachers must be notified before *each* test, not once a semester.

The Student Presents the Appropriate Documentation

- The student provides documentation that identifies functional limitations and supports the requests for accommodations.
- A diagnosis itself doesn't make it a disability.
- Communication regarding documentation is between the student and the disability service provider.

The Student Requests & Negotiates Reasonable Accommodations

- All requests are initiated by the student (not by disability service provider, parent/guardian or advocate) at the beginning of the semester.
- Accommodations may meet student needs, but do not substantially alter the fundamental nature of the course, program or university standards.
- Accommodations not requested are not provided.
- Requested accommodations are specific to the course and setting and may not generalize to other courses or other settings.



- The student is the liaison between the disability service provider and professors; i.e., alternate test arrangements, usually made a week in advance.
- The student provides the specifics regarding requests for accommodations; e.g., font size, table height, text chapters to be taped, scribes, etc.
- The student is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of implemented accommodations; e.g., quality of taped texts, notes from a note-taker, etc.

How Does High School...

High School

- Courses require less time out of class.
- Short reading assignments are usually covered in class, depending on the disability.
- Direct instruction by resource teacher available.

Studying

- Student is expected to study 2-3 hours daily for each hour in class.
- Substantial amounts of independent reading may be assigned and not reviewed in class.
- Study time may increase 50-100%.

College

High School

- Teachers check for completed homework and remind students to turn in assignments.
- Teachers approach student if they believe assistance is needed.
- Students are encouraged to approach teacher.
- Teachers are certified and have been trained in teaching methods to assist in learning new material.
- Teachers present material to help the student understand the text.
- Teachers often put important information on board or overhead to be copied for notes.
- Outside sources may be required less often.

Instructors

- Professors distribute course syllabus and expect students to complete assignments and prepare for exams as scheduled.
- Professors expect students to approach them if assistance is needed.
- Professors are often experts in their fields, but may not be trained as teachers in special education instruction.
- Professors may not follow the textbook and often elect to supplement the text with additional material.
- Professors often lecture in a free-style manner, leaving the student to identify important points and/or a format for note taking.
- Professors frequently require library research.

College

High School

- Grades are given for most assigned work.
- Homework grades often help when test grades are low.
- Graduation occurs when all required courses are passed with a "D" or better, or IEP goals have been met.

Grades

- Grades may not be given for all assigned work.
- Extra credit or homework is rarely used to compensate for low test scores.
- Graduation will occur only if the standards of the program and of the university have been met.

College

...Compare to College?

High School

- Six hours/day or 30 hours/week.
- School year - 180 days.
- Teachers and parents monitor attendance.
- Textbooks provided.

Studying

- 12-15 hrs/week - may include evening and/or Saturday classes.
- School year is divided into semesters or trimesters.
- Professors may or may not check attendance.
- Student pays for texts; at least \$300-\$500 each term.

College

High School

- Given frequently and cover small amounts of material.
- Make-up tests available.
- May emphasize memorization of factual information.
- Modification/alteration to evaluation does occur.

Tests

- Infrequent and cover large amounts of material.
- Make-up tests not always available.
- Often includes inferential reasoning and analysis/synthesis of material.

College

High School

- Time structured by others.
- Need for money for special events/purchases.
- Student is often dependent on parents to inform and remind them of their responsibilities.

Personal Freedom

- Time management is the responsibility of the student.
- Need for money is to meet basic necessities first; entertainment is second.
- Student is responsible for actions and must adhere to the university code of conduct.

College

With the transition from high school to college, the student will see an increased number of areas in which personal responsibility plays a critical role. This transition can be exciting... and a little scary. Preparation is key.

12 Community Colleges

A community college is a great place for some students to begin if they are unsure about their ability to handle the academic rigors of college along with living on their own for the first time. It provides an environment where students can focus on academics, while learning such skills as time management and self-advocacy with the support of living close to home.

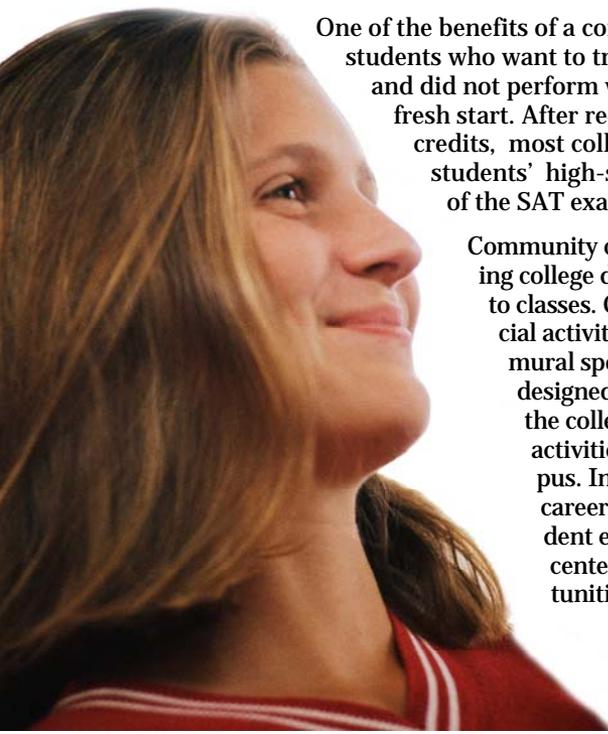
For students who are not clear about their future, this experience may help them clarify their goals, while they gain maturity and confidence. Some students who start at a four-year college struggle with the workload, expectations and independence. A community college provides a starting point for a student who may decide to transfer later. The transition from high school to community college and then to a four-year school may insure a greater chance of success. The community college offers something for everyone. It offers a variety of programs that can transfer to a four-year college.

Delaware County Community College, for instance, has transfer agreements with 40 area colleges and universities. If a student's goal is to focus on skills for a specific career, an associate's degree is available. For those students whose strengths lie in hands-on learning, a certificate program provides them with the skills necessary for direct entry into many careers.

All students are given entry exams to assess their skills and assist in placement into appropriate levels of classes. The three developmental levels of English and two levels of math are designed to build a solid foundation for students and to prepare them to be successful in college level classes. In addition, support services and accommodations are available, based on individual need.

One of the benefits of a community college is that students who want to transfer to a four-year school and did not perform well in high school can get a fresh start. After receiving 30 graded college credits, most colleges do not consider the students' high-school transcript or the results of the SAT exam.

Community colleges recognize that attending college does not consist solely of going to classes. Campuses offer a variety of social activities including college and intramural sports. Clubs and activities are designed to give the student a flavor of the college experience by offering many activities available on a four-year campus. In addition, resources such as career and counseling services, student employment services and co-op centers provide students with opportunities to be prepared for the future.



Surviving in College



Many students are under the impression that college is just an extension of high school. Nothing could be further from the truth. Although students may have been successful in high school, college is quite different.

Students for the first time will be juggling the demands of their academic requirements while learning to manage their personal lives at the same time.

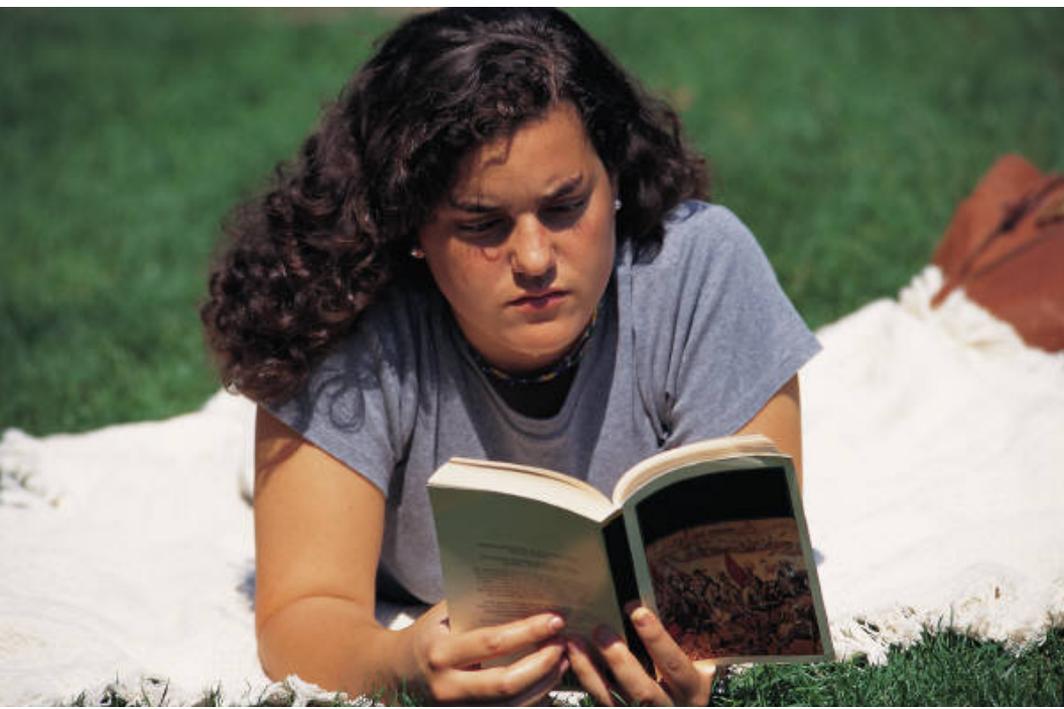
Many things for which parents once assumed responsibility for will now fall upon the college student.

Survival Tips

- With the assistance of your counselor and case manager, take appropriate college preparatory courses in high school.
- With the advice of your counselor and case manager, decrease the amount of support in high school to the minimal amount necessary to meet with success.
- Practice time management - use a calendar/planner to budget your time.
- Practice self-advocacy skills.
- Learn about your disability.
- Practice requesting appropriate accommodations.
- Practice reading strategies, set aside blocks of time for reading, learn how to outline/paraphrase.
- Be realistic when establishing a major.
- Balance courses and avoid back-to-back courses to allow for accommodations.

Surviving in College (cont'd)

- Schedule classes at a time of day that works for you (fits medications, etc.).
- Balance academics with activities.
- Prepare for tests early - don't cram.
- Request extended time on tests at least 3 days in advance; each test must be requested individually.
- Become involved on campus.
- Encourage the adults in your life to support your independence.
- Make good choices.
- Seek out and familiarize yourself with on-campus supports/resources before they are needed, such as disability services, health center, psychological services, academic advisor.
- Provide the appropriate documentation to request accommodations immediately. Don't wait until you are in academic jeopardy.
- Limit the number of credits - don't overload yourself.
- Understand your disability and be able to talk about it. If you cannot talk about your disability, you may not be able to advocate effectively for your needs.



Parent's Role

Your role as a parent is now changing in important ways. Up until now you have been an important and necessary advocate for your child. Although you will feel that your child isn't grown up yet, he or she is now in the adult world.

A college campus is a place where the student must be self-reliant. A college professor will not discuss your child's progress without his or her permission.

Taking a back seat is one of the hardest changes parents must make.

A Few Suggestions:

- When there is a problem, send your child to the resource person or specific professors on campus to solve his/her own problems.
- Rather than providing quick solutions, encourage brainstorming for possible solutions and guide your child toward choosing a solution that will work
- Understand that college will be more demanding academically. The student needs to work harder, be more organized, and actively problem solve. This demand will come just as the student begins enjoying enormous freedom - expect that he or she will make mistakes.

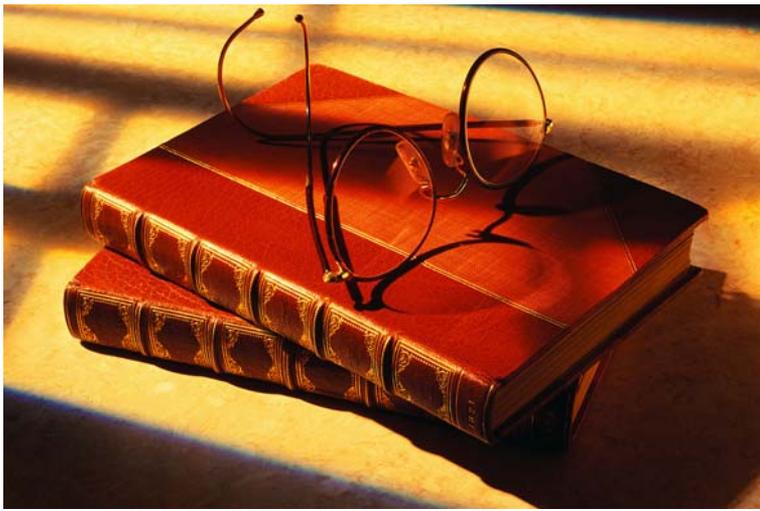
Our goal at Radnor High School is to provide our students with the skills and strategies to assist them towards success. It is important that the student attend all IEP meetings and be an active participant. This is an opportunity for students to articulate their needs, develop their own goals and begin self-advocacy. Guidance counselors, case managers and the IEP team are committed to supporting this transition by providing information as well as suggestions based on our understanding of the student's needs.

This is an exciting time in your child's life - the milestone everyone has been working toward. It is also an encouraging time because so many colleges recognize the needs of students with different learning needs. The majority of colleges offer a variety of supports and want their students to succeed.

Whether a traditional four-year college, a community college or a trade school is the goal, the key is for the student to understand his or her disability, to be able to identify what is needed to be successful and to learn how to advocate for himself.

Organizations

- Association of Higher Education and Disability
www.ahead.org
- Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA)
www.pheaa.org
- American's with Disabilities
www.disabilityinfo.gov
- Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic
www.rfbid.org
- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
www.dli.state.pa.us
- Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education
www.passhe.edu
- Children & Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)
www.Chadd.org
- National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)
www.nclid.org
- Office of Civil Rights
www.ed.gov/ocr
- Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking & Technology
email: doit@u.washington.edu



Reference

- *Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder*, Petersons, Thomas Learning
- *The K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder*, The Princeton Review, Random House
- *Peterson's Guide to Colleges with Programs for Learning Disabled Students (2nd edition)*, Princeton, N.J: Peterson's Guides

Schools Exclusively for Students with Disabilities

- Beacon College
www.beaconcollege.edu
- Landmark College
www.landmark.edu
- Mitchell College
www.mitchell.edu

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Notes



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