

Education for People with Disabilities



What is Special Education?

If your child's diagnosis or injury occurred during the summer break, you may feel intimidated by the process and bureaucracy of the special education system. In essence, special education provides instruction for children with disabilities that meet the child's individual needs and allow them to receive a *free and appropriate public education*. A child with disabilities can access special education from birth to age 21 through the Early Intervention Program (birth to age 3) and your local school district (age 3 to 21). For a breakdown of each program, to learn more about special education, and access resources please see our Education for Children Living with Paralysis (<https://www.christopherreeve.org/living-with-paralysis/for-parents/education-for-children-living-with-paralysis-1>.) site.

Following the law

There are three laws that affect special education: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504), and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). These 3 laws allow children to avoid discrimination in school and receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). It is also important to remember that each state has their own rules to implement and clarify these laws.

Some parents, especially those who expect a push back from their school districts, believe that having a printed copy of these laws available to read, highlight, and bring with them to their school meetings is a powerful tool to effectively advocate for their child's rights. While IDEA Part B (<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statute-chapter-33/subchapter-ii>) may be the most relevant to parents, Section 504 (<https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ocr/civilrights/resources/factsheets/504.pdf>) and ADA (<https://www.ada.gov/pubs/ada.htm>) could also be useful. To find information on all the laws affecting special education, I recommend you to visit the Laws & Guidance (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/landing.jhtml?src=ln>) section of the US Department of Education site.

First, the golden rules of Special Education...

- Document everything. Every phone conversation, letters sent or received, assessments made, and appointment notices need to be documented and properly stored. Parents usually keep a binder and a file cabinet to keep orderly track of their child's paperwork. This will allow you to check on timelines for implementation of services, find documentation to back your claims to the Child Study Team and provide evidence during mediation or appeals.
- Remember this: your child has the right to a free appropriate, public education. This means that the education should be tailored to your child's needs while providing access to the general school curriculum as appropriate to him.

What to do when your infant has paralysis...

- You do not need a referral from your doctor or a diagnosis. You can contact Early Intervention (EI) yourself as soon as you have concerns about your baby's mobility or development.
- This Early Intervention Contacts (<https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/actearly/parents/states.html>) site has a list of E.I. referral phone numbers for each state.
- You can receive therapy through E.I. and through other medical professionals at the same time. If you do, it's a good idea to keep all therapists informed of each other's therapy plans and objectives.
- In addition to your case manager, you may request a social worker through Early Intervention. This professional can help you with short-term family counseling or by referring and/or helping you navigate a program or service for your child outside the E.I. program.

- E.I. is a "family center, activity based" model. Make sure to actively participate in all your child's sessions, ask questions, model therapy routines, and follow through in between sessions.
- A successful transition from Early Intervention to Preschool requires time and preparation. Request a transition meeting at least 3 months before your child's third birthday or sooner if her birthday falls during summer vacation. To learn more about transitions see this [Early Childhood Transition Guidebook](https://media.pacer.org/php/php-a40.pdf) <https://media.pacer.org/php/php-a40.pdf> from the Pacer Center.
- If your child is close to his third birthday and you would like assistance with the transition to preschool, you can request an E.I. evaluation and transition assistance. Remember, by law, the Early Intervention Program must assist all children until their third birthday.

Do your research...

- Talk to other parents in your school district/ neighborhood. They are a great resource to learn about the usual policies of special education in your school district, what's worked for them in the past, how to approach the administration for a special request, etc.
- If age appropriate, talk to your child about his experiences in school (was he comfortable with his therapist? Did she felt rushed during her sessions? Did the teachers allowed the accommodations in his IEP?) Write down the relevant comments to share with the Child Study Team (CST).
- You are allowed to present evaluations from independent healthcare professionals during your child's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meeting. Such evaluations include privately paid therapy assessments, rehabilitation discharge papers, doctors' records (physiatrist, neurologist, development pediatrician). These evaluations should be considered during the IEP meeting.
- If you anticipate a difficult meeting, research and inform yourself about special education advocates or lawyers. (See below for details)

On seeking the mythical ideal classroom...

- There is such a thing as the ideal classroom for your child. The process takes time--make sure to give yourself several weeks before the IEP meeting to prepare.
- Learn this phrase: *least restrictive environment and* make it your mantra. This is your child's right under IDEA, ADA, and Section 504. If you are seeking an inclusive or a regular classroom setting, it is important to emphasize this right to your Child Study Team. This is especially relevant for children with mobility impairments without a developmental delay.
- Visiting schools is crucial for the ideal placement. Make sure to request visits to in-district and out- of-district schools, if appropriate, from your CST several weeks prior to the IEP meeting.

- While visiting the schools, keep a notebook for notes or use a questionnaire to help you identify the pros and cons of each school. Check the Special Education School Visit Checklist (<http://www.nylpi.org/images/FE/chain234siteType8/site203/client/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20SPECIAL%20EDUCATION%20SCHOOL%20VISIT%20CHECKLIST.pdf>), and this Choosing Schools (http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/disability_choosing_schools.html) article for reference.
- While visiting the schools, check for accessibility roadblocks and evaluate the school's willingness to problem solve them.
- Make sure to consider the medical care your child will need during school hours. If your child will need assistance with her bladder or bowel programs, taking medications, or may have complications such as seizures or autonomic dysreflexia (AD), it is extremely important to meet with the school's nurse and request a health care plan within this IEP or 504 Plan.

By Patricia Najarro, Reeve Foundation Manager of Information Services and Translation

Websites

180medical: Scholarships

<http://www.180medical.com/scholarships>

Awards educational scholarships to people with spinal cord injury, spina bifida or transverse myelitis.

Accessible College

<https://accessiblecollege.com/>

Accessible College provides college transition support for students with physical disabilities or health conditions. Numerous helpful blogs on the topic can be viewed on this website.

Affordable Colleges: College Scholarships for Students with Disabilities

<https://www.affordablecollegesonline.org/college-resource-center/affordable-colleges-for-students-with-disabilities/>

American Association on Health and Disability (AAHD) Scholarship Program

<http://www.aahd.us/initiatives/scholarship-program/>

The AAHD Scholarship Program supports students with disabilities pursuing higher education. Preference is given to students who plan to pursue undergraduate/graduate studies in the field of public health, health promotion, disability studies, to include disability policy and disability research.

The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)

<http://www.aapd.com/>

1030 15th St. NW, Suite 500E

Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202-521-4316 (V/TTY)
800-840-8844 (Toll-free)

Email: info@aapd.com

The American Association of People with Disabilities is the nation's largest disability rights organization. AAPD promotes equal opportunity, economic power, independent living, and political participation for people with disabilities.

Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)

<http://www.ahead.org>

16810 Kenton Dr., Suite 220
Huntersville, NC 28078
Phone: 704-947-7779

AHEAD is a professional membership organization for individuals involved in the development of policy and provision of services to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities involved in all areas of higher education.

Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)

<http://www.aucd.org/>

1100 Wayne Avenue, Suite 1000
Silver Spring, MD 20910
Phone: 301-588-8252

E-mail: aucdinfo@aucd.org

AUCD is a membership organization that supports and promotes a national network of university-based interdisciplinary programs. Network members consist of: 67 University Centers for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, 43 Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities Programs, and 15 Intellectual and Developmental Disability Research Centers. Through its members, AUCD is a resource for local, state, national, and international agencies, organizations, and policy makers concerned about people living with developmental and other disabilities and their families.

Best Colleges: Resource Guide for Students with Physical Disabilities

<https://www.bestcolleges.com/resources/college-planning-with-physical-disabilities/>

Center for Parent Information and Resources

<http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/>

c/o Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)
570 Broad St., Suite 702
Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: 973-642-8100

Email: mmclaurin@spanadvocacy.org

Families with a child who has a disability often need information about their child's disability, about early intervention (for babies and toddlers), school services (for school-aged children), therapy, local policies, transportation, and much more. Every state has at least one Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) to offer families just this kind of information. Many states also have a Community Parent Resource Center (CPRC), which offers the same type of support and training to parents of children with disabilities.

Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation: Navigating and Transitioning to College with Paralysis

<https://www.ChristopherReeve.org/booklets>

A free booklet written by Annie Tulkin of Accessible College LLC which covers disabled students' rights, what types of accommodations can be asked for, and what to look for when choosing a college. Call 1-800-539-7309 for a free print copy.

Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation and Accessible College: Free College Consultations

<https://www.christopherreeve.org/todays-care/living-with-paralysis/free-resources-and-downloads/complimentary-services/>

The Reeve Foundation is offering a limited number of **free** consultations with Accessible College LLC to families and students interested in transitioning to college with paralysis. The following are some of the areas you can receive assistance with:

Considerations for college based on healthcare needs • College accommodations • Healthcare and medication management • Hiring and managing a personal care attendant • Continuity of care • Self-advocacy skills • Disability disclosure • Disability documentation review and development • Communicating with the college's disability resource office • Disability specific questions for college tours and tour debriefs • Study skills and time management

Please call 1-800-539-7309 and ask for an Information Specialist or go to www.ChristopherReeve.org/Ask to find out more.

College Choice: 50 Best Disability Friendly Colleges and Universities

www.collegechoice.net

<http://www.collegechoice.net/50-best-disability-friendly-colleges-and-universities/>

DREAM (Disability, Rights, Education Activism, and Mentoring)

www.dreamcollegedisability.org

DREAM is a national organization for and by college students with disabilities, supported in our work by our sponsoring organization, the National Center for College Students with Disabilities (NCCSD) and based at the Association on Higher Education And Disability (AHEAD). DREAM is open to higher education students of all types, including graduate students, part-time students, and those who are auditing higher education courses. It is open to students of all ages with any kind of disability, culturally Deaf students, and nondisabled students who are our allies and peers. They explicitly include people who have traditionally been marginalized or under-represented in the disability or higher education communities. They strongly advocate for disability culture, community, and pride, and hope to serve as an online virtual disability cultural center for students who want to connect with other students.

FinAid: Go to Guide for College Financial Aid

<https://finaid.org/>

This page lists several scholarships for students with disabilities as well as financial aid resources for students with disabilities.

Kids' Chance

<http://www.kidschance.org/>

Victoria Burkhardt, Executive Director

Kids' Chance of America

15985 Preserve Marketplace, #1134.

Odessa, FL 33556

Phone: 401-405-7028

E-mail: admin@kidschange.org

Kids' Chance provides educational scholarships to children of workers seriously injured or killed on the job. Not available in all states.

Making Headway Foundation

www.makingheadway.org

<http://makingheadway.org/blog/making-headway-foundation-scholarships-available/>

115 King Street

Chappaqua, NY 10514-3460

Phone: 914-238-8384

Email: info@makingheadway.org

Making Headway is accepting scholarship applications for the Scott J. Reisser Memorial Scholarship Fund from pediatric brain or spinal cord tumor patients living in the NY, NJ or CT metropolitan areas. Applicants must be able to show that they have been accepted into a 4 or 2 year college or vocational program.

Makoa: Education Resources

<http://www.makoa.org/education.htm#education>

This page lists links to educational resources for people with disabilities, including resources at specific schools.

Microsoft Disability Scholarship

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/programs/microsoftdisabilityscholarship.aspx>

Microsoft offers scholarships of up to \$5,000 to high school students with disabilities who plan to enroll in college to promote their access to education leading to a career in technology. Please see the link above for more eligibility information and how to apply.

National Center for College Students with Disabilities

<https://nccsd.ici.umn.edu/>

c/o Brian Aberly

2025 East River Parkway

Minneapolis, MN 55414

Phone: 704-744-9979

Email: nccsd@ahead.org

The National Center for College Students with Disabilities (NCCSD) is a federally-funded project under the U.S. Department of Education (P116D150005), through the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE). Their mission is three-fold: provide technical assistance related to students with disabilities, collect info and do research on disability services at universities and colleges, and report to the U.S. Dept. of Education about the current status of college students with disabilities. Their clearinghouse has many free guides and other information available for free.

National Center on Disability and Access to Education (NCDAE)

<http://www.ncdae.org/>

Center for Persons with Disabilities

6807 Old Main Hill

Utah State University

Logan, UT 84322-6800

Phone: 435-797-7024, 435-797-1981 (TDD)

NCDAE monitors and promotes electronically-mediated distance education policies and practices that enhance the lives of people with disabilities and their families.

National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (NCDE)

<http://www.miusa.org/ncde>

Mobility International USA

132 E. Broadway, Suite 343

Eugene, OR 97401

Phone/TTY: 541-343-1284

E-mail: clearinghouse@miusa.org

NCDE is a comprehensive, one-stop resource on advising and tools for people with disabilities, professionals, educational institutions and organizations on increasing disability inclusion in international study, volunteer, teach and other exchange programs.

New Mobility: “Disability-Friendly Colleges”. September 1998.

<http://www.newmobility.com/1998/09/disability-friendly-colleges/>

This article, based on a survey of 34 public colleges and universities, presents an overview of services and accommodations available in general and at specific schools.

Northwest Regional Spinal Cord Injury System at University of Washington: The Road Back to School after Spinal Cord Injury article

http://sci.washington.edu/info/newsletters/articles/08_fall_return_to_school.asp

Paralyzed Veterans of America Scholarship Program

<http://www.pva.org/>

1875 Eye Street NW, Suite 1100

Washington, DC 20006

Phone: 800-424-8200

TTY: 800-795-4327

Email: info@pva.org

Assists PVA members and their immediate families in obtaining a post-secondary education from accredited colleges in the United States. Applicants must be either Paralyzed Veterans members, the spouse of a Paralyzed Veterans member, or an unmarried child under 24 years of age who is dependent on the member for principal support. For more info, call Christi Hillman at 800-424-8200 x776 or email christih@pva.org

Sentinels of Freedom

www.sentinelsoffreedom.org

Phone: 925-380-6342

Email: contact@sentinelsoffreedom.org

Provides educational scholarships to severely wounded post-9/11 veterans.

SwiftStudent: Disability Expenses Request Letter

<https://formswift.com/swift-student>

[https://formswift.com/disability-expenses-request-](https://formswift.com/disability-expenses-request-letter?fbclid=IwAR17kn2DZX8vvLRkaluhyXZ5lgII6NIEvEmwM-KoszFnzYdDeKaff9euZ-8)

[letter?fbclid=IwAR17kn2DZX8vvLRkaluhyXZ5lgII6NIEvEmwM-KoszFnzYdDeKaff9euZ-8](https://formswift.com/disability-expenses-request-letter?fbclid=IwAR17kn2DZX8vvLRkaluhyXZ5lgII6NIEvEmwM-KoszFnzYdDeKaff9euZ-8)

SwiftStudent is the only free, digital resource that provides financial aid appeal letter templates for students. Through SwiftStudent, students can learn about the financial aid appeal process, review eligibility requirements for making an appeal, and customize a financial aid appeal to start the conversation with your college financial aid office. They offer a sample letter that can be used to request a loan or grant for disability-related expenses from a college's financial aid office.

Through the Looking Glass

<http://www.lookingglass.org>

3075 Adeline Street, Suite 120

Berkeley, CA 94703

TTY: 510-848-1112

Email: tlg@lookingglass.org

Through the Looking Glass awards scholarships to high school seniors and college students whose parents have disabilities.

UNCF Numotion College Scholarship 2020

<https://www.numotionfoundation.org/numotion-foundation-establishes-scholarship-with-united-negro-college-fund/>

Numotion joined with the United Negro College Fund to award scholarships to African Americans college students with a mobility-related disability. Please see the link for details.

University of Utah

<https://disability.utah.edu/>

Center for Disability Services

201 S. 1460 E.

Student Services Bldg., Room 350

Salt Lake City, UT 84112

Phone: 801-581-5020

Scholarship info for people with spinal cord injuries who attending or plan to attend the University of Utah. <https://disability.utah.edu/students/scholarships.php>

U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS)

<https://www.ed.gov/about/ed-offices/osers>

OSERS provides a wide array of supports to parents and individuals, school districts and states in three main areas: special education, vocational rehabilitation and research.

We Connect Now

<http://weconnectnow.wordpress.com/>

We Connect Now is dedicated to uniting people interested in rights and issues affecting people with disabilities, with particular emphasis on college students and access to higher education and employment issues. One of the site's goals is to help college students with disabilities to succeed in their studies by getting the information and support they need, both through resources, links, blogs, news, studying existing laws and regulations, and through personal contacts.

Wheels on Campus: A Guide to Wheelchair-Friendly Higher Education from New Mobility and United Spinal Association

<https://newmobility.com/wheels-on-campus/>

A 66-page booklet available for free download

Resources for Undocumented Students:

Fast Web: Financial Aid and Scholarships for Undocumented Students

<https://www.fastweb.com/financial-aid/articles/financial-aid-and-scholarships-for-undocumented-students-and-illegal-aliens>

On Demand Videos

Shepherd Center: University Accessibility

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qF59-wfnl2A&feature=youtu.be>

A 12-minute video that promotes the idea that education can continue after spinal cord injury. Colleges have disability resource offices that can help students with disabilities navigate college.

The information contained in this message is presented for the purpose of educating and informing you about paralysis and its effects. Nothing contained in this message should be construed nor is intended to be used for medical diagnosis or treatment. It should not be used in place of the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider. Should you have any health care related questions, please call or see your physician or other qualified health care provider promptly. Always consult with your physician or other qualified health care provider before embarking on a new treatment, diet or fitness program. You should never disregard medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read in this message.

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