

Using the IEP to Pay for College

Did you know a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) might help fund their college education?

Students receiving special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) who have not graduated or accepted a regular high school diploma are eligible for a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) through the age of 21. With a little bit of planning and foresight, this can include participation in inclusive college programs for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Dual enrollment is the term for students who are enrolled in two institutions at the same time. Because the local school district would continue to administer the student's IEP and have responsibility for providing FAPE, and the student would be enrolled in a college program, the student would be considered to have dual enrollment.

The U.S. Department of Education has made clear that vocational rehabilitation (VR) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds can be used to support dual enrollment, comprehensive transition and other postsecondary education programs for students with disabilities. However, IDEA funds need only be provided by a school district if those courses are required to provide FAPE and are expressly included in a student's IEP.

So, you need to look closely at the IEP to make sure it passes this test. Did you know the IEP has a special section related to transition? If your child is younger than 14, you may not have paid much attention to this very important part of the IEP.

In Pennsylvania, beginning with the first IEP to be in effect when a student turns 14, and updated annually thereafter, each student's IEP must include:

(i) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills; and (ii) the transition services (including courses of study)

needed to assist the student in reaching those goals. 20 U.S.C. § 1414(d)(1)(A)(i)(VIII) and 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.320(b) and 300.321(b).

Transition plans for students can certainly include dual enrollment and, if the student's IEP Team determines that the courses offered as part of a dual enrollment program are necessary to provide the student with FAPE, costs for such course work is the responsibility of the student's school district.

So, how do we identify the goals, supports and accommodations necessary to successfully transition to a postsecondary setting and get those into the IEP? These will be unique to every student, but the IEP team should consider, and work toward, the student's desired:

- Post-Secondary Education
- Living Situation (alone? roommates? family? on or off campus?)
- Degree of Participation in campus or other social life
- Recreation and Leisure
- Employment

Once these goals are identified, supports, services, and accommodations can be put in place to help the student achieve them. In general, services would be designed to meet the needs of the individual student based on IEP goals, and they would be goals that can only be met in an inclusive post-secondary environment.

One student may take a couple of classes on the college campus with support from the district transition coordinator while living at home. Another student may enroll full-time and live on-campus, using the college campus as the environment to practice access and independent living skills.

Here are a few examples of secondary education goals:

- After high school, [student] will improve their social, self-advocacy, and self-care skills by participating in an inclusive education environment at a college-based education program.
- After high school, [student] will independently prepare for school each day, including self-care, dressing, making the bed, appearing for breakfast and arriving at class.
- After high school, [student] will participate in an inclusive college-based program designed to provide education and/or training and vocational training with appropriate supports.

- After high school, [student] will enroll in a 4-year college to obtain [what certification] and find work as a [specific position].

If you'd like to talk with someone about your student's transition goals, specifically, or college opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities more broadly, email advocacyassistance@achieva.info or 1.888.272.7229 x486 for more information.