

2019

Learning from Post-Transition College Students: Using Research to Improve Transition Services for College Inclusion Success

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Abbott, Jordan and McEachern, Catherine, "Learning from Post-Transition College Students: Using Research to Improve Transition Services for College Inclusion Success" (2019). *Presentation at the Massachusetts Council for Exceptional Children Innovations in Special Education. Norwood, MA. 2.* Retrieved from https://scholarworks.umass.edu/cfssr_presentations/2

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Learning from Post-Transition College Students: Using Research to Improve Transition Services for College Inclusion Success

Jordan Abbott & Catherine McEachern

MCEC Innovations in Special Education
November 22, 2019

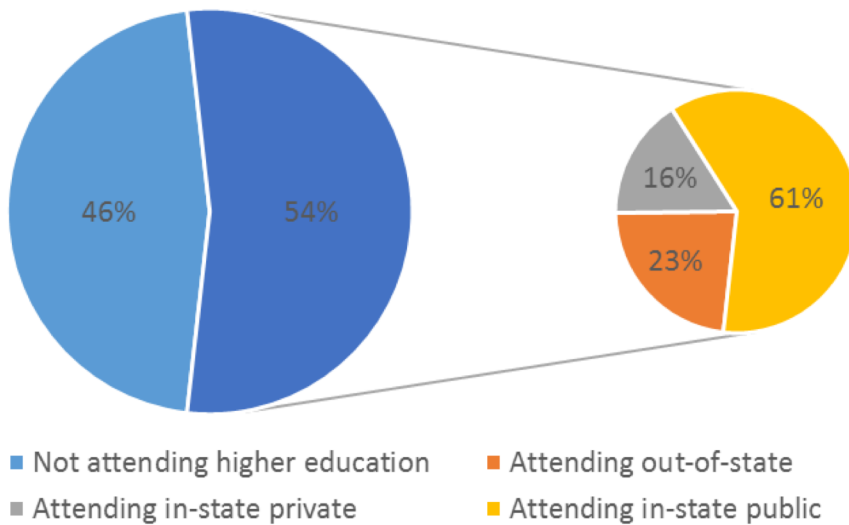
“It's very different than high school. I basically had my teachers advocate for me as opposed to college, especially bachelors. I think that it makes me more open toward being more independent and responsible and advocating for myself.” --Worcester State University student

Agenda

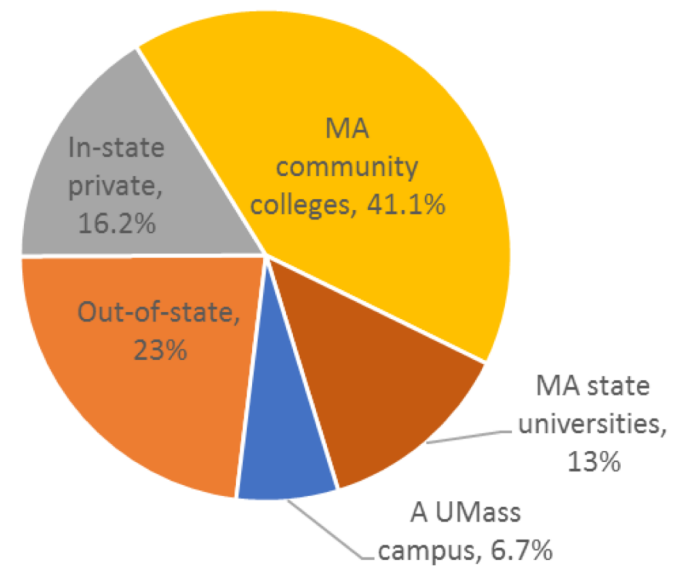
- College attendance, persistence, and completion
- What the literature does and doesn't tell us
- Preliminary results from the UMass study on college-going
- First-hand account and insider tips: experiences of a college graduate with disabilities
- Question & Answer

MA: Postsecondary Attendance

MA High School Graduates with Disabilities



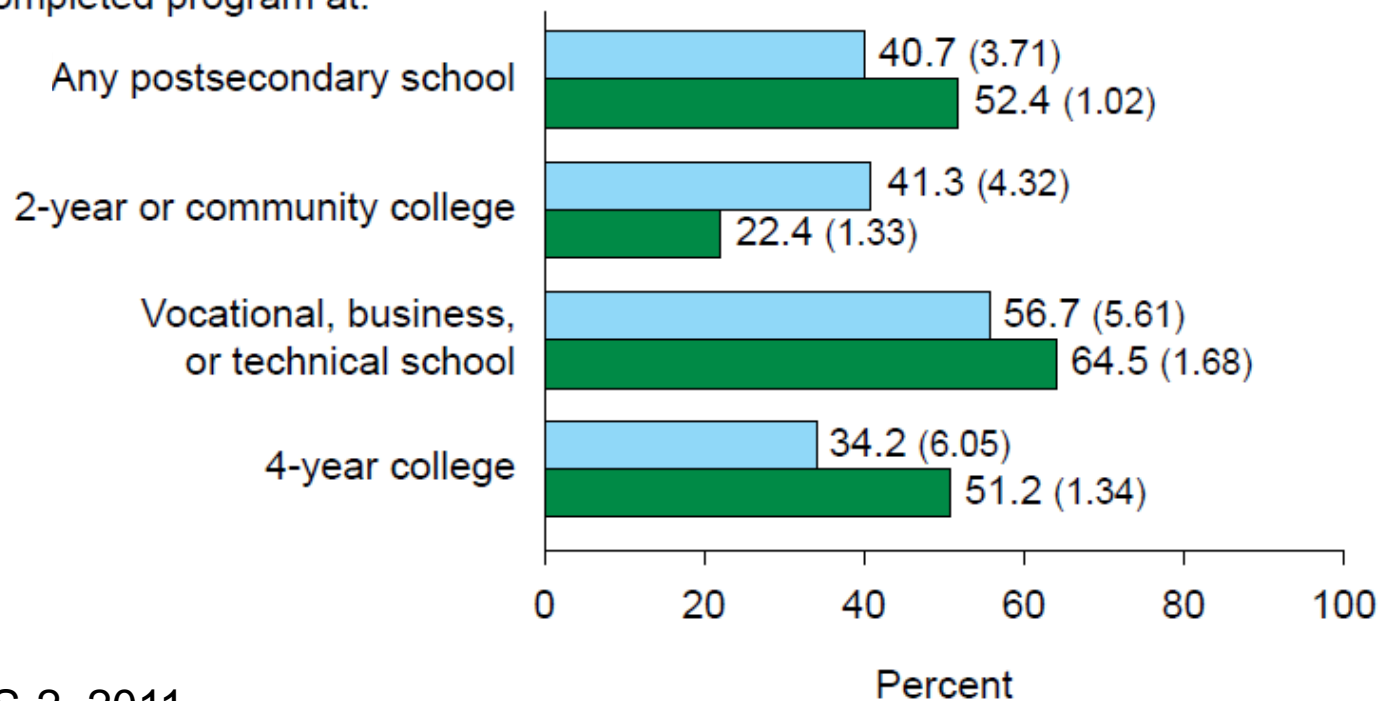
MA Graduates with Disabilities Attending Higher Education



U.S.: Postsecondary Persistence and Completion

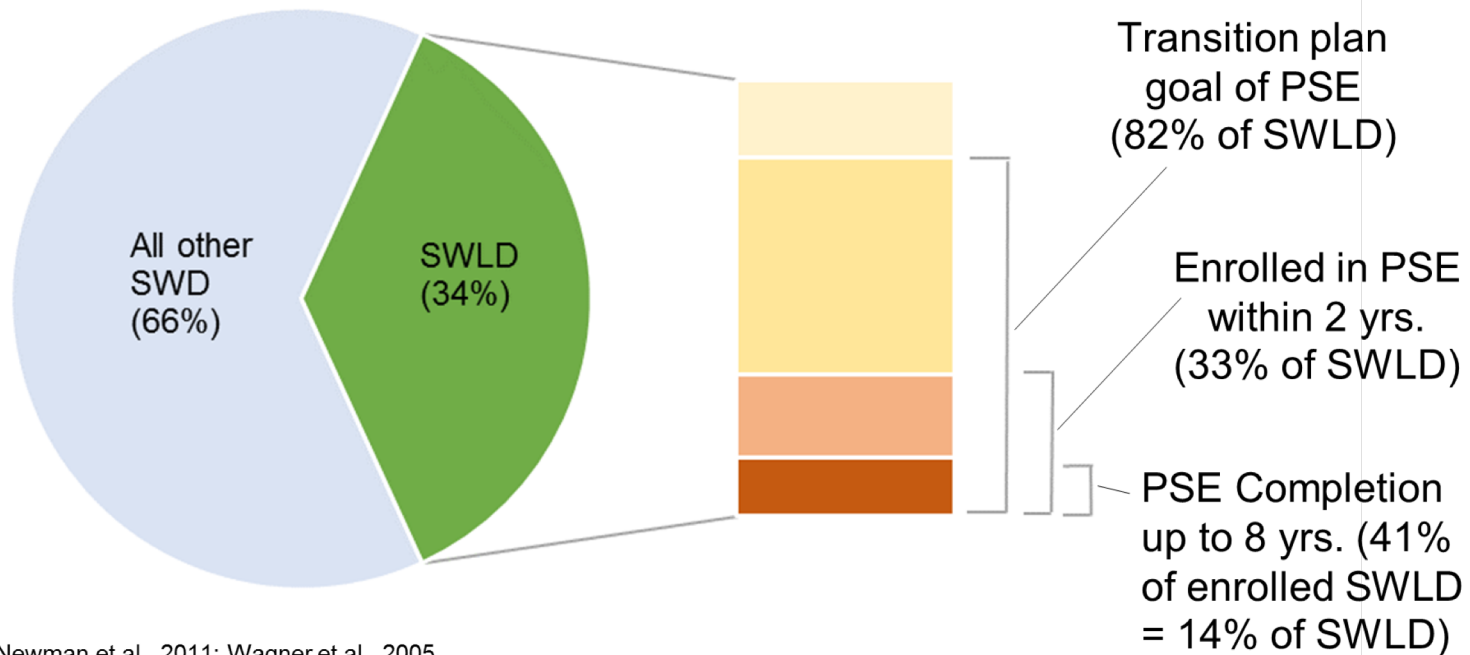
Graduated from or completed program at:

■ Young adults with disabilities
■ Young adults in general population



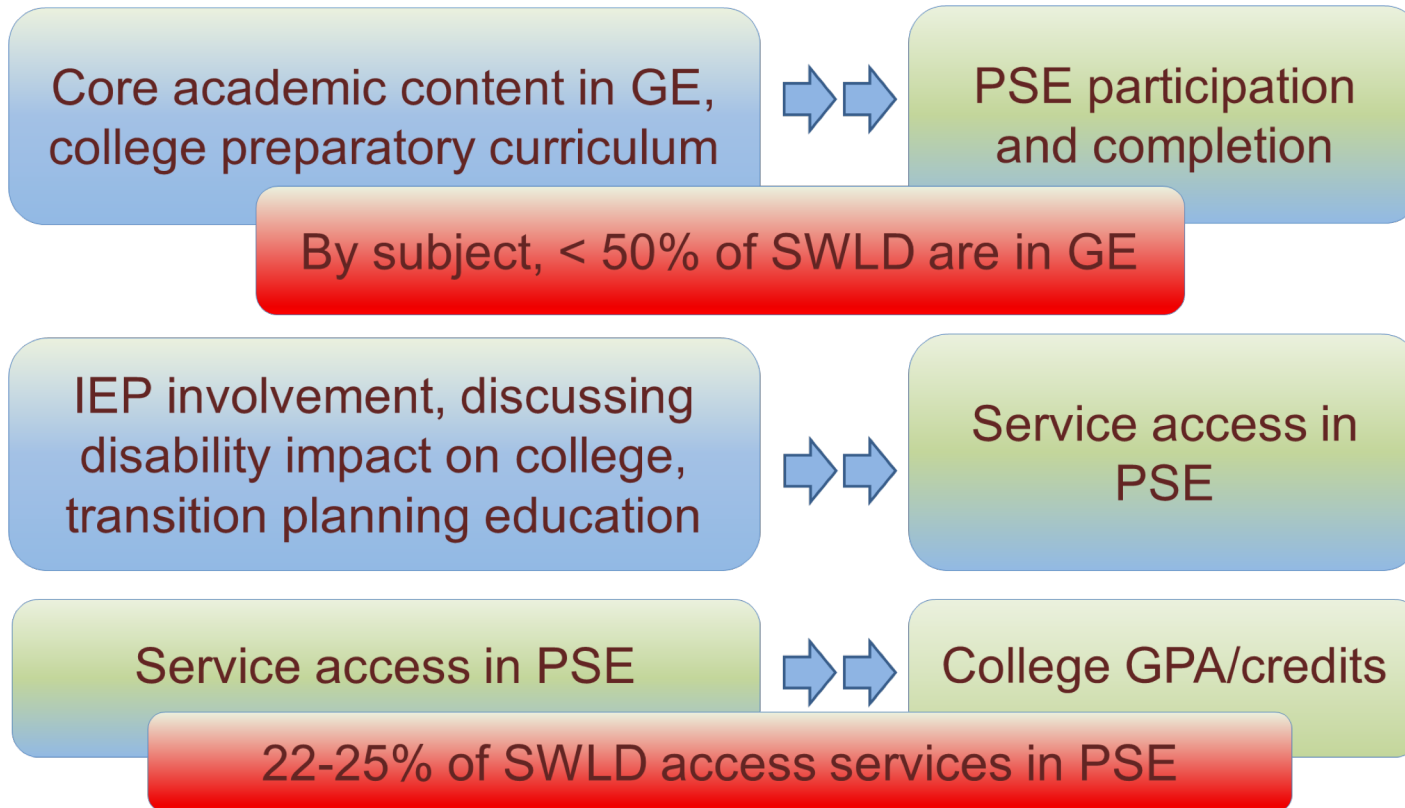
NLTS-2, 2011

Students with Learning Disabilities



NCES, 2018; Newman et al., 2011; Wagner et al., 2005

Findings from Literature Review



Findings from Literature Review

Students with disabilities prioritize self-advocacy and disability rights

Self-determination is a significant intermediary between secondary factors and postsecondary outcomes

Financing postsecondary education is a crucial component of transition curricula

Findings from Literature Review

College readiness factors: confidence, persistence, help-seeking, self-knowledge, self-determination, self-discipline, knowledge that college is different from high school

Teachers' deficit ideologies regarding underrepresented students undermine access to PSE-oriented transition services

Family involvement is at the level of compliance rather than meaningful partnerships

Recent Study



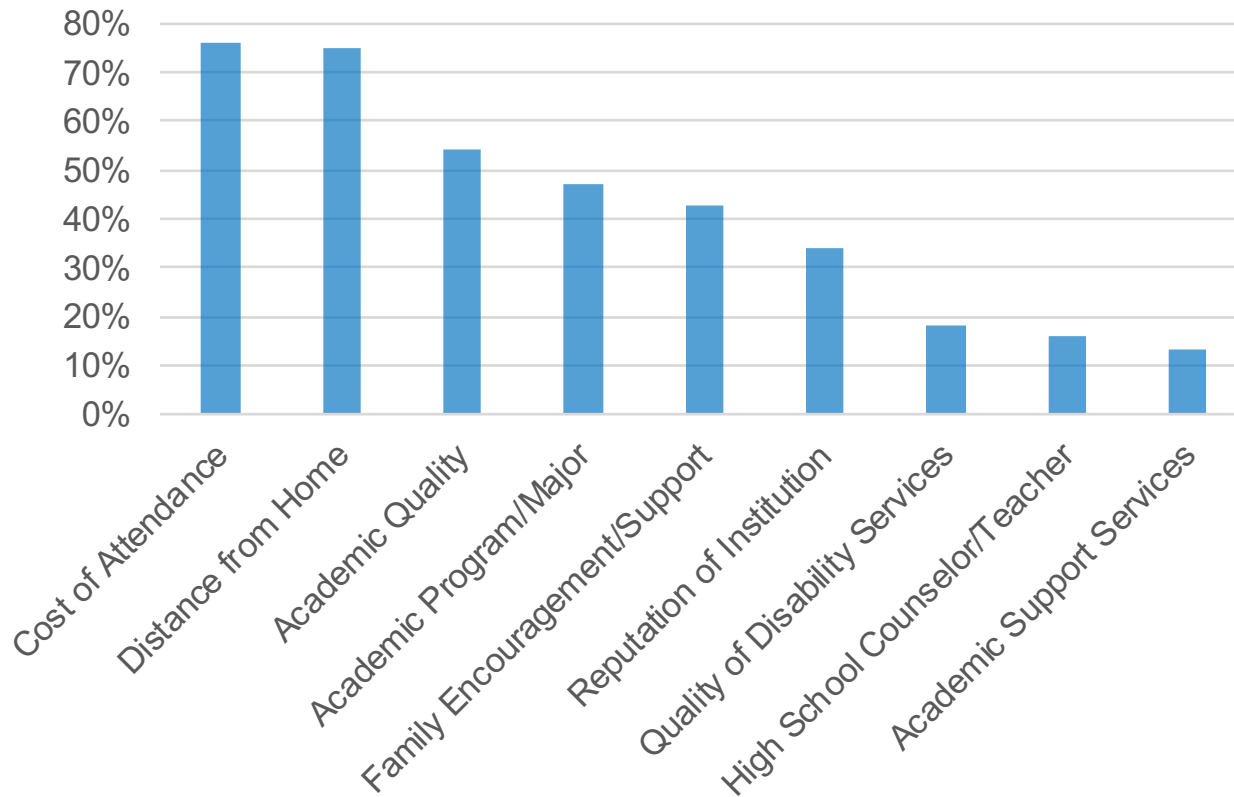
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Experiences of students with disabilities in the college search/college choice process and as enrolled students

- Interviews (students registered with Disability Services)
 - Survey (general student population)

Factors Influencing Choice to Attend Students with IEPs in high school



Transfer Student
Yes: 33%
No: 67%

Disability Services

Respondents: 1,992

IEP in High School: 276 (14%)

Of students reporting having had an IEP in high school

- identify as a person with a disability:

54% (NO 27%, UNSURE 19%)



- registered with Disability Services:

48% (NO 44%, UNSURE 8%)



■ Yes

■ Unsure

■ No

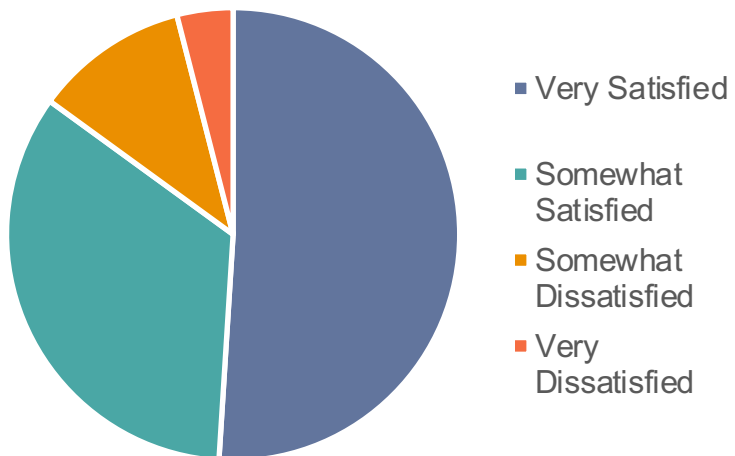
Disability Services

Reasons not registered:

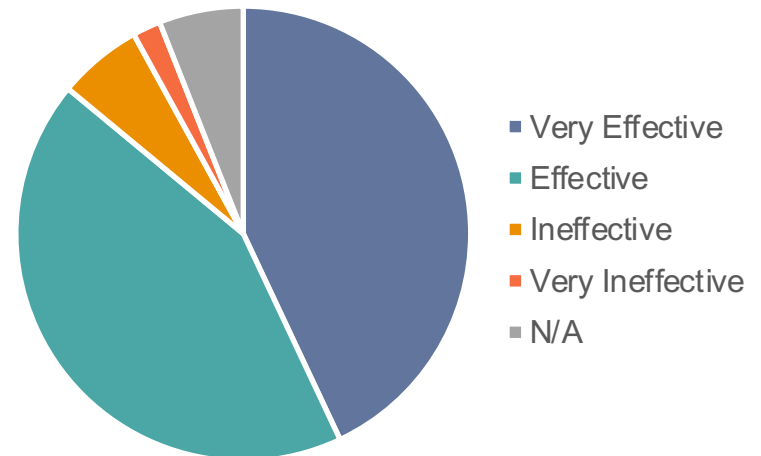
1. I do not think the services or accommodations would be helpful (32%)
2. I want the same resources/accommodations as my classmates (26%)
3. I do not have a disability (25%)
4. I do not know how to register (21%)
5. I do not know what services this office provides (20%)

Disability Services

Registered Students



Very Satisfied or Satisfied: 86%



Very Effective or Effective: 92%

Attitudes Toward Inclusion

“Students with intellectual disability belong at college.”

Strongly Agree/Agree: **96%**

“Students with intellectual disability belong at this institution.”

Strongly Agree/Agree: **88%**

“I would feel comfortable with students with ID in my classes.”

Strongly Agree/Agree: **95%**

In her own words...

Brief Introduction: Catherine

- Special Education Advocate -- Specializing in Transition
- Recent graduate of UMass Amherst, Class of 2019
- B.S. Psychology, Focus in Neuroscience, Specialization in Developmental Disabilities and Human Services
- Self-Identification
 - Developmental Disabilities
 - Once Extreme, now Moderate **Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)**
 - **Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)** -- Inattentive Type
 - Severe **Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD)**
 - Slow Processing Speed
 - Auditory and Sensory Processing issues
 - Physical Disabilities
 - Due to Invasive **Neurological Lyme Disease** (2016)
 - Arthritis, Fibromyalgia, Severe Nut Allergies, Weakness in Joints (leading to collapse after 2 - 3 hours standing), Frequent injury

School Experience

- **Middle School** → 504 Plan, but no intensive testing
- **High School** → IEP Plan, following additional Neuropsychological Evaluation
 - Freshman Year: 1.82 GPA
 - Accommodations given Sophomore Year:
 - 100% Extra Time on Exams and Quizzes (Separate Space)
 - Extra time on homework and projects (if requested before due date)
 - Notecard on all Exams
 - Ability to leave class at any time to see School Counselor, School Psychologist, and/or Learning Specialist
 - Ability to take breaks at nurse due to physical symptoms of Panic Attacks
- **College** → Accommodations through Disability Services
 - Completed DS Intake Form before starting my first semester
 - Accommodations given:
 - 100% Extra time on Exams and Quizzes (Separate Space)
 - Extra time on assignments
 - Access to Learning Specialist

Transition Experience

- **14 Years old** → IEP Team, including myself and my parents, started going over what my future goals were
 - Topics mentioned:
 - College (4 year or 2 year)
 - Job
 - Building up learning skills or working skills
 - Potential Majors/Career Fields
- My Decision: 4 Year University
 - HS GPA: 3.0
 - **Explained GPA in Common App Essay (Disabilities)**
 - # of Schools Applied: **12**
 - # of Schools Accepted: **2**
 - **Be aware that Demographic Information matters in this process!**
 - Planned on Pre-Medicine
- Pre-Medicine Preparation:
 - Police Internship (High school)
 - EMT School and License (Summer 2015, post-graduation)
 - AP Classes Senior Year in order to get ahead on credits in college

Self-Advocacy

- **High School**
 - Involved in IEP meetings at 14
 - Learned about my **diagnoses, strengths, and weaknesses**
 - Started to **Self-Advocate**
- **College**
 - Applied to Disability Services summer before 1st semester
 - Necessary to **Self-Advocate** with Professors, Teaching Assistants, Supervisors, etc.
 - Consumer Manager can offer support, however, it was **MY** responsibility to advocate for my accommodations if professors unwilling

Tips:

- **Important to learn this skill early!**
 - as early as possible!
- **Transition should include awareness on what using the term “Disability” will legally qualify the student for** (regardless of how they identify)
 - desensitize students to use this term, this will allow them proper access to legal accommodations and services
- **Common Issue: parents may feel guilt in accepting that their child has a disability**
 - this is incredibly unhelpful for the child
 - Therapy, support groups, and education can help

Transition Planning

- **Research Colleges, Career options**
 - Disability Services
 - Food Allergies (safety of Dining Halls)
 - Distance from home
 - Mental Health Services
 - etc.
- **Encourage student to be involved in IEP meetings!**
 - if student unwilling, Special Educator should go over documents with student in private
 - the student should know and understand their **diagnoses, strengths, and weaknesses** (emphasize that they are not “damaged goods”, just unique)
- **Teach students their change in legal coverage from High School to College or Workforce**
 - IDEA + 504 + ADA → Only 504 and ADA
 - therefore, no IEP Plans in High School, they do not carry over!
- **Ensure MCAS preparation is part of transition planning**
 - MCAS scores can ensure or disqualify a student’s graduation with a **diploma**
 - ALT MCAS = no standard diploma, this makes eligibility for college difficult
- **SAT/ACT Preparation part of transition planning**

Working with Parents

- **Education is power** → important for understanding your child, their disability, and what their future could look like
- **Your children are more capable than you may think!**
 - Catherine is direct proof
 - Balance pressure and expectations
 - Let your child dream about careers without limiting them
- **Do not explicitly tell your child that they cannot do something**
- **Talk to your child about their diagnosis and help them figure out what works for them**
- **Address your own conscious or unconscious biases!**
- **Important to know: in College, all information goes through the student. The school cannot contact you regarding grades, accommodations, issues, etc.**
 - therefore, teaching your child about their disability and encouraging them to self advocate is imperative

Disability Services in College

- **Documentation is key to being deemed eligible for services and accommodations**
- **Disability Services may not offer all options, but if you request it you may get it**
 - Not all consumer managers operate the same way, some may offer more options than others
 - Important for students to know what is offered through Disability Services and specifically request it
 - YOU get to choose what accommodations you want to request, the consumer manager will either deem it appropriate or not
- **Residential Life: Disability Services can offer dorm accommodations**
 - Typically the only documentation needed is a Doctor's Note
- **Common reasons for students not registering or using accommodations**
 - Stigma (fear of peers and professors)
 - Not understanding diagnoses
 - "I won't survive in the real world if I use accommodations"
 - Student doesn't know what it's like NOT to have accommodations
 - Not realizing the challenge of college, wait to register
 - Do not think disability is "bad enough" to qualify

Questions?

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