

College for Students with LD and/or AD/HD

by Loring Brinckerhoff, Ph.D.



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A Parent's Guide to Helping Kids with Learning Difficulties



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College for Students with LD and/or AD/HD

High School Students Considering College

In the ideal world, every student with a learning disability (LD) or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) would be a master at charting her own destiny after high school. In reality, it is often her parents who orchestrate the transition planning process. Nevertheless, such teenagers should be encouraged to participate actively in planning their transition to young adulthood — including the prospect of attending college.

This article will explain the differences between high school and college; this information can help students with learning and/or attention problems make an informed decision regarding postsecondary education. For students who've decided college is right for them, the article also outlines the essential steps towards independence that high school students with LD and/or AD/HD need to take before applying to college.

Differences between High School and College

If a high school student is to make an informed decision about attending college, and plan effectively for her transition to postsecondary education, she (and her multidisciplinary team, if applicable) needs to be aware of the many inherent differences between high school and college settings (*Brinckerhoff, McGuire & Shaw, 2002*).

Time in Class and Access to Teachers

Two of the biggest differences between high school and college concern the **amount of in-class time** and **opportunities for direct teacher contact**. High school students are in class approximately 6 hours a day, and it is not unusual for them to have contact with their teachers four or five times a week. In comparison, college classes may meet only once or twice a week, thus, the opportunities for direct teacher contact are much more limited. In college, faculty members often have limited office hours, making it difficult for students to find time to meet with their professors. With the advent of online courses, this is changing, but having direct access to the instructor of the course, rather than a teaching assistant (TA), is still a concern.

Time Spent Studying

Typically, high school students spend a limited amount of time completing homework assignments at home. Instead, they often work on assignments during a study hall or resource room period. In contrast, college students must learn how to budget study time for themselves. As a general rule, **for every hour of class time, college students need to spend three hours of out of class time preparing assignments**. For students with LD and/or ADHD this rule of thumb should be doubled, given the time needed for rewriting lecture notes, reading, or listening to audio textbooks, and integrating course materials from a variety of sources (e.g., texts, lecture notes, lab assignments).

Support Services

Many high school students with LD become accustomed to special education personnel, learning specialists, or library personnel who are willing to drop what they are doing and “rescue” them

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before an upcoming term paper or mid-term examination. Most college campuses have a disability services office, but few have the personnel to provide drop-in hours for last-minute term paper editing, test preparation, or content tutoring.

Class Size

High school classrooms typically contain 25 to 30 students, in comparison to many college classrooms, which consist of large lecture halls for 200 to 300 students. During the freshman and sophomore years, students are routinely herded into large, impersonal auditoriums with tiny desks for core courses, such as Introduction to Western Civilization, or Psychology 101. These settings may be efficient for the broad dissemination of information, but for students with AD/HD and/or organization problems, they can be very distracting.

“Teenagers should be encouraged to participate actively in planning their transition to young adulthood — including the prospect of attending college.”

Teacher Feedback and Grading

In high school, homework is often assigned on a day-to-day basis, and students are expected to turn it in daily, or weekly, for teacher feedback. In college, “homework” often consists of long-range assignments (with no scheduled check-ins) such as term papers involving extensive use of Internet resources or cooperative assignments with peers.

It is not unusual for college students to receive only two or three grades per semester. The first grade may not appear until the mid-term, five to six weeks into the semester. For high school students with LD, this is often an adjustment given that they’re used to receiving regular, frequent feedback from teachers. Many college freshmen with LD or AD/HD find themselves for the first time in academic settings that are much more competitive than they ever imagined. High school grades that were once based on subjective measures like “effort” or the “degree of improvement” are replaced in college with grades assigned by teaching assistants who are looking for prescribed responses and mastery of course objectives as stated in the syllabus. The novelty and size of the college institution combined with the scholastic rigor of the curriculum makes it particularly difficult for students with LD or AD/HD to stay focused and up-to-date with assignments.

Teaching Style

Not only is the grading different, but so is the teaching style of college faculty. High school teachers are often responsible for teaching a broad range of students and for teaching factual content, while college instructors often expect students to integrate course information independently from a variety of sources rather than merely parroting back isolated facts. High school teachers are known for taking attendance, regularly checking notebooks and homework assignments. College professors rarely take attendance and seldom monitor students’ daily work. They typically lecture non-stop and require students to think analytically, and to synthesize abstract information on their own. Students with LD often have to adjust to many divergent teaching styles that they may not be used to, while they feel their way through course material for weeks at a time without direct feedback from the instructor.

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Balancing Personal Life and Academics

Perhaps the biggest challenge that students with LD or AD/HD face when they go away to college is balancing their personal life with academic demands. High school students find that their free time is often structured by limitations set by parents, teachers, and other adults. On the other hand, college environments require students to function independently by managing their own time both during the day and at night. Students are often ill prepared and overwhelmed as they try and strike a balance between their course work and active social lives.

Essential Steps toward Independence

Comprehensive transition planning needs to focus on a coordinated set of student-centered activities that should be linked with the student's transition goals (National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1994). High school guidance counselors, school psychologists, and parents need to support the student as she plans postsecondary options. This can be accomplished formally (if the student has an IEP) or informally. Together the team should craft a realistic transition plan that describes:

- Where the student plans to go after high school
- What needs to be done now so she can reach her goals
- Who needs to be involved in this process
- Who will implement and monitor the prescribed transition activities and review progress along the way with the student

A Timetable for Transition Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities and ADHD (Brinckerhoff, McGuire & Shaw, 2002) is designed to help students gradually assume greater responsibility for their own learning outcomes and view the postsecondary, multi-year planning process as a series of coordinated steps that involve input from several supporting players. (See Page 10.)

Junior Year: Assuring a Firm Foundation

The junior year is perhaps the most critical year for high school students as they lay the final groundwork for their postsecondary experience. The proposed academic program for junior year should be selected with considerable thought, given that college admissions officers look very carefully for any changes or trends in the educational rigors in the program of study. Depending on a student's postsecondary goals, she should be advised that if she elects to take only two or three college-preparatory classes per semester, she might not appear to be prepared for a competitive college curriculum that typically consists of four or five courses. Guidance counselors should address these issues early on to be sure that the student and parents understand the ramifications of such choices.

Students with LD should not be routinely waived out of high school course requirements (e.g., foreign language or math) without careful consideration of the implications waivers may have on the college admission process. It is also better for a student to take the most rigorous course load she can manage (with accommodations) and earn "good grades," than fill the transcript with "fluff courses," like "Free-flight Frisbee 101!"

Practicing Self-Advocacy and Using Accommodations

It is not unusual for high school juniors, or even seniors, with LD or AD/HD to meet for the first time with a college placement counselor and be clueless about the kind of postsecondary setting

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they want to attend and the level of LD support services they may need. In order for a student to meaningfully participate in the transition process she must learn how to advocate for herself. The student should be able to articulate the effect her disability may have on academic performance. She should also be able to identify any accommodations (e.g., extended testing time, a note taker, reduced course load), technological aids (e.g., audio books, Alpha Smart computer), or support services she will need in order to compensate for her LD and/or ADHD. In the comfort of the high school setting, a student should be encouraged to “try out” accommodations such as audio books, or software to outline term papers, so she can determine what works best for her before she enters college. During the annual IEP conference or at transition planning meetings the student should be encouraged to express her concerns, preferences, and opinions based on personal experience. The IEP meeting is an ideal forum for a high school student with LD to practice self-advocacy skills and to speak up about her own future plans.

It is during this time that planning should focus on matching the student's interests and abilities with the most appropriate postsecondary setting. Guidance personnel can be particularly helpful if they describe (ideally based on their personal visits to colleges) the diverse range of two- and four-year options available to students after graduation.

In the next article, I will outline specific recommendations for college-bound students with LD and/or AD/HD on how to find the best postsecondary match.



College for Students with LD and/or AD/HD

Teens Shopping for College Options

An increasing number of students with learning disabilities (LD) and/or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD) realize that, in order to be better prepared for adult life and the world of work, additional training beyond high school is essential. High school guidance personnel can play a critical role in apprising students of a variety of postsecondary options available to them — ranging from open admission community colleges to highly competitive Ivy League institutions. When guidance support is not available to high school students, or is minimal, parents are often left to their own devices at trying to find the best “postsecondary match” for their son or daughter.

This article will highlight some practical ways that high school students and their parents can effectively work together to identify postsecondary institutions and LD support services that match the student’s interests, abilities, and needs. I will discuss the range of support services available to prospective students. In addition, I will make a number of suggestions on how a college-bound student with LD or AD/HD can utilize a transition planning portfolio (TPP) to enhance her chances of gaining entrance into the college of her choice. The good news is that there are now over 1,200 colleges in the United States and Canada that offer students with learning disabilities and/or AD/HD some level of support services. To illustrate the variety and type of LD support services currently available to students, I will profile two postsecondary institutions which offer either basic support services or a comprehensive LD program.

“Regardless of the college setting, students with LD and/or AD/HD need to start early planning for the transition from high school to college.”

Sorting out College Options

To begin, students need to be instructed in how to use college resource guides or directories, and the latest computer-guided software to assist them in the college search process (Mangrum & Strichart, 1997). Internet sites like Collegenet.com, Collegeview.com, and Collegelink.com allow prospective students to search for colleges based on factors such as:

- type of school (e.g., university, community college, or vocational/technical)
- size of student body
- faculty/student ratio
- geographic region
- intercollegiate sports and extracurricular activities
- areas of study (majors)
- campus culture
- tuition fees
- technology (level of sophistication, requirements, and support)
- financial aid available

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Students can then use the “hot links” from these sites to go to the homepages of the individual colleges for more information, to compare and contrast school offerings, or to apply online (Brinckerhoff, McGuire & Shaw, 2002). Based on this initial search, catalogs can be downloaded or requested by mail for a more detailed analysis.

Community and technical colleges are a very popular option for students with LD since they allow students to try out college course work while simultaneously maintaining the support of friends and the familiar routines of living at home. Since nearly all community colleges have open admissions policies, smaller class ratios, comparatively low tuition rates, and a wide range of vocational, remedial, and developmental courses, they are often an appealing first choice for students with learning disabilities (Brinckerhoff, et al., 2002). Another advantage of community colleges is that they do not require standardized entrance examinations such as the ACT or SAT. Some students with LD may elect to pursue careers in technical areas that deemphasize reading and writing skills and capitalize hands-on experience. For others, a technical college curriculum that specifically emphasizes mathematics, science, or engineering may be a more appropriate choice. Some students may meet more success in college settings that feature a co-op curriculum that focuses on both coursework and work experience rather than in an institution with a more traditional liberal arts curriculum (Brinckerhoff, et al. 2002). Regardless of the college setting, students with LD and/or AD/HD need to start early planning for the transition from high school to college.

Finding the Right Balance of College Offerings & LD Support Services

As students scan webpages looking for institutions of higher education, they should make a list of the schools that are the most interesting in terms of location, level of competition, and curriculum offerings. Students should be advised to choose the college first, and the learning support, second. Typically, this is not done, and parents initially shop for the “LD services” that they have heard about, and don’t consider whether or not the institution is really the best fit for their son or daughter given the course offerings, curriculum, and faculty/student ratio. After a student has identified 6 to 8 institutions that are at the appropriate level of competitiveness (selective, highly selective, most selective) based on the popular college guides, she should think carefully about the level of LD support services she may need in college. By cross matching the institution with the level of support services necessary, she can generate a list of 3 or 4 schools to investigate fully. Further consultation with some of the LD-specific college guides can be helpful as well. Once the list is narrowed down, the student and her parents should plan to visit a campus, take a walking tour, sit-in on a class, and visit a dormitory room, computer lab, and library. A student with LD who presents herself better orally than in writing, should consider scheduling an interview with the admissions office and with the LD support service office. If the institution she is considering has a highly-rated LD support services office, there should be no harm in disclosing the disability in the interview. If, however, the school does not have strong services for students with learning disabilities, it might be better not to discuss the learning disability or AD/HD openly at this early stage of the application process.

LD Support Services: Basic Services or a Comprehensive Program?

Campus support services for students with LD vary from one institution to the next. Various support models exist and run the gamut from very basic services to comprehensive programs. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), each college and university must provide a minimal level of support to students with LD and AD/HD at no cost to ensure that “reasonable accommodations” are available (e.g., textbooks in an audio format, note takers, additional time on examinations, provision for course substitutions, reduced course load). The most loosely defined, or basic, services are those where there is a disability contact person on campus who typically wears many hats. He may have some

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limited training in disability matters, but may in fact be an attorney, counselor, or nurse. These generic support services are available to ensure equal educational opportunity for any student with a disability but little more. This individual typically consults with other offices on campus, like the writing lab or tutorial program, to support students who are considered to be “at risk.” More and more campuses are hiring at least one individual to serve as the designated point person for all disability matters. It is simply too complex a job to have the responsibilities for students with disabilities fragmented across several staff members.

Basic LD Support Services

An example of a one-person operation, with a wide range of support services, is Babson College, in Wellesley, MA. Babson is a campus with 1,600 undergraduates, 14 miles west of Boston. Approximately 70 registered undergraduate students were served by the Students with Disabilities office during the 2002-2003 school year. The program includes one full-time staff member. Remediation and support is provided one-on-one in small groups and in class-size groups for study skills and time management. Programs for college survival skills, medication management, and written composition skills are provided through on-campus or off-campus services. Faculty members are notified by the coordinator of the Students with Disabilities Office regarding all accommodation needs. For admission to the program, students are required to submit a psychoeducational report. The application deadline to the LD program is rolling/continuous.

Other colleges that offer similar basic LD support services: Clark University; The College of William & Mary; Mount Holyoke College; and San Diego State University.

Comprehensive LD Support Services

Comprehensive college LD programs that go beyond the legally mandated services are characterized by having more than one person who directs the support services. Typically the director or coordinator has expertise in learning disabilities, and oversees a staff of several full-time professionals and part-time tutors. In addition to the basic accommodations noted above, these campus offices typically have:

- extensive written policies and procedures
- faculty and staff awareness training
- a wide range of tutorial supports
- academic advisement
- frequent monitoring of student progress
- a summer transition program (for incoming freshman)

In some instances, because of the specialized nature of the services provided, these comprehensive programs offer a limited number of “slots” for students with learning disabilities and require a special application and an additional fee. Some of newest innovations in these settings include AD/HD peer coaching, technology prep tutorials, and technology lending libraries for students. Sometimes this model includes in-house diagnostic testing as part of the program. Subject matter tutoring may also be available in addition to learning strategy instruction.

An example of a comprehensive LD support program is the Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques (SALT) Center at The University of Arizona, in Tucson. The University of Arizona has over 28,000 undergraduate students, and approximately 500 registered undergraduates were

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served by SALT staff during 2002-2003. The SALT Center is located in a beautiful new building on campus and houses a full-time staff of 22 professionals, who serve as AD/HD coaches, counselors, graduate assistants, peer mentors, LD specialists, technology specialists, and peer tutors. The SALT program offers a one-day mandatory orientation program for new students before registration. Subject area tutoring is provided from graduate assistants, professional tutors, and trained peer tutors. Additional support in the areas of career planning, learning strategies, self-advocacy, stress management, practical computer skills, test taking, time management, and writing skills are provided collaboratively with on-campus and off-campus services. An extensive website includes written policies and procedures regarding course substitutions, LD accommodations, and documentation requirements. For students seeking support beyond the mandated services, an additional fee of \$1,600 to \$3,900 applies, depending on the level of service desired.

“Students should be advised to choose the college first, and the learning support, second.”

Other colleges that offer similar comprehensive LD support services: Curry College; Stanford University; University of Connecticut; University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill; University of Georgia.

Developing a Transition Planning Portfolio

The **transition planning portfolio (TPP)** is a personal file that the student develops and maintains throughout the high school transition planning process. It may consist of three or more sections that are tabbed for easy referencing. An artist carrying case with a handle would be the ideal size for the portfolio, although the traditional paper and pencil sections may soon give way to a series of electronic file folders contained in a personal website or in an “e-portfolio.”

- **The first section** should contain the student’s school and medical records, and copies of IEPs, high school transcripts, and a one-page summary of the student’s extracurricular activities.
- **The second section** should contain the student’s disability documentation including the most recent psychoeducational evaluation with a specific diagnosis, listing of all approved accommodations, and a copy of her ACT and/or SAT scores.
- **The third section** could contain post-secondary school information, questions to ask during the college interview, a completed copy of the common application form, an updated resume and/or personal essay describing her learning disability, and non-confidential letters of recommendation. Additional sections can easily be added to showcase the student’s interests or achievements (e.g., newspaper clippings, photos).

The transition planning portfolio is not only an organizational tool, but it is also a repository of support materials for a student to use to market or “package” herself. The transition planning portfolio should be nearly complete by the end of tenth grade with updates inserted as warranted. The development of the portfolio could be accomplished as an “independent study” project or as part of a summer transition program between the junior and senior years of high school. IEPs crafted within this time frame should include a transition planning objective such as: “By the conclusion of 10th grade, Christine will have assembled her own personal transition planning portfolio.”

One of the keys to success for any student with LD and/or AD/HD is to be able to articulate what her disability is all about, how it impacts her day-to-day functioning, and how she has learned to compensate for it. In order to field interview questions about her disability, it is useful for the student to

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write a brief 1-2 page essay about her LD and/or AD/HD. This exercise of putting on paper the exact nature of the disability is often extremely helpful. It can serve as a springboard for discussion between the student, the LD specialist or school psychologist, and the parents. Parts of the essay could even be folded into an **admissions essay**. In any case, the student should plan ahead and decide whether or not she will disclose her disability at any stage of the college application process. If an applicant chooses to reveal her disability, she should tie the disclosure in with her documentation and present a rationale for the disclosure (e.g., explain why certain requirements such as foreign languages have not been met, or why certain grades are lower than expected). Students might also suggest in the essay that admissions personnel focus on some of the unique abilities that were noted by the evaluator who conducted the psychoeducational or neuropsychological testing.

Today is an exciting time for high school students with LD and AD/HD to be looking for postsecondary options. Students with learning disabilities need to do their research carefully to be sure that the kind of support they need is in place at postsecondary institutions they are considering (Block, 2003). It is hoped that this article will help students chart their own destinies as they find the perfect "postsecondary match."

College for Students with LD and/or AD/HD

A Timetable for Transition Planning

Grade 8: Preparing for High School Success

Students with learning disabilities/ADHD need to:

- Take the most academically challenging program in the most integrated setting possible.
- Consult LD teachers as needed on how to become independent learners.
- Actively participate in IEP meetings and suggest goals that focus on study skills, time management, and test-taking strategies.
- Seek opportunities that will foster self-determination and independence through increased responsibility at home and in school.
- Develop money management skills and assist in meal preparation, shopping duties, and caring for clothing.
- Expand academic interests through electives and extracurricular activities.
- Begin to identify preferences and interests.
- Keep a calendar for activities and homework assignments.
- Develop appropriate social skills and interpersonal communication skills.
- Learn about high school expectations and offerings.

Grades 9 & 10: Transition Planning Begins

Students with learning disabilities/ADHD need to:

- Continue to practice Grade 8 goals.
- Learn what learning disabilities are and are not.
- Develop an understanding of the nature of their own disability and learning style.
- Clarify the exact nature of their learning disability or ADHD by reviewing the diagnostic report with an LD specialist or psychologist.
- Learn about civil rights and the responsibilities of high schools and colleges under the IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA.
- Self-advocate with parents, teachers, and peers.
- With parent input select classes (e.g., word processing, public speaking, study skills) that will prepare them academically for college or vocational/technical school.
- Avoid temptation to “retreat” to lower-track classes, if college-bound. Select solid college prep courses.
- Be wary of course waivers and carefully consider implications of those choices.
- Use LD support and accommodations in math or foreign-language classes rather than seeking a waiver, if possible.

A Timetable for Transition Planning

Grades 9 & 10: Transition Planning Begins (Continued)

- Seek classroom teachers and learning environments that are supportive.
- Enroll in remediation classes if necessary.
- Focus on “strategy-based” learning with LD teacher.
- Balance class schedules by not taking too many difficult courses in the same semester, or too many classes that play into the area of weakness.
- Beware of peer advice on which classes to take and avoid.
- Provide input on who should participate in the planning team.
- Become a co-leader of the transition planning team at the IEP meeting.
- Demonstrate independence by writing some of their own IEP goals.
- Try out accommodations and auxiliary aids in high school classes that are deemed appropriate by LD teachers (e.g., taped textbooks from RFB&D, note takers, laptop computers, extra time on exams).
- Know how, when, and where to discuss and request needed accommodations.
- Learn about technological aids such as talking calculators, four-track tape recorders, optical scanners, handheld spell checkers, voice-activated software, and electronic day planners.
- Know how to access information from a large library.
- Meet with a guidance counselor to discuss PSAT registration for October administration (in the 10th grade).
- Arrange with guidance counselor to take PSAT/ PLAN with accommodations if warranted.
- Register for SAT II if appropriate.
- Use “score choice” option for SAT II test, to release only those scores desired.
- Gain a realistic assessment of potential for college and vocational school.
- Consider working at a part-time summer job or volunteer position.

Grade 11: Transition Planning in the Junior Year

Students with learning disabilities/ADHD need to:

- Continue to practice Grade 8, 9, & 10 goals.
- Review IEP and ITP for any changes or modifications for the upcoming year.
- Advocate for a complete psycho-educational evaluation to be conducted by the beginning of 12th grade as an IEP goal.
- Present a positive self-image by stressing their strengths, while understanding the influence of their learning disability.
- Keep grades up. Admissions staff look for upward grade trends.
- Arrange for PSATs with accommodations in mid-October. Apply for a social security number if necessary.
- Match vocational interests and academic abilities with appropriate postsecondary or vocational options.

A Timetable for Transition Planning

Grade 11: Transition Planning in the Junior Year (Continued)

- Explore advantages and disadvantages of community colleges, vocational technical schools, and 4-year colleges given the learning disability and/or ADHD.
- Meet with local Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) counselor to determine their eligibility for services. If eligible, ask counselor for assistance in vocational assessment, job placement, and/or postsecondary education or training.
- Consult several of the popular LD college guides and meet with a college advisor to discuss realistic choices.
- Finalize arrangements for the SATs or ACTs with necessary accommodations. Visit Web site for ACT (<http://www.act.org>) and College Board (<http://www.collegeboard.org>).
- Start with a list of 15–20 colleges based on the LD guides, visit the Web site for these institutions, and request specific information about LD services offered.
- When reviewing a prospective college Web site, determine how available support services are on campus. Is there specific information on the site about disabilities?
- Preview colleges with <http://www.collegebound.net> or <http://usnews.com> search site.
- Narrow listing to 8 –10 preliminary choices based on competitiveness, location, curriculum, costs, level of LD support, etc.
- Request any additional information needed from college (e.g., applications to LD program, specific fee information, financial aid forms, etc.).
- Discuss with parents, counselor, regular education teachers, and LD teachers the anticipated level of LD support needed in a postsecondary setting.
- Understand the differences between an “LD program” and support services models.
- Attend “LD college nights” at local area high schools. Assume responsibility for asking questions of college representatives.
- Develop a “Personal Transition File” with parent and teacher assistance. Contents should include: current diagnostic testing, IEPs, grades, letters of recommendation, and student activity chart or resume.
- Narrow options to 5 or 6 schools ranging in competitiveness and levels of LD support.
- Prepare a “College Interview Preparation Form” to use during the campus interviews.
- Arrange for campus visit and interviews in advance. Don’t just drop in on the LD support services office staff and expect an interview.
- Consider sitting in on a class or arrange to meet college students with learning disabilities through the support services office. Listen to their firsthand experiences.
- Meet with the designated LD services coordinator to determine the level of support offered and to assess the nature of the services offered (e.g., remedial, compensatory, learning strategies, etc.).
- Determine how important self-advocacy is on campus. Determine how accommodations are arranged with faculty.

A Timetable for Transition Planning

Grade 11: Transition Planning in the Junior Year (Continued)

- Follow up with a personal thank-you note to the disability coordinator.
- Consider a private LD preparatory school or a “13th year” program if postsecondary education doesn’t seem to be a viable option.
- Consider enrolling in a summer orientation program specifically for students with learning disabilities/ADHD. Contact HEATH Resource Center (800-54-HEATH) for more information.
- Apply for a summer job, volunteer position, or career-related work experience.

Grade 12: Transition Planning in the Senior Year

Students with learning disabilities/ADHD need to:

- Continue to practice Grades 8, 9, 10, & 11 goals.
- Update IEP and ITP quarterly.
- Retake the SATs or ACTs to improve scores. Note that scores may be flagged as “special” or “nonstandard.” Discuss implications with guidance counselor.
- Select several colleges as “safe bets” for admission, several “reasonable reaches” and one or two “long shots.”
- Consider early decision only if convinced that a particular school is the best match.
- Note all application deadlines. Complete a paper-based application to use as a model for online versions.
- Consider downloading applications or using the Common Application.
- Be alert to early application deadlines for some LD college programs.
- View a variety of college shopping networks: Collegenet (<http://www.collegenet.com>); Collegelink (<http://www.collegelink.com>); AppZap (<http://www.collegeview.com/appzap>).
- Carefully select people to write letters of recommendation. Give teachers and counselors plenty of time. Pick a teacher who knows their personality. Recognize that such letters may include comments about the learning disability. Keep Personal Transition File.
- Keep a listing of names, phone numbers, and addresses of postsecondary contact people and copies of all applications in their Personal Transition File.
- Role-play the college interview with guidance counselors or special education teachers.
- Decide whether to disclose their learning disability/ADHD prior to admission.
- View “Transitions to Postsecondary Learning” video and complete student handbook exercises with LD teachers (Eaton/Coull Learning Group, 800-933-4063).
- Pick up all necessary financial aid forms (FAF) for college from guidance counselor. Males who are 18 years old must register for the draft to be eligible for federal aid forms.
- Discuss financial considerations with guidance counselors and search the Web using <http://www.finaid.org> or <http://fastweb.com>.

A Timetable for Transition Planning

Grade 12: Transition Planning in the Senior Year (Continued)

- Tap into Department of Rehabilitation Services. If eligible for job guidance, consider enrolling in internships or job-shadowing experiences that permit “hands-on” skill building.
- Formulate a realistic career plan.
- Forward mid-year grades to colleges.
- Wait for the news from colleges. If the news is good, then:
 - Rank postsecondary choices based upon their ability to successfully compete and the provision of support services to meet their unique learning needs.
 - Notify all schools of their decision.
 - Pay housing deposit by May 1, if appropriate.
 - Arrange to have final transcript sent to the college.
 - Hold an exit interview with guidance counselor and LD teachers.
- If the news is not good, then:
 - Appeal the admissions decision, especially if some new “LD-relevant data” were not considered or overlooked.
 - Pursue any of a variety of alternatives such as applying to a less competitive college with a “rolling admissions” policy; enrolling in a postgraduate year at an LD preparatory school; enrolling in a community college with academic support services.
 - Consider taking a college course for credit over the summer at a community college or in conjunction with a summer orientation program.

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College for Students with LD and/or AD/HD

Tech Preparation: New Challenges and Opportunities for College-bound Teens

If you and your teenager are considering college, you'll want to be aware that the postsecondary education landscape has undergone a technological revolution in recent years. Until a few years ago, basic computer knowledge such as word processing and Internet exploration were the only technological skills necessary for students transitioning into college. Today, colleges and universities require students to be proficient in much more than basic computer skills. Nearly all colleges have electronic catalogues in their libraries, Internet-equipped study stations, Ethernet access in the dorms, and offer college courses online. Laptop computers have become not only commonplace but also an essential admissions requirement for freshmen entering many colleges.

An awareness of the ways in which technology has transformed and reshaped postsecondary education is important for a successful college experience for all students, but is especially relevant for students with learning disabilities (LD) and/or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). Traditionally, assistive technologies such as audio books, talking calculators, and portable word processors have been part of the solution for students with LD. Today's students, however, may require additional technological skills and support. This article will highlight some of the changes on the tech horizon with the hope that high school students with LD and/or AD/HD will learn these tech survival skills in a supportive environment before entering college so they will be better prepared for learning both online and offline.

Educational Technology in Today's Colleges

Educational technologies can be broadly defined as information and communication technologies used to manage, inform, instruct, and communicate in higher education. While educational technologies can support and accommodate students with LD, they may pose unforeseen obstacles for some students. Special education administrators, general and special education teachers, and parents need to be alert to these hurdles and be sure that the Individual Education Plan (IEP) for a college-bound teen includes objectives for both assistive technology and mainstream educational technologies. For example, a student who has significant problems with written expression may benefit from learning how to use assistive tech tools such as Dragon Dictate, a text-to-speech software program. Students also need to be fluent with mainstream technologies such as Web CT, a tool commonly used by faculty for presenting a course syllabus, handouts, and assigned readings online.

Tech-enhanced learning environments are not a replication of the traditional classroom experience in a different setting. Rather they represent a different learning environment which requires both students and teachers to adapt to a new mode of instruction, communication, and evaluation. Rose & Meyers (2002) point out that the digitization of information allows students to customize the information they are learning, and provides multiple ways of engagement and multiple means of representation of course content. Although this sounds exciting, **in order to be successful, students with LD and AD/HD must have the skills necessary to make informed choices among the vast alternatives that technology makes possible.**

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Essential Tech Skills for College Students

Students entering college need to be competent in educational and communication technologies such as course-authoring tools (e.g., WebCT, and Blackboard), and Internet searches. Carmen Luke (1996) notes that the shift from print and paper to an electronic medium combined with the proliferation of information resources and databases requires very different multimodal and multimedia literacy skills from those traditionally promoted in our schools. Fluency with website navigation in accessing instruction and campus services is a clear expectation in postsecondary education. Yet, prior to college, students are rarely taught ways to make informed navigation decisions and extract relevant decisions from the Internet. For example, students need to know how to archive an Internet search as they navigate from one link to the next. Unlike the well-defined boundaries of a textbook, students who surf web pages need to stay focused and on topic. They also need to be careful that they are not lured or distracted by commercial websites and Internet advertisements that appear to be legitimate sources of information, but in fact are personal opinions posted by individuals. Learning these skills can be especially challenging for students with LD and/or AD/HD.

In light of the growing importance of educational and communication technologies, traditional campus services have also had to change. Consider these examples:

- In the past, students were required to first meet with their advisor and then sign up for courses in-person on a designated date. Today a student receives advice about course selection online from his advisor, shops for courses on dedicated departmental websites, and registers online.
- Face-to-face meetings with faculty during set office hours have given way to email communication which can occur at any time, day or night, and from any location.
- In many colleges, information regarding admissions, degree programs, student support services, housing, and extracurricular activities are no longer confined to the pages of a printed brochure or guide but are prominently displayed on college websites. According to a 2002 survey of 559 two- and four-year colleges by the Campus Computing Project, two thirds of colleges surveyed offered online course registration, and more than eighty percent offered course catalogues online.

A Continuum of Tech-based College Classrooms

At the very least, most classroom instruction today is **technology supported**, which means technology is part of the lesson either through Internet research or email communication. While traditional technologies such as television, video tapes, audio conferencing, and overhead transparencies are still in use, a new cadre of multimedia options are quickly becoming commonplace. It is not unusual to see faculty using video and computer technologies as an integral part of their teaching. PowerPoint presentations, video conferencing, and the Internet are standard features of today's college instruction.

An even more tech-enriched environment includes classes conducted in computer lab settings. These **tech-enhanced** classrooms are increasingly popular as computer capabilities for all students become an essential part of instruction. Often these courses require students to be competent in supplementary technological competencies such as working with databases, spreadsheets, and statistical programs. Each student has his own computer and follows the lesson, both online and offline.

The most sophisticated technological learning environments are **virtual classrooms**. Almost all colleges now offer some distance education courses along with traditional classroom-based instruction. By definition, distance education is instruction at a distance where communication between the students and the teacher does not occur face-to-face in a classroom, but at any time through a virtual medium.

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For example, students can download a class lecture and view it at their convenience. Distance education classes are conducted exclusively online and require students to interact primarily in written format through email, chat rooms, discussion boards, or blogs. It's true technology-based courses increase the opportunities for immediate feedback and closer monitoring of student progress. However, it also may give students a false expectation that the professor will be available 24/7, which is simply not the case.

A Learning Curve for College Faculty

New educational technologies in our classrooms require that teachers have an expanded repertoire of skills for accessing and presenting digital information to students. Today's college faculty needs to facilitate the flow of information from a multitude of sources rather than being the sole purveyor of course content. In place of term papers and book chapter readings, faculty often assigns students projects such as designing web pages and electronic portfolios. As a result, students are required to access information from traditional sources (e.g., textbooks and lectures) as well as non-traditional sources (e. g., Internet, chat room discussions, and list serves).

Seasoned college professors, as well as adjunct faculty, may not think to provide students with guidance on how to participate in virtual communities and other tech-mediated environments, if they assume students already possess such skills. Students with LD and/or AD/HD may find it challenging if they are left to fend for themselves in virtual learning communities when they have limited written language skills, poor keyboarding skills, and slow information processing abilities. However, when faculty can anticipate these problems and teach tech skills and "netiquette" in conjunction with course content, all students can benefit.

Your Teen's Tech Readiness: Assess and Progress

Now that you understand the ever-increasing role of technology on today's college campus, you and your teenager will do well to assess his technology skills while he's in high school — and plan for his future. There are three steps to evaluating his tech readiness and matching his skill level to specific colleges:

1. Evaluate his current technical skills.
2. Identify additional technology skills he wants to develop before he goes to college.
3. Learn about the technology skill requirements and support at the colleges he is considering.

To begin this assessment and planning process, see "Questions to Help Teens assess their Tech-Readiness for College" on page 18.

About the Co-author

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Questions to Help Teens Assess Their Tech-Readiness for College

There are three steps to evaluating a teenager's tech readiness for college and matching his skill level to specific college settings:

1. Evaluate the student's current technical skills.
2. Identify additional skills the student wants to learn.
3. Learn about the technology skill requirements at colleges you are considering.

This worksheet is designed to help you and your teenager with LD and/or AD/HD work through all three steps. Revisit the form and update it with your teen as he acquires new technology tools and skills.

Note: Assistive technology helps students with disabilities bypass or "work around" their academic weaknesses, while educational technology complements academic performance for all students.

Part I: Evaluate Your Current Educational Tech Skills

Have your teenager evaluate his current level of tech skills. Assist him as necessary.

What technology tools do you currently own or use? (Check all that apply)	Own it	Use it
iPod		
Personal Digital Assistant (PDA)		
Laptop/Desktop computer		
Audio Books		
Programmable wrist watch		
Text-to-speech technology (e.g., Kurzweil)		
Outlining software (e.g., Inspiration)		
Speech-to-text software (e.g., Dragon Naturally Speaking)		
Reading Pen		
Other _____		
Other _____		



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Questions to Help Teens Assess Their Tech-Readiness for College

What technology skills have you learned?	Rate Your Skills (Circle your response)		
How would you rate your overall computer skills? (e.g. installing software, moving and resizing the screen, organizing digital files and folders, using the help function)	Good	Average	Poor
How would you rate your word processing skills on a computer? (e.g., changing font size, color, copying and pasting information, applying header and footer and page numbering)	Good	Average	Poor
How good are your keyboarding skills?	Good	Average	Poor
Are you comfortable reading off the computer screen for long periods of time (e.g., 30 mins.)?	Yes	Somewhat	No
Do you use a portable word processor or laptop computer for writing assignments or taking notes in class?	Often	Sometimes	Never
Do you use the Internet to access your school's website for homework information, and do you use online textbooks?	Often	Sometimes	Never
How would you rate your overall skills in searching for information on the Internet? (e.g., using different search engines, bookmarking websites, using electronic databases, and navigating links)	Good	Average	Poor
How would you rate your electronic communication skills? (e.g., checking, creating and replying to email, sending email attachments, using instant messaging)	Good	Average	Poor
How would you rate your skill in making multimedia presentations? (e.g., PowerPoint, inserting sound or video into your presentation)	Good	Average	Poor

Questions to Help Teens Assess Their Tech-Readiness for College

Part 2: Set Goals for Learning New Educational Tech Skills

What tech-based strategies would you like to learn before going to college?	Check if interested	Resources for Help and Information
If you have an IEP or 504 Plan, include objectives for learning to use assistive tech or educational tech tools.		Work with your IEP team to add this goal to your IEP.
Gain a clear understanding of your academic strengths and weaknesses.		Work with your IEP team, parents, or guidance counselor to build self-awareness.
Prepare to actively seek tech support to assist you in learning.		Work with your IEP team, parents, or guidance counselor to develop self-advocacy skills.
Learn how to use text-to-speech software or audio books to help you read.		Technology center at your high school or local community college Alliance for Technology Access http://www.ataccess.org/
Learn how to use software programs to help you organize your writing.		Technology center at your high school or local community college Alliance for Technology Access http://www.ataccess.org/
Learn how to conduct an online search on the Internet to help you with research projects or term papers.		Technology center at your high school or local community college
Learn how to take an online course, using special software.		Courses/tech center at local community college
Explore other tech tools or skills you might want to use in college (See list in Part 1 of this worksheet.)		Technology center at your high school or community college Alliance for Technology Access http://www.ataccess.org/

Questions to Help Teens Assess Their Tech-Readiness for College

Part 3: Learn about the Tech Requirements/Culture at Colleges You Are Considering

For each college you're considering, find out about the school's tech sophistication, tech requirements, and the level of tech support. You should be able to find this information by reading the school's website and course catalog, and by contacting the campus disability services office.

Questions to Ask Colleges	Note Responses Here
Who provides technology support for students? (check all that apply)	<input type="checkbox"/> a campus-wide service <input type="checkbox"/> the disability services office <input type="checkbox"/> other: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> There isn't much support.
Do disability services staff have specialized training in a broad range of assistive and educational technologies?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Is there an additional fee for tech support services?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES, and it is as follows: <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Does the disability services office provide tech equipment on a short-term loan to students?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Does the disability services office sponsor a summer tech prep orientation program?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
Does the disability services office provide scanning of textbooks at no charge to students?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
How flexible is the college in adapting web-based services (e.g., online application, priority registration) to student with LD and AD/HD?	<input type="checkbox"/> Very flexible <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible <input type="checkbox"/> Not flexible
Does the college offer technology preparation courses? Are these offered as a semester course, a free-standing workshop, or as tutorials? Is there college credit associated with these options?	Notes:
Does the college or department have specific computer competency requirements for graduation?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES, and it is as follows: <input type="checkbox"/> NO
How extensive is online access to library resources?	<input type="checkbox"/> Extensive <input type="checkbox"/> Okay <input type="checkbox"/> Limited
Does the college offer many of its undergraduate courses on WebCT or Blackboard?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO

Questions to Help Teens Assess Their Tech-Readiness for College

NEXT STEPS:

After completing this worksheet, it may be helpful for your teen to list action items and include a date by which he wants to accomplish each goal. (Examples: Prioritize which tech skills and tools he needs to learn before starting college, and locate appropriate resources.) Revisit this worksheet — and your action items — regularly to track progress.

● About the Co-author

Manju Banerjee, M.A., M.S. is currently a doctoral student at the University of Connecticut. She is former Director of Disability Services at Lesley University in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Coordinator of Learning Disability Services for Students at Boston University. She is associate editor of the *Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability*.


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Resources & References
High School Students Considering College
Books

Preparing for College: Options for Students with Learning Disabilities
<http://ahead.org/publications.php#prepareforcollege>
 By Dr. Lydia Block and Wayne Cocchi

College Students with Learning Disabilities — 3rd Edition
<http://ahead.org/publications.php#ldstudents>
 By Loring Brinckerhoff, Ph.D.

Ready, Set, Go: Helping Students with Learning Disabilities Prepare for College
<http://ahead.org/publications.php#readyssetgo>
 By Association on Higher Education and Disability

Section 504: The Law and Its Impact on Postsecondary Education
<http://ahead.org/publications.php#504>
 By American Council on Education and the HEATH Resource Center

Websites

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET)
<http://www.ncset.org/>

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD)
<http://www.ldonline.org/njclcd>

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)
<http://www.ahead.org>

Related SchwabLearning.org Articles

Transition to Adulthood: Focusing on Life after High School
<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=970>

Parent Role Affirmed in Feds' Sobering Study of Teen Students with LD
<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=790>

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Teens Shopping for College Options

Books

K&W Guide to Colleges

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0375762205/schwabfoundation/

By Marybeth Kravets and Imy F. Wax

Peterson's Colleges With Programs for Students With Learning Disabilities or ADD

www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/0768904552/schwabfoundation/

By Peterson's Guides (Editor), et al.

Related SchwabLearning.org Articles

Attorney Paul Grossman on Legal Rights for College Students with LD

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=847>

Parent Role Affirmed in Feds' Sobering Study of Teen Students with LD

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=790>

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Related SchwabLearning.org Articles

Assistive Technology for Kids with Learning Disabilities — An Overview

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=286>

Assistive Technology Tools Database

<http://www.schwablearning.org/resources.asp?g=6&s=4>

Matching Assistive Technology Tools to Individual Needs

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=1093>

Self-Advocacy: A Valuable Skill for Your Teenager

<http://www.schwablearning.org/articles.asp?r=522>

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A Parent's Guide to Helping Kids With Learning Difficulties



Visit Schwab Learning's Online Resources



SchwabLearning.org is a parent's guide to helping kids with learning difficulties.

We'll help you understand how to:

- **Identify** your child's problem by working with teachers, doctors, and other professionals.
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- Locate **resources** including Schwab Learning publications, plus additional books and websites.

SchwabLearning.org—free and reliable information at your fingertips, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.



Sparktop.org™ is a one-of-a-kind website created expressly for kids ages 8-12 with learning difficulties including learning disabilities (LD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD). Through games, activities, and creativity tools, kids at SparkTop.org can:

- Find information about how their brain works, and get tips on how to succeed in school and life.
- Showcase their creativity and be recognized for their strengths.
- Safely connect with other kids who know what they are going through.

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