

Postsecondary Educational Opportunities

Many students with disabilities, physical or learning or both, automatically assume college is out of the question. This type of assumption not only limits the scope of their high school experience, it also limits opportunities they'll have for the rest of their lives.

Laws covering students with disabilities at the college level are fairly broad. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act ensure that students with disabilities who qualify for admission can't be excluded from attending colleges or other institutions of higher learning and that institutions must provide reasonable accommodations if a student can document they are needed.

There are no IEPs at the postsecondary level. Colleges and universities are not required by law to provide a free and appropriate education. They are required to provide appropriate academic adjustments as necessary and convenient, accessible housing.

What Students Need to Know

According to Vincent J. Varrassi, Campus Director for the Regional Center for College Students with Learning Disabilities on the Teaneck Campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University, in order to be successful at the postsecondary level, students with disabilities need to be ready to ask and advocate for the accommodations they need. "In college students are responsible for knowing what accommodations they'll need and for providing the appropriate documentation. Mom and the child study team aren't going to be around."

FAST FACT:

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 1995-96, six percent of undergraduate students in the United States reported having some type of disability.

Varrassi said students with learning disabilities should "test their mettle" in high school by taking courses that are a little bit harder than they're used to. "Students need to find out what level of competitiveness they're up for," he said. This can help determine where they should apply.

What Teachers Can Do to Help

"Teachers need to be sure they are preparing the student for the college experience. Students arrive as freshmen and tend to be a little surprised at the level of work required of them," said Varrassi.

Here are three things Varrassi suggests teachers can do to help students prepare:

- ✗ **Raise the bar -- academic expectations and self advocacy skills**
- ✗ **Make students aware of available technology tools and software**
- ✗ **Focus on writing skills**

"Students with disabilities who want to continue their education need to take the most challenging curriculum in which they can experience success," said Varrassi. "They should be working hard, taking courses in the main stream so they're not going to experience that level of competition for the first time as a freshman in college."

Students should know types of assistive technology they'll need to be independent. Unlike in high school, colleges don't provide one-on-one paraprofessionals or other people-support. If the student gets to college and still hasn't determined what assistive technology he or she will need, a referral can be made to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and the evaluation can be done at the college.

What to Look For, Where to Look

Some colleges offer specific programs supporting students with disabilities. Students should look for college programs that offer tutorial support, strategy support and a counseling component. Currently, there are eight regional centers in New Jersey providing direct assistance to auditorily impaired, visually impaired, and learning disabled students. You can find a list of the eight online at <http://www.nj.gov/highereducation/sn.htm>.

The Adaptive Technology Center for New Jersey Colleges offers a website that features a detailed look at what kind of support is available for students with disabilities at New Jersey colleges: <http://adaptivetech.tcnj.edu/index.html>. Also *The K & W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder* is a wonderful resource with information about colleges all over the country.

Cerebral Palsy of New Jersey currently provides transition services that include assistance in college preparation, arranging college tours and guiding the family through the process. For more information contact **Associate Executive Director Jackie Edwards** at 888-322-1918, ext. 526. or email her at jedwards@cpofnj.org.

Solutions with Technology

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Keepin' AT Fresh in the Summertime

by Mike Marotta

As the weather gets warmer, students' (and some of the faculty's) thoughts turn to summer vacation. Before the end of the school year, we should take steps to ensure that the technology implementation successes we achieved during the school year are not lost by the time September arrives. This article highlights some suggestions for both students and faculty to help keep their technology skills fresh during the summer months.

Who Could Benefit?

Several school districts have experimented with a variety of training strategies during the summer months. They've found this is an ideal time to train students and their families on the proper use of technology. With this additional training, families become a more efficient support system for the school-based teams. Teams should explore the use of Extended School Year (ESY) programs to create these types of technology learning opportunities.

While the summer is a good time to train students, it may prove to be an even better time to train faculty on the uses of technology in the curriculum. Teacher training during the school year is difficult due to time constraints and the necessity of preparing lessons. In the summer, teachers are free from these issues and can really focus on the technology tools and find creative ways to integrate them into the curriculum.

Cerebral Palsy of New Jersey has worked with several districts to provide teacher training during summer months. Some training is very student specific, with the focus being on the tools one particular student uses. While this training appeals to a small core team, training has also been instituted for many teachers throughout a school or district.

Our training staff has designed and delivered training programs to groups of more than 20 teachers to enable them to become familiar with a specific assistive technology software tool that the school will be implementing. This type of training allows teachers to learn together and create a natural technology support team for each other. In

order to increase attendance, teachers may be paid for their time or compile "comp" time they can use during the next school year.

Putting Technology to Use

It may be difficult to convince students to use their technology over the summer, so we need to create activities that are fun but will keep their skills fresh. One idea is to ask the student to keep a journal of all the exciting things he or she does over the summer. This type of activity encourages writing, but does not feel like "work."

If students want to stay connected with friends over the summer, set up the technology to work with email programs or instant messaging programs. This casual, spontaneous interaction will increase writing while feeling like the furthest thing from schoolwork!

Teachers can also use the summer to expand their hands-on experiences with technology. Since a large portion of the district's technology is not used during the summer, schools may be able to provide teachers with computers and assistive technology tools to take home. Then teachers can experiment with the technology at their own pace and explore features they may not normally use. This deeper understanding of the technology will also lead to better integration of the tools across the curriculum.

With some planning, students and faculty's technology skills can be maintained and improved through the summer months. This will lead to more proficient technology users come September.

Enjoy your summer break and see you in September!

For more information on technology support and training, contact Fred Tchang, Director of Assistive Technology Services at 888-322-1918 ext. 588 or via email at ftchang@cpofnj.org

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