

# Transition to Postsecondary Education For Education Professionals and Families

Young adults with disabilities have historically faced barriers to accessing postsecondary education due to low expectations, insufficient funding, and a lack of accessibility and support. Fortunately, many individuals are entering postsecondary education and finding great success. For many, the key to that success is using the Transition Individualized Education Program (IEP) to design a path to one of the many options for continued career education during and after high school, including:

- Postsecondary institutions
  - 2-year community college
  - 4-year college or university
  - Vocational or technical programs/schools
- Collaborations between high schools and colleges
  - Dual enrollment courses for college credit during high school
  - Summer or fall bridge programs, offered on college campuses, which help high school students orient to college life
  - Non-degree or certification programs for students with disabilities at a 2- or 4-year college/university (e.g., [Think College](#)) that offer higher education options for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- Employer-based training
  - Pre-apprenticeship programs (e.g., [Job Corps](#))
  - Apprenticeship programs
  - Employer-provided job training programs
- Other
  - Adult education (GED programs and credentialling)
  - Continuing education programs to learn new skills or progress in a career

## Federal Laws and Funding Guiding Postsecondary Education

Several federal laws guide postsecondary education for students with disabilities, including:

- [The Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) is a civil rights law that promotes equal access and participation in programs and services. The ADA protects qualified people with disabilities from discrimination in many areas of postsecondary education, including admission, academics, and research.
- [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) protects the rights of people with disabilities in programs and activities that receive federal financial assistance, including higher education institutions. Like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 requires funded schools to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to children with disabilities.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) can help students learn about careers and gain new skills through Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). This program involves collaboration between schools and local service providers to help students with disabilities prepare for employment or postsecondary education. These services are available to eligible students aged 14–22. Services include:

- **Job exploration:** Counsel students on career pathways, in-demand jobs, and non-traditional employment.
- **Work-based learning:** Provide internships, apprenticeships, and job shadowing.
- **Post-secondary education:** Help students enroll in college and attend college fairs and tours.
- **Workplace readiness:** Teach communication, problem-solving, and other skills.
- **Self-advocacy:** Teach students about their rights and responsibilities, how to disclose their disability, and how to be self-aware.

VR helps individuals with disabilities secure employment. VR services are available at [25 Area Offices](#) across Indiana, with counselors assisting in each county. Eligibility for VR is not determined by income or financial resources; it is available to anyone whose disability creates a barrier to employment. VR can assist with the following:

- Exploring your employment interests and skills.
- Helping individuals secure jobs.
- Providing assistive technology and other job-related services.
- Re-entering employment after a period of not working.

- Training for a new career.
- Providing services for career advancement.

## Preparing for Postsecondary Education

There are many differences between high school, colleges, and universities for students with disabilities, including:

Topic	High School	Postsecondary Education
Laws	The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act
Documentation	High school personnel can help a student with disabilities identify and address the documentation requirements of the postsecondary institution they will attend.	Students are responsible for providing the necessary documentation (i.e., testing) regarding their disability. Documentation must demonstrate the need for specific accommodations.
Accommodations	Schools are responsible for arranging accommodations, but the accommodations and services in high school may not directly transfer to college.	Students are responsible for seeking out services and accommodations in colleges/universities by contacting disability services offices.
Student Responsibilities and Self-Advocacy	The school identifies students as having a disability and includes tutoring and academic support as part of IEP or 504 plans. Students have their time structured by others, leaving minimal homework time outside of class.	Students must self-identify and self-advocate (disclose) to receive accommodations and other services through the Office of Disability Services and must structure their own time to complete assignments.
Instruction	Students under an Individualized Education Plan or a Section 504 Plan must have instruction and accommodation as outlined in the plan.	Students must self-identify (disclose) to receive accommodations and other services through the Office of Disability Services. Students must structure their own time to complete assignments.

Topic	High School	Postsecondary Education
	Educators are obligated under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to provide what is outlined in the plans.	Professors are not required to modify the curriculum and assignments (including deadlines).  Tutoring and academic support are generally not provided by the Office of Disability Services, so students must rely on the standard support services available to all students.  Class sizes are typically smaller in schools than at colleges.
Study Responsibilities	K-12 schools may require study requirements and students are expected to comply.	Students are given a heavier workload in college compared to K-12 schools, and they are expected to work more independently and study outside of class.
Testing	Testing can be adjusted to meet the needs of the student when necessary.	Testing is more infrequent in college and typically covers larger amounts of material.
Housing	Schools typically do not offer housing options.	Attending a postsecondary education program away from home requires significant planning to address accessible housing, rent, accommodations, meals, etc.
Parental Role	Parents have access to students' records in K-12 schools and can advocate for their child until the age of 18 and after when parents obtain guardianship.	A student must provide written consent for a parent to access their college/university records and students must advocate for themselves.

## Planning & Preparation for Postsecondary Education

Given the significant differences between high school and postsecondary education programs, students must be prepared early and consistently as part of the school to adult life transition planning process. Students, parents, and educators should ensure that the following are continuously reviewed and implemented:

## **Individualized Transition Plan (ITP)**

- Create a comprehensive plan tailored to each student's needs, outlining goals, accommodations, and support services required for postsecondary success.

## **Self-Advocacy Skills**

- Teach students how to effectively communicate their needs, ask for accommodations, and advocate for themselves with professors and disability services.

## **Academic Skill Development**

- Focus on building strong foundational skills in reading, writing, math, and critical thinking, incorporating strategies to address specific learning challenges.

## **Executive Functioning Skills**

- Teach students time management, organization, planning, and self-regulation skills crucial for navigating college demands.

## **Exposure to College Expectations**

- Provide students and families with relevant information and experiences so they understand what to expect from college.
- Arrange college visits to local colleges to familiarize students with the campus environment and support services.
- Incorporate advanced-level assignments and projects to prepare students for higher-level academic rigor.
- Consider dual enrollment programs in which students can earn high school and college credits simultaneously.

## **Disability Awareness Education**

- Ensure all educators understand students' disability and appropriate accommodation needs.
- Encourage interaction with peers without disabilities to promote understanding and inclusion.

## **Assistive Technology Training**

- Introduce students to assistive technologies like text-to-speech software, screen readers, note-taking apps, and other tools that support their learning.

## Collaboration with Postsecondary Institutions

- Connect families and students with available college services and support them to advocate for their needs.
- Make early contact with college disability services to discuss student needs and potential accommodation needs.
- Facilitate transition meetings between high school staff, parents, and college disability services to ensure a smooth transition.

In summary, there are multiple opportunities and programs available for students preparing to exit secondary school and to attend postsecondary education. Many of these education and training opportunities involve formal or informal connections between educational, VR, employment, training, social services, and health services agencies. The partnerships among high schools, career centers, community colleges, four-year colleges and universities, and state technical colleges are critical to postsecondary education success for students with disabilities.

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