



Utah Parent Center
Special needs, extraordinary potential

Planning for Higher Education

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Joey has always loved his computer classes in high school. He wasn't sure what kind of job he wanted when he was older, but Joey thought he would be good at working with computers and would enjoy it.

His parents talked to his school counselor who told them about several vocational programs with a wide array of computer classes, including graphic design and information technology. The family contacted each program to find out about admissions information and Joey applied to three programs that fit his interests. Because of his computer experience and his obvious interest, he was accepted to all three!

He now lives at home and rides the bus to school every day. He stays at school all day and completes his homework there. He loves his classes and it turns out that he's even better at graphic design than he thought he would be—he is starting to build his portfolio and think about the perfect job!

Transition Tips: Planning for Your Child's Future

The transition your son or daughter will make from being a child to being an adult member of the community is a long journey. This journey can be difficult for anyone, but for your child with disabilities, determining where to go, the best way to arrive there, and then completing the journey can be especially challenging. This is why it is so important for you to think about, as early as possible, the important transitions your child will need to make and to develop a plan. Take the ideas in this handout to your Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting when you start talking about transition. This handout may help your IEP team generate other ideas about the transition to adulthood that apply specifically to your child.

With your encouragement and careful planning, you can help pave the way for your child to go where he or she wants to go!

The Transition to Post-Secondary Education

Post-secondary education is not simply an extension of high school. Students who decide to continue their education beyond high school will need to choose among vocational programs, two-year colleges, or four-year universities or colleges, in addition to deciding on an educational path. Keep in mind that many programs can be tailored to your child's needs and interests.

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Your high school student may also be able to try courses at post-secondary institutions through a transition program in your school district. Your child would receive support while in the class. By trying a course at a college or university, your child may have a better idea what kind of program he or she wants to pursue or where he or she wants to go.

Also remember that other factors will play a huge part in deciding the program for which your child will apply and attend. A school's location or size could deter your son or daughter, even if the program is perfect. Take some time to dream up the perfect program-perhaps you will find it!

Explore Your Options

Young adults who want to continue school have many different options, and the choices can be overwhelming. You can help your child identify his or her disability and plan strategies to address the disability in a post-secondary institution. If your child is confident and comfortable about addressing his or her needs, it will be easier to find the right program.

Remember that your son or daughter does not need to choose a very specific career path in order to choose a good educational path-start with these considerations:

- Talk to your son or daughter about the kinds of classes and teachers he or she likes in high school.
- Keep in mind your son or daughter's abilities and strengths: Is he or she particularly good at math or writing? Does she come home from school and talk about her industrial arts class? Does he tell you about his science project?
- Ask school counselors and teachers about programs your son or daughter might enjoy.
- Make sure you talk about your son or daughter's dreams: Does he know exactly what he wants to do when he's older, and if so, what kind of degree is needed?
- Encourage your child to take a wide variety of courses in high school. Let your child's interests be a guide to some classes-don't shy away from classes that may seem too hard, too easy, or not academic enough. Preliminary courses can help define a major in post-secondary education or a career path in the future.

There are a wide variety of programs out there. You can help your child narrow the choices by also looking at:

- School location: Does your son or daughter want to be close to home? Does he or she want to be challenged by learning to travel independently?
- Urban, rural, or in-between: Does your child want to be in a big city with an array of cultural and extracurricular activities? Does he or she plan to spend most of the time on campus studying and meeting new people?
- School size: Some programs have large classes and little interaction with professors; others have intimate classes and many opportunities to interact with professors and staff. Ask your child which he or she prefers.

- Atmosphere: Some schools and programs are known for their intensity; others for their friendliness. Ask current students or graduates about the atmosphere to get an idea if the program is compatible with your child.
- Living Choices: Some schools and programs have dorm rooms for students; others (most vocational programs) do not. Talk to your child about living options.

Also remember that there are big changes ahead. For example, if your child decides to go away to college, time management may be a difficult challenge. The built-in support of family will be gone. Your child may need to begin learning some independent skills now in order to prepare for the journey.

Set Your Destination and Map a Course

Once you and your son or daughter have decided what kind of program is appropriate, find out which schools offer the desired program. Again, school counselors and teachers are resources for information. Call school admission officers to request brochures and fact sheets about the school and its programs. If possible, visit the schools with your son or daughter to find out how he or she would fit in and if it is a comfortable place to learn. Most schools include information about their programs on a Web site as well.

Even if you are still in the process of finding the right school or program, you should map your route by looking into the admissions process.

Most college and university programs require students to pass an entrance exam before they are admitted into the program. The most common admissions tests are the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing Assessment (ACT). Some two- and four-year institutions, particularly vocational colleges, require students to take a placement exam to determine their aptitude in math, reading, and writing. These are not admissions tests—they do not decide if a student will be admitted to the college or university. Placement exams simply determine which classes would be most appropriate for your child.

You may also want to look into financial aid for post-secondary school. The financial aid officer at your child's high school may be able to tell you if you qualify for federal assistance. All higher education institutions that receive federal funds must not discriminate in the admission or treatment of students. Students with disabilities may request accommodations so that they can participate in the program of their interest—and the school needs to make those changes to ensure that the program is accessible to the greatest extent possible. Many institutions have specific offices for students with disabilities. Make sure to ask what kinds of supports the office provides. Talk to students who receive help from the office—they have the experience that counts!

Find out if your child needs a certain grade point average to be accepted into the program. Ask if he or she needs recommendations from high school teachers and community members, and if so, think about who would be the best people to write those.

Resources That Will Help You Reach Your Goals

PAYING FOR EDUCATION

- **Student Financial Assistance**
(800) 433-3243; (800) 730-8913 (TTY)
studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/index.jsp
- **CREATING OPTIONS: A RESOURCE ON FINANCIAL AID FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES** www.heath.gwu.edu

LEARNING ABOUT PROGRAMS

- **Division of Services for Vocational Rehabilitation**
801-538-7530
www.usor.utah.gov/division_of_rehabilitation_services
- **Utah's Disability Resource Centers at Institutions for Higher Education**
Call each college or university individually. Ask for the Disability Resource Center or call the Utah Parent Center at 801-272-1051 or 800-468-1160 for individual listings.

LEARNING ABOUT YOUR RIGHTS AS AN ADULT

- **Utah Parent Center**
801-272-1051 or 800-468-1160
www.utahparentcenter.org
- **Utah Independent Living Centers**
801-466-5565 Voice/TTY or 800-355-2195
- **Disability Law Center**
801-363-1347 or 800-662-9080
www.disabilitylawcenter.org
- **Becoming Leaders for Tomorrow**
<http://blt.cpd.usu.edu/>
- **Workability Utah**
www.workabilityutah.org
- **Department of Workforce Services**
801-526-9240 or 866-621-5011

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