

Planning for College While Still in High School

College Enrollment Timeline/ Checklist for High School Students

The transition from high school to postsecondary education can be a smooth one with less anxiety and fewer surprises if you as a special education student and your family plan strategically and consistently throughout your high school experience. A tool that can assist with this process is a series of checklists that should be followed and reflected on from the freshman to senior years so that you are mentally, academically and socially ready for the changes you will experience in the postsecondary setting. If you are starting this in a later year of high school, review the checklists from previous years and implement as many of the preparations as possible. Thinking ahead, no matter what year you are in high school, will ultimately help you reap huge benefits in the transition process.

1 Freshman Year

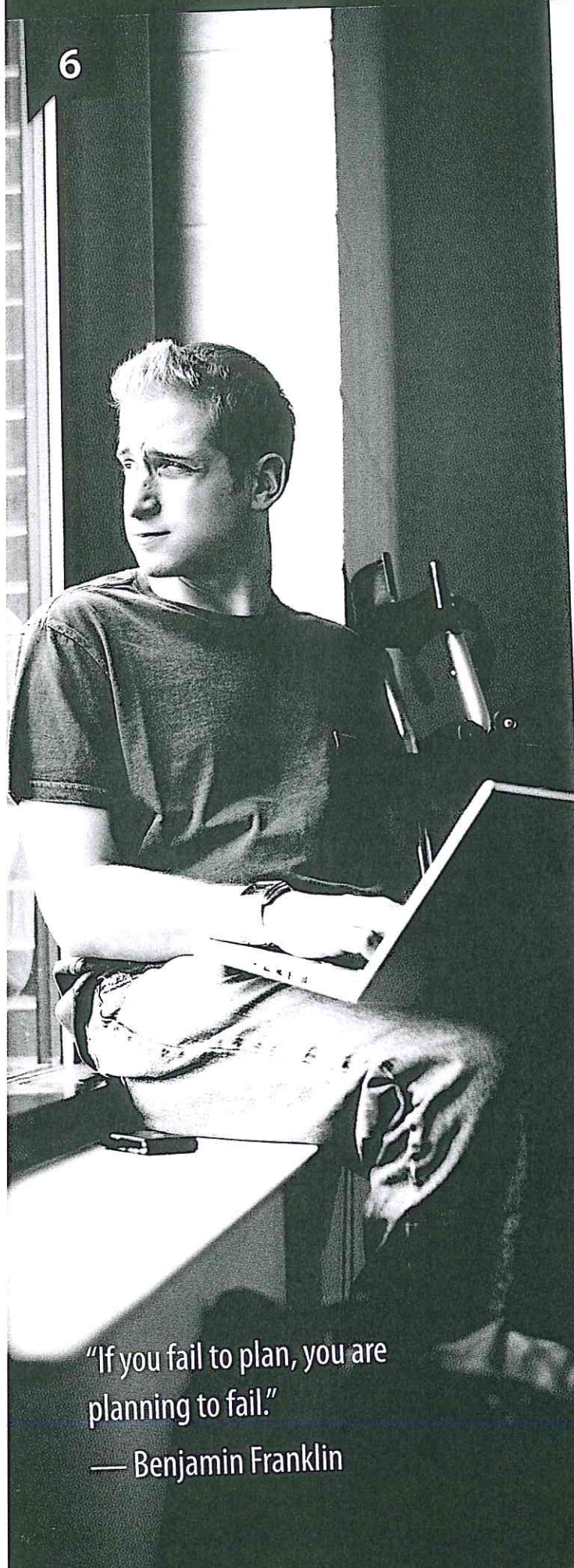
- Start a graduation file to organize information related to work, school activities, and future plans so that necessary records and notes are in a centralized location.
- Learn about and accept your disability.
- Practice explaining to others the educational needs that stem from your disability.
- Review and adjust your future goals in all of your Individualized Education Program (IEP) transition areas.
- Participate in your IEP meetings.
- Discuss your graduation plans, graduation status and transition goals.
- Understand your strengths and weaknesses. Utilize your strengths and develop strategies to compensate for your areas of weakness.
- Learn what your accommodations are, and use them when needed to discover what helps you be academically successful.
- Enroll in high school classes that meet your postsecondary goals. These may include more rigorous classes that are considered college prep courses, or they could be special education classes that teach learning strategies which can lead to more academic independence.
- Learn and use organizational and time management strategies.
- Begin career exploration that may include career aptitude and interest inventories.

2 Sophomore Year

- Review freshman year checklist.
- Continue to build your graduation file. Contents may include high school activities such as awards or recognitions, a list of hobbies or leisure activities, and immunization records.
- Actively plan your IEP Meetings with your case manager, and plan to speak on your own behalf.
- Set academic goals that are achievable.
- Practice requesting your own accommodations rather than relying on your case manager.
- Use the GPS tool at <http://gpslifeplan.org> to set goals and design future plans.
- Investigate other service providers with your case manager who can offer assistance after graduation such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Social Security, mental health counselors or a school or county social worker.
- Begin to explore colleges, programs/degrees and entrance requirements.
- Discuss with your counselor college options, career choices and preparation for college entrance exams.
- Begin career exploration activities such as skill inventories, career aptitude and career investigation.
- Build your resume through school activities and volunteer experiences, as most scholarship and entrance applications place importance on student involvement.

- Review freshman and sophomore year checklists.
- Continue to build your graduation file. New items may include college applications, scholarship applications and letters; support service and other agency contacts and letters, ACT, SAT or Accuplacer scores; recommendation letters with the names and addresses of those writing the letters; any new resume items including volunteer and other activities and job experiences.
- Assist your case manager in planning and running your IEP meeting and writing your IEP goals.
- Learn when, if and how to discuss the educational needs related to your disability with your instructors.
- Invite outside services providers to your IEP meetings such as Vocational Rehabilitation, social workers, Center for Independent Living, Social Security, mental health counselors, etc.
- Explore assistive technology that may be helpful now and at the postsecondary level.
- Practice self-advocacy skills (see self-advocacy chapter).
- Develop organization and time management skills so that you become as academically independent as possible. This may include using a planner, folders, a calendar or your phone so that you plan ahead for assignments due and activity involvements.
- Narrow your career choices and match them to postsecondary programs.
- Attend college fairs, open houses and/or weekend college retreats.
- Plan in-depth visits to several postsecondary institutions through the admissions or disability services offices.
- Discuss with postsecondary admissions departments about scholarships and financial aid programs. Find out from your parents if their workplace offers scholarships.
- Schedule assessment tests needed for college entrance requirements including the ACT, SAT or placement tests.
- Prepare for assessment tests that colleges require by attending preparatory classes, using purchased materials or online practice tests.
- Take the armed forces ASVAB test, if applicable.

- Continue to build your graduation file. New items may include college applications, FAFSA and financial aid information, high school transcripts, disability documentation such as your last IEP/504 Plan, and most recent evaluation and or any additional items that build on prior file information.
- Lead your IEP meetings and lay out your written postsecondary plan.
- Make your senior year as close to the postsecondary experience as possible:
 - ✓ Use a planner to record assignments and appointments.
 - ✓ Utilize a systematic plan for organizing class materials.
 - ✓ Take challenging academic classes without modifications, if possible.
 - ✓ Request and use only the accommodations available at the postsecondary level.
 - ✓ Consider the options for assistive technology and learn how to use it.
 - ✓ Complete assignments on time.
 - ✓ Use your self-advocacy skills by speaking to the appropriate person when you need assistance rather than going immediately to your case manager.
- Understand the differences between high school and college (see page 37).
- Complete college applications and submit with entrance fees. Most can be completed online. Earlier is better, but check college websites for deadlines.
- Discuss scholarship opportunities with your counselor and admissions staff. Search the web, but never pay for a scholarship search as this should be FREE.
- Have discussions with your family and counselor about financial aid and your college debt load.
- Apply for financial aid by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) online before the priority deadline at the college you will be attending.
- Visit colleges before accepting admission. Plan to meet with admissions and disability services staff while on each campus. In the meeting with disability services, discuss documentation requirements and how the accommodations you need will be provided.
- If necessary, retake the ACT, SAT or Accuplacer Exam.



"If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."

— Benjamin Franklin

Planning for College While Still in High School cont. from page 5

Assistive Technology

Assistive technology (AT) is equipment or systems that help students with disabilities become more efficient and independent by performing functions that may otherwise be difficult or impossible. Colleges often offer a wide array of AT, so it is helpful for you to learn and use it while you are in high school. Types of AT include alternative textbooks, screen readers, speech-recognition programs and note-taking systems. Alternative input devices include alternative keyboards, electronic pointing devices, sip-and-puff systems, wands and sticks, joysticks, trackballs and touch screens. Other AT products include screen enlargers or screen magnifiers, talking and large-print word processors and Braille embossers. Assistive technology can be demonstrated at locations such as the State Services for the Blind, PACER, the Courage Center and your local Centers for Independent Living.

Preparing for College Entrance Exams

Preparation for college entrance exams, whether it be the ACT, SAT or Accuplacer Placement Tests, is a very helpful practice. Preparatory information is available in high school counselor offices, on testing websites, or can be purchased; some students also choose to enroll in entrance exam preparatory classes. Any preparation that can be done before taking the exam can increase your test scores. ACT or SAT scores are usually a part of college admissions criteria. Lower scores may also result in students having to register for developmental/pre-college classes when entering the first year of college. Some helpful preparatory websites include: <http://www.actstudent.org/onlineprep>; <http://sat.collegeboard.org/practice>; <http://www.testprepreview.com/accuplacer>.

Minnesota Career Fields and Pathways information

Setting career goals can be difficult. Many students enter college without a defined major in mind and often change their major several times. This is normal! However, the more you are goal and career oriented both in high school and in college, the more likely you will be successful. The Minnesota Career Fields and Pathways document is available in the Resources section to assist in the process of thinking through career paths that are available to you in Minnesota.



Self-Advocacy

An important skill necessary for postsecondary success is the ability to self-advocate. Self-advocacy involves being able to speak and act on your own behalf, asking for help when it is needed, making informed decisions, and taking responsibility for these decisions. Being a self-advocate involves understanding yourself and your own disability, knowing your individual strengths and weaknesses, and being aware of your educational and personal needs. It also involves being able to express this information to others when necessary.

While in high school, many of your life decisions were made by parents, teachers, counselors and other professionals. Having support is also important in higher education, but you will be the one to determine when assistance is needed, provide the relevant information, and make the final decision of what is best. Your strongest advocate is you!

Understand Why You Have Received Special Education Services

Do you know your own disability and why you received additional assistance while in high school? Can you explain without assistance from others your educational needs and the accommodations you have used successfully? While in high school, review your Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan and

your three-year evaluation or medical documentation with your case manager or counselor so you understand this aspect of yourself. Ask for a more active role in discussions about your educational goals and choices so you have a better understanding of your own disability and educational needs.

Self-Advocacy continued on page 8

Self-Advocacy continued from page 7

Understand Your Strengths and Weaknesses

Develop a realistic understanding of your strengths, weaknesses, needs and preferences. Determine the skills you do well right now. What skills do you need to improve?

Most educational counseling offices can administer various interest and career inventories to help you learn more about yourself. The results from these assessments can verify strengths and weaknesses that may assist you in choosing a career or field of study, especially when career paths are revealed that you never knew existed that match your strengths and interests.

Learn From Other College Students

If you have the opportunity, discuss with successful college students about the transition to college. They will be a good source of information as they answer your questions from a student's perspective. They can also ease your fears about the changes you will face at the postsecondary level.

Learn How to Discuss Educational Needs with Instructors

In college, you will need to discuss your disability and educational needs with the disability services staff if you want to receive accommodations. Later, you may also need to discuss the implementation of some accommodations with your instructors. It is helpful to talk to your instructors about your accommodations while you

are in high school so you will be comfortable with these conversations when you enter college. This will also help you learn when it is appropriate to discuss your educational needs, how much information to share, and the purpose of sharing information.

Some students are nervous about discussing the implementation of accommodations with college instructors. Realize you are not the first person to have this conversation. It may be difficult at first, but you will build confidence over time. Most conversations with college instructors about accommodations will be positive and helpful. However, if there are difficulties, you may find it necessary to include others, such as a professional from the disability services office, to assist in the request. Advocating is a reminder to others about the importance of providing an accessible campus for all students, both now and in the future.



Wise Student Advice: *Learn Self-Advocacy*

"I received special education services all through high school. I discussed with my case manager during IEP meetings that I wanted to attend a community college after graduation and pursue my goal of becoming a special education teacher. My case manager realized that I needed to learn self-advocacy skills and how to take care of my needs independently if I was going to be successful in college. We determined that I would discuss with my high school instructors on my own the accommodations that I may need for each of my classes. I learned that I didn't need all of the accommodations for every class, but when I did need them, I had the conversation with my instructor. My case manager also drilled home that I needed to be organized with my homework, so I kept track of my assignments and made sure I got them completed on time because I knew that would be an expectation for college. I thought I would struggle more in my senior year with this added level of pressure on me, but I didn't! I also knew I had the support of my case manager to discuss any needs or if I had risks of failure."

— special education major



Practical Learning Strategies

College courses can provide academic challenges to students, especially students unprepared for the academic rigor experienced at the postsecondary level. Students who have learned practical strategies while they are in high school will have a smoother transition to college because the skills that have been learned can be implemented. In addition, these strategies will help students become more independent and active learners, which is especially needed in the postsecondary environment. Consider the following as you refine your study skills in preparation for college courses.

Learning Assessment

Do you know how you learn best? Consider taking a learning assessment to discover your preferred mode of learning. Instructors may not provide information to you in your preferred mode, but if you understand yourself and how you learn, you, the student, can adapt classroom material to a method that will help you more readily absorb and retain information.

- Auditory learners find strategies such as recording lectures, listening to audio textbooks and studying aloud very helpful in the learning process.
- Visual learners should review notes and PowerPoints, highlight, color code and rewrite notes into visual forms, such as flashcards, charts, diagrams or mind maps.
- Kinesthetic learners learn by "doing," so adding physical movement to study time is essential. This could include

spacing or taking a walk while studying from index cards, reading textbooks while pedaling a stationary bike, listening to music, keeping one's hands busy with a stress ball, studying with others by verbally reciting and discussing the content, and taking a five-minute break for each 30 minutes of study.

Memorization Techniques

Memorization techniques are very important skills to have while in college, as the amount of information to be memorized increases in the postsecondary environment. New vocabulary, complex processes and the fast pace of learning new material are just some of the reasons memorization skills are crucial for college students.

- Stay interested. Keep your attention and focus on the material you need to learn.

- Time. Make a determined effort to carve out quality study time that is free of distractions.
- Memorization order. Memorize the information from general to specific.
- Organize. Sort or arrange the information you need to remember in groups, such as how they are similar or different.
- Visualize. Use a visualization technique, such as a mind map or picture.
- Relate. Form associations between new ideas you wish to remember and things you already know.
- Repeat. Rephrase information in your own words and use multiple senses to help you encode information. See it, say it, write it.

*Practical Learning Strategies
continued on page 10*

Study Skills

How you approach your studies in college will have a direct effect on your academic success. Remain positive, remind yourself of the goals you have set, and use effective study methods such as these listed below.

- Study in one-to-three hour shifts, taking a break every 30 minutes to stretch or drink a beverage.
- Study when you feel well rested and relaxed, making sure to study during the time of day when you are most productive and alert.
- Study the more difficult information first when you are the freshest, saving for last the homework and projects you most enjoy or are not as strenuous.
- Stay nourished with healthy foods so you have energy and your brain can function well.
- Study before and after class. A good strategy is to read the text assignments before class and review your class notes while they are fresh in your mind.
- Study two or three hours for each hour of class you attend.
- Meet with instructors during their office hours if you are having difficulty learning new material.
- See a tutor from the college tutoring center, join a study group or use an online tutoring service that may be available for the course.

Test Taking Strategies

To do well on tests, you need to know the material and be mentally prepared to show your knowledge of the subject. Try the following strategies for taking tests in college.

Before a test:

- Review over time the material presented in class before the date of an exam. The more prepared you are, the more confident you will be; cramming is not an efficient learning method.





- Learn the exam format before the test if possible so you know if the test questions are multiple choice, short answer, true/false or essay.
 - If you are anxious, try some stress-reducing techniques: Take a walk, listen to music, or write down your anxieties 10 minutes before taking a test. (Harms, W. *Writing About Worries Eases Anxiety*, 2011.)
 - Arrange for testing accommodations before an exam if it is an effective accommodation for your disability. Testing accommodations may include extra time, a quiet place, audio and enlarged print.
- During a test:
- Think positively! Remind yourself that you studied hard and are prepared for the test. If allowed, use scratch paper to write down what you think you will need to remember, such as formulas, facts or names.
 - While taking the test, read the directions carefully, look over the sections of the test and budget your time for each section.
 - Do the section of the test that you know the best first.
 - Concentrate on your own test, not what others are doing.
 - Read each question carefully before answering so you are sure to understand the question completely.
 - When stuck on a question, cross off the answers you know are wrong. If you are not sure of the answer, move on to the next test question.
 - Before you hand in your test, look it over to be sure you did not miss anything.
- After a test:
- After your test is graded, carefully read any comments from your instructor so you understand any mistakes you may have made.
 - Ask your instructor for clarification for anything you still don't understand.
 - Look back at your book and notes, and jot down information you learned from the test.

Practical Learning Strategies
continued on page 12



*Practical Learning Strategies continued
from page 11*

Note Taking

Note taking is an essential skill in college that can only be refined through practice. Because tests usually cover material that was presented in class, it is important to study from a good set of notes. There are many methods and systems for taking notes, so experiment and find a system that works for you.

- Take notes that are clear and concise, which is more effective than long, complicated notes.
- Organize your notes for each class session by writing the name of the class, topic and date that the notes were taken.
- Leave space on the page to add key words or other information. You can try taking notes on the right side of the paper and leaving a wide margin on the left side.
- Audio record the lecture so that you can listen to the material again using a digital recorder or smartpen.
- Review your notes soon after class and rewrite sections that are unclear. Add missing information. Highlight the most important information for later study. This will also help you know if you need to check the book, the recording of the lecture, or with your instructor for further content clarification.

Time Management

Learning how to manage your time effectively is absolutely essential to success in college. An effective time management plan includes prioritizing tasks, implementing due dates, breaking down assignments, and scheduling times to be in class, study, work, do errands and attend appointments.

- Choose a time management system. This could be a planner, assignment log or a calendar in paper format, phone application or computer application. Choose one that will work for you, and use it daily.
- Prioritize your tasks and handle the top priorities first.
- Set realistic goals. It is common to underestimate how long an assignment will take to complete, so it is best to start assignments well before the due date.
- Use your planner to break down assignments. Determine all of the steps needed in order to complete an assignment and include those steps in your planner.

“One of the greatest discoveries a man makes, one of his great surprises, is to find he can do what he was afraid he could not do.”

— Henry Ford

- Overcome stumbling blocks and procrastination. Evaluate the time spent on leisure activities such as video games, movies or texting with friends since it may have a negative effect on your study time. Be proactive in scheduling your leisure activities so they don't take over the time you have allowed for study.
- Check your planner daily. Update what you have completed, and track your progress so you can make adjustments as needed. Don't forget to reward yourself for working hard and completing your projects.

Reading Strategies

In college, you will be responsible for reading assigned textbooks, supplemental materials and on-line resources, so it is important to use effective reading strategies for comprehension. Common reading tips may include the following:

- Read in a quiet, well-lit area with comfortable seating.
- Take breaks to rest your eyes and your mind.
- Read aloud or use audio books to improve concentration.
- Take notes from the reading assignment and highlight important concepts.
- Take note of unfamiliar vocabulary and generate a list for study.

Read with a Purpose, Using the SQ3R Strategy

- **Survey.** Preview the assignment/material to be studied by scanning the text quickly to discover the central concept. From your preview, formulate an overall picture and purpose of what you are going to study.
- **Question.** Question what you need to learn in terms of what, why, how, who, and where to support the central concept. Write these questions in the margins of your textbook or at the top of your study notes.
- **Read.** Read specifically to answer the questions. Most paragraphs contain one or more main ideas in support of a concept. Locate and highlight them with a marker, make notes in the margins, and pay attention to bolded or italicized type, graphs and illustrations.
- **Recall.** Pause periodically to recall in your own words the important ideas you have read.
- **Review.** See if you answered all of your questions and understood the new material. Go back and re-read difficult parts you may have missed in the recall. If there are review questions in the material, make sure you can answer them all.