

# Life After High School: Making the Transition to Postsecondary Opportunities



We are all born with great potential.  
Shouldn't we all have the chance to achieve it?

**Ballard Spahr**  
LLP



Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities  
at Kennedy Krieger Institute

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## What happens when my child finishes high school?

Students with disabilities have a number of options as they transition from high school to postsecondary settings. Many students enter two- or four-year colleges, or participate in career or vocational training programs to prepare for employment. Some students may transition to receiving services from state agencies. Regardless of the postsecondary setting a student pursues, it is important that students and families prepare for the shifting roles and responsibilities inherent to any transition, and that they create a plan for success.

## How should I prepare for my child's transition?

Planning for the transition is critical and should include setting goals and helping your child become a self-advocate. Beginning at age 14 (in Maryland), schools should include transition planning as part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. During transition planning, students, families and school staff members will consider a variety of options, including postsecondary education, vocational training or employment, and independent living. Some students may begin receiving transition services from their state vocational and rehabilitation services agency prior to graduation from high school.



The transition process may include a service coordinator from their state department of vocational and rehabilitation services. Service coordinators should be invited to IEP meetings when transition planning will be discussed. They should be given copies of teachers' notes, a current IEP and a recent psychological evaluation to help them participate fully in the process.

Students should participate actively in transition planning. They should begin to advocate for themselves during the IEP process, which should include attending IEP meetings. Practicing self-advocacy skills in IEP meetings will help students become comfortable with effectively communicating the nature of their disabilities and how their disabilities impact them. Parents should keep all documentation related to their child's medical records, school records and benefits. When possible, parents should help their child obtain volunteer and employment experiences before he or she leaves high school.

School district practices for coordinating IEP transition services differ from one district to another. It's important to know how your district coordinates these services. Some schools employ school-wide transition coordinators specifically dedicated to the transition process, while others establish transition councils that meet the transition needs of students with disabilities in the entire district. In some schools in Maryland, the IEP case manager is in charge of IEP transition services.

## What are some of the differences between high school and postsecondary opportunities?



The transition from high school involves a shift from being “entitled” to services, to having to demonstrate “eligibility” for services. In high school, students may be entitled to receive special education and related services until they turn 21 or obtain a high school diploma. After high school, individuals with disabilities are responsible

for providing schools and service providers with documentation to establish eligibility for services.

One of the most significant differences after high school is that requesting or advocating for accommodations and services becomes the responsibility of the individual, not the postsecondary institution, employer or service agency. If students need accommodations in a postsecondary educational setting, it is their responsibility to obtain necessary documentation at their own expense. As

students transition to postsecondary settings, they will increasingly be called upon to explain to others how they are eligible to receive accommodations or services for their educational programs.

## Can postsecondary institutions deny students admission based on their disabilities?

Applicants who meet the essential requirements for admission may not be denied admission based on their disabilities. Postsecondary institutions also may not categorically exclude applicants with particular disabilities and must make individualized determinations regarding eligibility. For example, an institution cannot assume that all blind students are ineligible to participate in an art program. Rather, the institution must consider the individual circumstances of each student in determining whether that student can meet the essential eligibility requirements for its program.



## Does my child have to notify postsecondary institutions or employers of disability status?

Individuals with disabilities are not required to tell schools or employers that they have a disability. Postsecondary institutions generally may not make

“preadmission inquiries,” which are questions that require applicants to disclose a disability. However, to receive academic adjustments or auxiliary aids and services (commonly called accommodations), such as interpreters or extra time on tests, individuals with disabilities must identify their disability status to schools or employers and request accommodations.



## How can my child receive accommodations at the postsecondary level?

Students with disabilities must comply with an institution’s reasonable processes for obtaining accommodations, including reasonable requests for documentation. Many institutions require students to provide documentation, at their own expense, showing they have a disability, explaining how the disability affects their ability to function, and supporting the requested accommodation. An IEP or Section 504 plan might not be sufficient for many institutions, and students may be required to obtain additional evaluations or documentation at their own expense. State vocational rehabilitation agencies may be able to assist students with these

expenses. Students who take the SAT and ACT may also obtain accommodations for these tests by following the procedures published by each testing administrator. In addition, high school students can get accommodations for AP exams, which can lead to college credit.

## What Maryland resources are available to help my child during the transition process?

The Maryland State Department of Education’s Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) provides transition planning and transition services to eligible students with disabilities. DORS recommends that high school students reach out to the agency in their junior year of high school to begin the transition process. DORS may begin assisting your child in high school by providing vocational assessments, training and other resources. DORS may also be able to assist eligible students with disabilities with some costs related to postsecondary education and employment.

Your child may apply for services from the Social Security Administration for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and for Medicaid/Medical Assistance through the state. Depending on the availability of funding, eligible students may receive services from the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA). The DDA may provide support, vocational and residential services to qualified individuals.





## Where can I find information about adult guardianship and less restrictive alternatives?

Families should consider whether it is necessary to put in place powers of attorney that would give parents authority to handle financial and property matters as children transition to adulthood. Families should also consider advance directives, as they allow parents to continue to participate in decision-making related to healthcare. For some individuals with disabilities, parents may need to make the difficult decision to petition for guardianship of their children as they transition to adulthood, in cases in which children are unable to make necessary decisions or care for themselves. Visit the People's Law Library at [peoples-law.org](http://peoples-law.org) for information about the guardianship process in Maryland.

Visit [KennedyKrieger.org/TransitionResources](http://KennedyKrieger.org/TransitionResources) for a list of resources, including state, federal, transportation, healthcare and housing resources.

## Transition Planning Checklist

When my child is...	We should ensure that...
<b>age 14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students begin attending and participating in IEP meetings.</li> <li>• Transition planning begins.</li> <li>• For students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, an application is submitted for eligibility status with the Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration.</li> </ul>
<b>age 16</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students apply to the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services for assistance with employment, training and educational opportunities.</li> <li>• Students continue the transition planning process.</li> <li>• Students obtain a Maryland ID card or start the process to obtain a driver's license from the Motor Vehicle Administration.</li> <li>• Students research eligibility for reduced fares on public transit and MetroAccess.</li> </ul>
<b>age 18–21</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students apply for Supplemental Security Income from the Social Security Administration.</li> <li>• Students apply for Medicaid/Medical Assistance.</li> <li>• All students should register to vote. Male students must register with the Selective Service.</li> <li>• Families investigate health insurance options for young adults with disabilities.</li> <li>• Families consider options such as powers of attorney, advance healthcare directives and, when necessary, guardianship.</li> </ul>

## Accommodations for Students With Disabilities: High School vs. Postsecondary

	High School	Postsecondary
<b>Which federal laws apply?</b>	Public high schools are covered by the IDEA, Section 504 and the ADA.	Most postsecondary educational institutions have obligations under Section 504 and the ADA.
<b>Who is responsible for notifying a school of a student's disability?</b>	Schools are responsible for identifying students who need, or are believed to need, special education or related services.	Students with disabilities may choose to identify their disability status to postsecondary educational institutions; this decision, however, is voluntary.
<b>How does a student with a disability qualify to receive accommodations?</b>	Schools must evaluate students who need, or may need, accommodations, to determine how to meet their needs in the classroom and in extracurricular activities.	Students must self-identify as having a disability and comply with a postsecondary educational institution's reasonable procedures to receive accommodations.
<b>Who obtains necessary documentation?</b>	Schools bear the cost of evaluating students who need, or are believed to need, special education or related services.	Students bear the cost of obtaining evaluations or other documentation that might be required by a postsecondary educational institution's reasonable procedures.
<b>How do students with disabilities receive accommodations?</b>	Schools are responsible for providing students with reasonable modifications to their programs and services.	Students must follow the institution's reasonable procedures for requesting accommodations. For example, at many institutions, students are responsible for notifying instructors of their eligibility to receive accommodations.

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## Contact Information

### Maryland Center for Developmental Disabilities

For more information, please call **443-923-9555**, or call toll-free at **1-888-554-2080**.

TTY users, please contact us at **443-923-2645**, or dial **711** to make a Maryland Relay call.

**MCDD.KennedyKrieger.org**

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