

Transition to College for Students with Special Needs and Disabilities

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Every year, around 1.7 million high school students in the United States go to college. In this modern age, everything that is needed to know about college is virtual. What to bring for a dorm, what classes to take, where the social events are, the majority of it is online. However, the one piece of college that does not get talked about very often is the emotional effect college has on students. For many students, college is the first time they leave home and it is the first time they are out on their own. It is very hard to prepare a student for what life away from their family will be like. Although the transition to college is hard on general education students, the transition for special needs and disabled students can be even tougher. While in secondary school, students are provided with the tools they need to get through high school, and they prepare them for life outside of high school. According to research (Welding, 2023), “Nearly 1 in 5 undergraduate college students reported having a disability.” That is twenty percent of students. This paper will go through research on this topic, ideas that had not been previously considered, as well as a potential solution to this problem.

The Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities notes that “The goal of education is that all students will have the basic academic, employability, and social skills needed to be prepared for post-secondary education, employment, and to be contributing members of society” (Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities, Marion, 2001). The majority of the first eighteen years of a child’s life are spent in a school, learning and preparing for the next step of life, whether that be they choose to go to college or choose another path. For students with special needs and disabilities, the decision is usually made for them. But for those that do end up going, they may require assistance in a variety of areas. Understanding the research on this topic can help to understand ideas not previously known.

One thing that was discovered through this research that was not originally known was that IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) is not continued on post-secondary. The article “Transition of Students with Disabilities to Post-secondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators” (2018) it states “ A student has no obligation to inform an institution of post-secondary education that he or she has a disability; however, if the student wants an institution to provide an academic adjustment or assign the student to accessible housing or other facilities, or if a student wants other disability-related services, the student must identify himself or herself as having a disability.” If a student wants disability services, they have to ask and file a report to receive services. This could add to the complications of post-secondary education, as well as the emotional aspect of the transition. Understanding other ideas not considered can help to understand a potential solution to this problem.

Every student is different, and no one solution will work for every student. However, creating a generalized idea could add something to each student’s experience of secondary and post-secondary education. As previously stated, the goal of education is to provide students with the skills they need to be “contributing members of society” (Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities, Marion, 2001). In some way or another, each school offers some sort of higher education preparation. However, for special needs and disabled students, this preparation is not sufficient. Creating a class with a strong curriculum preparing special needs and disabled students for the transition to college and the intricacies of college itself could be very beneficial for this group of students. An article written on the US Department of Education website offers a few skills these students should have. They note that understanding their disability, learning time management skills, having computer skills, and getting involved on campus are all helpful and will better the student's experience at college (“Transition of Students

with Disabilities to Postsecondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators,” 2018).

Creating a curriculum to prepare these students for post-secondary education is such a positive thing that can be done.

Transitioning to college is a big step in any student’s life, but even more so for a student with a disability or special needs. The Ohio Coalition for Education for Children with Disabilities (2001), notes that “We must build on the students’ strengths. Diverse learners are resources, not deficits to the classroom. We need to be creative to meet the diverse needs of all students. We need to teach compensatory skills and provide appropriate accommodations and adaptations to meet the needs of all students.” This is a problem that is not talked about, however, something needs to be done about it. Through creating a curriculum preparing students for the transition to college is very beneficial, and crucial for students.

References

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