

A Step by Step Guide to the College D.R.E.A.M.



Introduction

Just a few years ago, the thought of a son or daughter with a significant intellectual disability going to college was only a parent's dream. Due to generalized stereotypes, institutional barriers, low expectations, and the contention that they did not possess the skills and abilities needed to be successful in postsecondary education, few opportunities existed for these students beyond high school. Due to changes in federal legislation and an emphasis on inclusive education at the postsecondary level, there are emerging opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to attend colleges and universities across the nation. Inclusion with same-age peers, improved access to employment opportunities and improvement in independent living skills are among the primary goals of students with intellectual disabilities attending college.

In Pennsylvania, there are approximately 20,000 students age 6-21 identified as having an intellectual disability (ID). In an effort to improve the outcomes for these students with ID, Pennsylvania has begun to develop postsecondary transition programs on college and university campuses. The development of these programs in an inclusive college setting will ensure students have positive employment outcomes within an integrated and competitive work setting at the end of their postsecondary experience.

Step 1

Knowing the Differences Between High School and College

High School

- › IDEA = Entitlement to services and FAPE, “Success”
- › K-12 Education is a **“right”**
- › Identified by the school system
- › Parents as advocates/family input sought
- › IEP is a legal document for provision of services
- › Teacher is a trained educator
- › Structured day, M-F, same hours
- › Frequent teacher reminders for assignments & tests
- › Class periods, clocks, bells
- › Attendance is mandatory

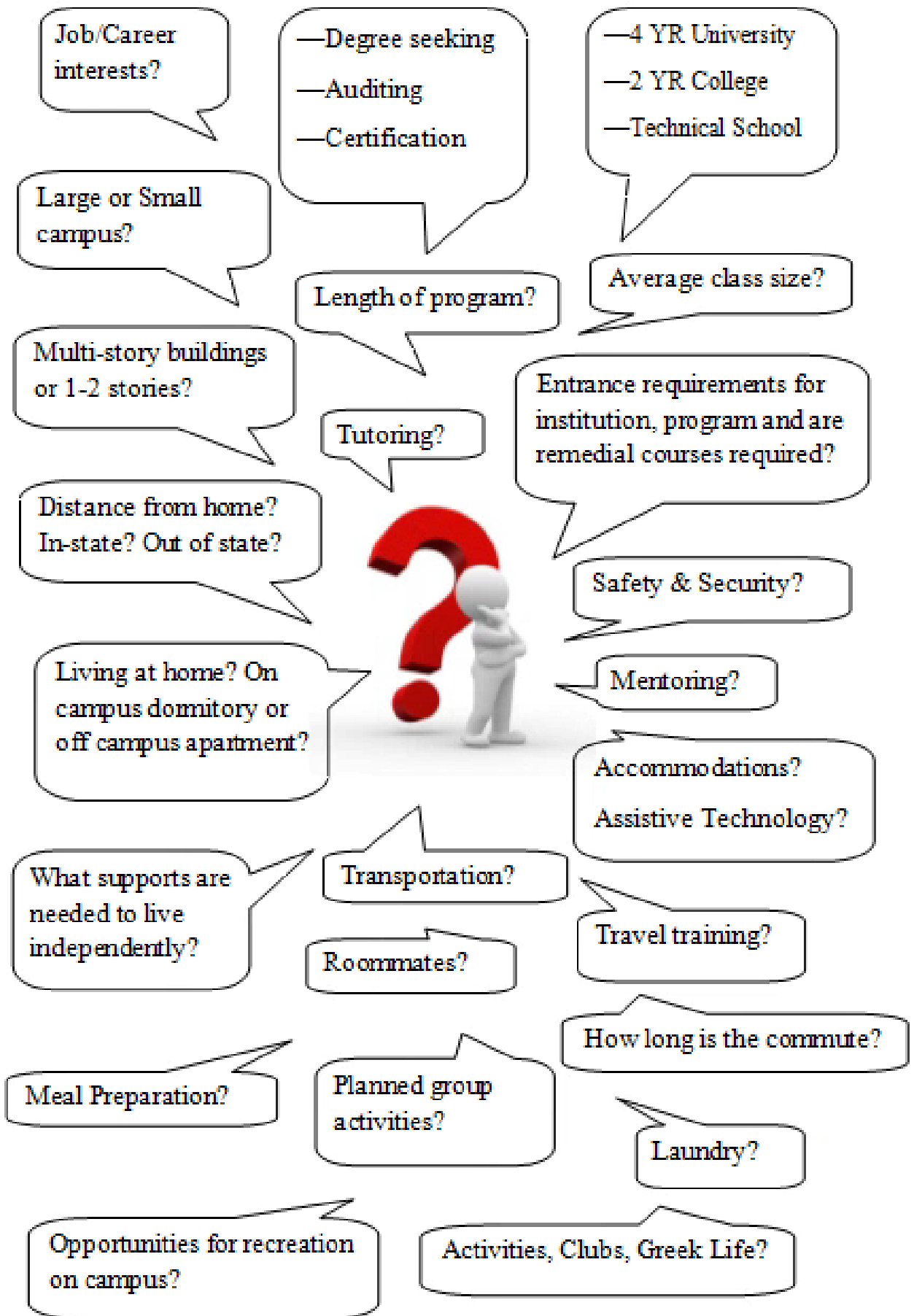
College

- › ADA = Eligibility for services “Access”
- › College Education is a **“privilege”**
- › Student must self-identify
- › Transfer of privacy rights to the adult student/self-advocate
- › Accommodation Plans - Disability Service Office
- › Professors are content experts and trained researchers
- › Less structure, days & times vary
- › Very few reminders, provided a syllabus and expected to keep up
- › No bells, manage own time
- › Attendance is strongly suggested



The thought of college for many families with students with intellectual disabilities has evolved from a dream to an expectation. An expectation now made a possibility through the combined efforts of local education agencies, community adult agencies and institutions of higher education. Having high expectations and planning early is the first step in preparing for postsecondary education. Early planning involves ensuring students with intellectual disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment and supports and services are in place for academic, career, social, and independent living goals to be met.

- ◆ Transition plans have clear connection to college and employment and reflect needed supports and services
- ◆ Access to general education curriculum in the least restrictive environment
- ◆ Continued development of independence, self-advocacy and self-determination skills
- ◆ Life skills development in communication, relationship building, organization and managing daily activities
- ◆ Understand differences between high school and college
- ◆ Understand education rights and differences between IDEA, ADA and FERPA
- ◆ Investigate college programs in your area, regionally or nationally
- ◆ Visit postsecondary sites and investigate supports and services available
- ◆ Investigate your school district's policies regarding postsecondary transition programs
- ◆ Understand your school districts policies and procedures surrounding graduation, graduation ceremonies and senior activities (e.g. prom, trips)



Step 3

Paying for College

Students with intellectual disabilities face many of the same challenges as their non-disabled peers when it comes to making decisions about college. Perhaps one of the biggest challenges faced by all, especially by students with intellectual disabilities, is how to pay for it. There are several options available to students, and with some research and creativity, those options can fund the cost associated with attending college. Many students use a combination of funding sources, or braided funding, to cover the costs.

When looking at postsecondary programs, it is especially important to pay attention to those who are a Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP), as students are eligible to apply for Federal Financial Aid such as Pell Grants or Work Study Programs under Title IV of the Student Aid Program.



*****For more information, see the D.R.E.A.M. Financial Planning Guide***

Step 4

You've Been Accepted, Now What?

One of the biggest changes your student will face as a college student is the increase in freedom (i.e., setting their own class schedule) coupled with more responsibility. Life will be changing rapidly for the student. There are critical skill sets that will be necessary for a successful college experience. The student will have to be their own self-advocate, learn when, how, and with whom to disclose their disability, request accommodations from the campus Office of Disability Services (ODS), and learn to live independently. Let's explore some key points in these areas.

Requesting Accommodations:

The student must:

- ⇒ Contact the Office of Disability Service (ODS)
- ⇒ Provide documentation of the disability (IEPs are usually not considered appropriate sources of documentation)
- ⇒ Discuss accommodations needed (what have you used in the past that was helpful, what do you think you will need?)
- ⇒ ODS office will review documentation and determine eligibility
- ⇒ If eligible, ODS will provide a letter for the student to give to his/her professors
- ⇒ The student will schedule an appointment with their professor(s) to give them the letter and discuss needed accommodations
- ⇒ Professor will provide accommodations
- ⇒ Student monitors effectiveness of accommodations



Importance of Self-Disclosure

Once the student leaves the K-12 system, in order to access services, the student must self-disclose their disability. Although disability and medical information is personal, sharing often creates a greater understanding, builds stronger relationships, opens the door to accommodations, services and other resources that may be available.

Independent Living:

Depending on the college program, some offer on/off campus housing options. Many students with special needs have never lived on their own before and living independently for the first time can be overwhelming, but they are not alone. In programs with on campus housing, a resident advisor is on site to help facilitate independent living, social activities and navigate them through daily living. Regardless of whether or not the student will continue to live at home while attending college or if they will be in campus housing, there are important skills that should be developed and fostered for greater life long independence.

- ◇ Setting an alarm/Waking on time
- ◇ Daily personal hygiene
- ◇ Getting to class on time
- ◇ Taking medications
- ◇ Managing money/Paying Bills
- ◇ Balancing a checkbook
- ◇ Using an ATM
- ◇ Using public transportation
- ◇ Shopping for groceries
- ◇ Preparing meals/Balanced diet
- ◇ Doing laundry
- ◇ Cleaning/Chores
- ◇ Getting along with roommates/
understanding personal space

Health: Maintaining good health encompasses a variety of factors including diet, exercise, physical check-ups, dental exams, medication management, proper sleep, hygiene, and other personal care needs. At this pivotal transition age when students are exiting high school or college, maintaining optimal health can be complicated by the loss of coverage under their parent's plan, the transition from pediatric to adult health care providers, different terminology, eligibility requirements and different service options. Some important areas to consider include:

- ◆ Difference between pediatric and adult providers
- ◆ Health insurance vs. Medicaid
- ◆ Prescription medications vs. over-the-counter medications
- ◆ Making a doctor's appointment
- ◆ Being able to provide a health summary to the doctor
- ◆ Having a list of questions for the doctor
- ◆ Recording communication with the doctor for recall and comprehension
- ◆ Self-advocating & decision making skills
- ◆ Physical, emotional and sexual health
- ◆ Proper nutrition, food choice, food storage, expiration dates
- ◆ Personal hygiene

Safety: Closely related to health are safety concerns for youth with disabilities. Some topics may include:

- ◆ What to do in a medical emergency
- ◆ First aid
- ◆ Fire safety
- ◆ Emergency preparedness



Sexuality: Education about sex and sexuality is important for all youth.

Youth with disabilities have the same range of sexual thoughts, feelings, desires, and attitudes as youth without disabilities. Yet, when youth with disabilities, in particular intellectual disabilities, express their sexuality, it is often seen as a “problem.” Youth with intellectual disabilities have higher rates of unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and sexual abuse than the rest of the population. It is important for youth to be educated about sex so that they can explore, express and enjoy sexuality in a healthy, positive and safe manner as well as providing the opportunity to educate them on protective behaviors.

Reasons for increased risk of sexual harm:

- ⇒ Lack of knowledge/education about sexuality
- ⇒ Limited effective communication/vocabulary
- ⇒ Lack of intellectual ability to understand changes within their body
- ⇒ Misinformation from peers
- ⇒ Misplaced trust
- ⇒ Having dependence on others for assistance
- ⇒ Overly compliant/wanting to please
- ⇒ Lack of assertiveness
- ⇒ Overprotected lifestyle/limited social interaction

Benefits of Sex Education:

- ⇒ Reduced risk of sexual abuse, STD's, unplanned pregnancy
- ⇒ Improved assertiveness
- ⇒ Less risk taking behaviors
- ⇒ Greater independence
- ⇒ Increased social skills
- ⇒ Knowing language to report incidences of abuse
- ⇒ Healthier choices
- ⇒ Greater responsibility
- ⇒ More acceptable expression of sexuality/change in behavior

What to Expect When They Come Home

The college experience for youth with disabilities should be no different than the experience of their non-disabled peers. The same is true when they come home either from their day of classes (as a student still living at home) or during weekends and holiday breaks (if they live on campus). Continued development and reinforcement of independent living, social skills and daily living should be evident.

- ◇ Maintain a daily routine
- ◇ Responsibilities of cleaning their room and/or other common area(s)
- ◇ Doing their own laundry
- ◇ Maintaining social, recreational and leisure activities with peers
- ◇ Using public transportation/increasing independence
- ◇ Continued assistance and reinforcement of budgeting money, paying bills, shopping, preparing meals, etc.

What if it doesn't work out:

Every program is unique and many factors vary from one program to the next or from one college to another. The same is true of students, every student is unique and the first program may not be the best fit. Do not be discouraged if at first it doesn't work out. Continue to research, visit and try other programs to find the one the best meets the needs and interests of your student in order for them to grow into successful, independent, contributing members of society.

Additional Resources:

Pennsylvania Department of Education—Secondary Transition

http://www.pattan.net/category/Educational%20Initiatives/Secondary%20Transition/page/Secondary_Trasntion_Checklist_Pilot_Project_.html

Think College

www.thinkcollege.net

Financial Aid

www.studentaid.ed.gov/sa/eligibility/intellectual-disabilities#ctp-programs

D.R.E.A.M. Partnership

www.dreampartnership.org

717-836-0672

Financial Literacy-Practical Money Skills

https://www.practicalmoneyskills.com/foreducators/lesson_plans/special.php

Sex Education for Individuals with Disabilities

www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/sexed/

Health Care

<http://fcihe.com/resources/independent-living/health/>

