

## Preparing Your Child for College

At Achieva, when we are asked to look at Individual Education Programs (IEP) we often say “begin with the end in mind.” What we mean is: look at the aspirations your child has for life beyond high school. What are their hopes or dreams for work, family and community? Then go back and look at what needs to be included in the IEP to make these goals a reality. More and more often, we are hearing that students want to attend a college or university.

As college and university programs for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities become commonplace, parents are asking: “How can I position my child for success in a college or university environment?”

You’ll want to start planning for college early. There are two things that take the most time: saving money for college, and using the IEP to prepare your child to succeed in college.

As an active member of the IEP team, you’ll want to make sure there is agreement that your child is college-bound, and IEP goals should be designed accordingly, starting as early as possible.

Encourage inclusion in general education courses. The more experience your child has in traditional academic class settings, the more prepared they’ll be for attendance in college courses.

Start saving. Students with disabilities may be eligible for funding from various state and local sources, but college is expensive and these programs will not cover the entire cost. ([Refer to Achieva’s resources on College Planning](#))

Develop a plan to fade supports; help your child self-advocate as much as possible. As with any student, college is a time for taking steps toward independence. In the case of a student with intellectual or developmental disabilities, you will want this to follow a well-established trajectory of fading support and increasing self-advocacy. Provide opportunities to practice life skills like telling time, navigating a campus, utilizing transportation or meal-planning prior to coming to campus. Help your child understand their strengths or weaknesses so that they are able to ask for support as necessary.

Students should have a detailed plan for high school, laid out in the IEP, that supports enrollment in college:

- Expand the IEP transition plan to outline a high school plan of study, with specific classes identified.
- Work to address any basic skills deficits in reading, math, writing, and speech or language.
- Become proficient with smartphones, computers, and the Internet.
- Provide opportunities for students to independently manage their time and academic work. This may uncover areas of need that wouldn't necessarily be apparent in a high school environment with existing supports, but this exercise is essential to uncovering skill gaps that may need to be addressed prior to college.
- Continue to develop an understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses and the strategies they will use to leverage their strengths and compensate for weaknesses in a more rigorous environment.

With an early start, a thoughtful, measured approach, and the support of the family, school team, and community, students with intellectual and developmental disabilities can enroll and thrive in a college or university environment.

Email [advocacyassistance@achieva.info](mailto:advocacyassistance@achieva.info) or 1.888.272.7229 x486 for more information.