

# **COLLEGE PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

## **COLLEGE PLANNING**

The first step to getting to college is finishing high school. Using [Appendix F6\\_High School Graduation Checklist](#), make sure students are on track to earn the credits and pass the exams necessary to graduate with a Regents, Advanced Regents, or Local diploma. A CDOS (Career Development and Occupational Studies Commencement Credential) or SACC (Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential), on their own, are not sufficient for entry into college.

Every special education student must have transition services on their IEP by the time they turn 15. These services should be based on the student's post-high school goals, including college. Transition services can include placement in internships or volunteer opportunities, tutoring or other academic supports, and college counseling, as well as services related to employment and independent living. Schools must review students' transition services and goals at least once a year at their IEP meeting.

Coaches, tutors, and college specialists play an important role in ensuring that students with disabilities are connected to the support they deserve both before and during college. Students with disabilities can receive accommodations on college admissions tests and in college, but these services do not happen automatically just because a student had an IEP in high school; instead, they must be specifically requested, and many students are not aware of the process for making such a request. This guide covers how to request accommodations (such as extended time) on college entrance exams like the SAT and ACT and how to receive support at college from the Disability Services office (or its equivalent).

For more information about transition services, check out this guide to [Transition Services & College Planning](#) available on the Advocates for Children [website](#).

## COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS

Some colleges still require students to submit scores from the SAT or ACT, and certain students may benefit from submitting these scores even if not required. Students with qualifying disabilities can get accommodations on these exams, similar to the testing accommodations they may get in high school.

### Accommodations can include:

- Extended time, breaks, separate location, or preferential seating
- Use of a computer, reader, or other assistive technology
- Large print, magnifiers, or use of highlighters
- Permission for food or medication in the testing room

The process for requesting accommodations will differ slightly depending on what test the student is taking. Students who need accommodations on the PSAT, SAT, or AP exams should request accommodations through the College Board. Students who take the ACT will need to request accommodations specifically for that test.

## THE COLLEGE BOARD

### REQUESTING PSAT/SAT/AP TEST ACCOMMODATIONS

Students should work with their school to submit requests for accommodations to the College Board through **SSD Online**, a web portal to **Services for Students with Disabilities**.



The student's parent (or the student, if they are over 18), will need to sign a consent for the school to release the student's information to the College Board. Students can also request accommodations by mail using a paper application, called a Student Eligibility Form, which they can get from their school. The approval process can take up to seven weeks, so make sure requests are submitted well in advance of the deadline for the student's testing date.

In most cases, if the student is requesting the same accommodations that they get through their IEP or 504 Plan, the College Board will approve the request without asking for more information. If the student doesn't have a current IEP or 504 Plan, or is requesting other accommodations, the College Board may request additional evaluations or medical reports. All documentation must be submitted to the College Board by the SSD deadline for the student to receive accommodations on the exam.

Students will get a decision about their accommodation request through the mail, and school staff will be able to see the decision in SSD Online. **If accommodations are approved**, the decision letter will include an **eligibility letter** and the student's **eligibility code**, which they will need when they register for the SAT. If a request for testing accommodations has not been approved, the decision letter will explain why. Students can appeal by submitting additional documentation for the College Board to consider.

Once the College Board approves a student's accommodations, they are valid until one year after the student graduates from high school and can be used on the PSAT, SAT, and AP Exams. Students who transfer schools should let their new school know they have been approved for testing accommodations by giving the new school their SSD Number (on their Eligibility Letter). The new school can then notify the College Board of the school transfer.

For more information about testing accommodations on College Board exams, [click here](#).

## **THE ACT**

### **REQUESTING ACT ACCOMMODATIONS**

Students who are taking the ACT will need to have their school request accommodations through the **ACT's Test Accessibility and Accommodations System (TAA)**.

When students register for the test, they should indicate that they need accommodations and select the accommodations they need. The email they get back from the ACT will include instructions for notifying their school and a consent to release information.

As with the College Board exams, the ACT typically will approve testing accommodations that students already receive through an IEP or 504. The ACT may request additional documentation, which will differ depending on the student's disability.

Once the ACT makes a decision about a student's accommodations, which will take 10-14 business days, it will email a "Decision Notification" to the school staff member who submitted the request. In case the ACT requires more information, it's important that students register early so that schools can submit all required paperwork by the late registration deadline. For more information, visit the [ACT website](#).

## **GETTING SUPPORT AT COLLEGE**

To get accommodations in college, students with disabilities need to request them from the college and share supporting documentation, like recent evaluations or medical reports.

Every college or university has an accessibility or disability office that arranges accommodations. Students should contact this office to request accommodations as early as possible - ideally before classes begin.

Note that disabilities need not be permanent or even long-term to qualify for support; a student with a broken hand, for instance, or another temporary medical condition, can receive support from the disability office at any point during the semester.

### **Possible accommodations include:**

- separate location to take tests
- extended time
- a note taker in class
- tests given in a larger format
- priority registration
- reduced or substituted course load

When visiting colleges with a student with a disability, it's always a good idea to go to the **Disability Services Office** to meet with staff and assess how helpful and welcoming the office is, since this may be an indication of how supportive they would be if the student enrolls.

### **Suggested questions to ask staff at the Disability Services Office:**

*How do I apply for accommodations?*

*What documents will I need? How current do they need to be? How many students use your services?*

*What accommodations do you offer?*

*How many Disability Support counselors do you have?*

*Can they help me if I'm having problems with my professors or other staff on campus?*

*What Assistive Technology (AT) do you offer? Do you have an AT expert on staff?*

*If a professor is not giving me the accommodations I'm supposed to have, how is the situation resolved?*

*What is the procedure to get extended time on exams? How much notice is required?*

*If I need a separate location for exams, where would I take them?*

*What are the most difficult classes for students with disabilities on campus?*

*Will I get an advisor in the Disabilities Services Office and a regular academic advisor?*

*If both, how will the two advisors work together?*

*What is the four-year graduation rate for students with disabilities similar to mine?*

### **As with admissions meetings, students should prepare ahead of time for their meeting with the Disability Services Office.**

You may want to role play the questions with students and help them come up with questions geared toward their needs. Encourage students to take notes during the visit and walk away with names, phone numbers and email addresses for helpful contacts. See if you can speak to other students with disabilities while you are there who are doing well and can serve as peer mentors.

Once a student begins attending classes, encourage them to check in regularly with the Disability Services office for ongoing support.

### **If a student is having difficulty getting accommodations or ensuring everyone honors their accommodation needs, they should:**

1. Talk to the faculty member teaching the class
2. Get help from the Disability Services Office
3. Go to administrators in the academic department or at the Dean's office
4. Research the school's internal grievance procedure and work with Disability Services to follow it

*In some cases, students can file complaints with the US Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights or the US Department of Justice. Learn more at [www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html).*

## **SERVICES FOR CUNY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Every CUNY campus has an office that provides services to Students with Disabilities. For a list of all of the campus offices, visit their [website](#).

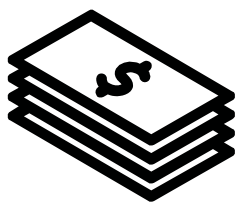
In addition, CUNY offers a program called **CUNY LEADS** to promote employment opportunities for students with disabilities in all of its degree, non-degree, and Continuing Adult Education programs. Advisors work to connect students with internship and job opportunities, help with resumes, interviews, and the job search, and provide support while students are adjusting to their new job. They can also help students apply to ACCES-VR.

**CUNY LEADS PLUS** is another support program that offers intensive services to students on the autism spectrum or with psychological and/or learning disabilities who need more help securing employment than the traditional LEADS participant. LEADS PLUS participants receive a work readiness credential and are given assistance with an internship or job upon completion of the program. CUNY also offers supports to students with Autism Spectrum Disorder through **Project REACH**, located on 7 campuses.

Finally, CUNY Unlimited is a credential program for students with developmental or intellectual disabilities. Students in CUNY Unlimited will not obtain a college diploma; however, students do earn an achievement certificate by taking academic classes and participating in vocational experiences. For more information on these and other programs for CUNY students with disabilities, [click here](#).

## **FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

In addition to scholarships and financial aid available to all students, and those available to students in foster care, there are some scholarships and financial resources specifically designed for students with disabilities.



The following websites can direct you to potential funding sources for students with disabilities applying to college:

- [www.collegescholarships.org/disabilities](http://www.collegescholarships.org/disabilities)
- [finaid.org/scholarships](http://finaid.org/scholarships)
- [www.scholarships.com/financial-aid/college-scholarships](http://www.scholarships.com/financial-aid/college-scholarships)
- [www.affordablecollegesonline.org/college-resource-center](http://www.affordablecollegesonline.org/college-resource-center)

## **ADULT CAREER AND CONTINUING EDUCATION SERVICES - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (ACCES-VR)**

**ACCES-VR** (formerly known as VESID) is a state agency that provides services to help people with disabilities explore their job interests, find a job, and keep it. Services can include career counseling, paid internships, and funding for vocational programs or college.

Students should apply in their last two years of high school. Most students who have IEPs in high school will be eligible for ACCES-VR. For tips on how to apply, check out the [Appendix H4 ACCES-VR Informational Guide](#) or go to the ACCES-VR website: [www.acces.nysed.gov/vr](http://www.acces.nysed.gov/vr).