

## **High School to College Transition for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities**

### **Best Practice Documentation Guidelines for Secondary Educators**

The following document was developed by a group of secondary educators and school psychologists, postsecondary disability service coordinators and Colorado Department of Education (CDE) staff to assist secondary educators to meet IDEA 2004 transition requirements while preparing students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) for successful transition to post-secondary education. These guidelines, developed by The Higher Education (THE) Work Group will help educators build a ***Body of Evidence*** that enables students with SLD to access accommodations and services that support successful transition.

It is important to know information requested by most adult disability service agencies may already be included in a student's evaluation reports, body of evidence used to determine eligibility, IEPs, and Summary of Performance or could easily be incorporated into existing paperwork. In most cases additional testing is not required.

#### **Documentation Requirements at the Postsecondary Level**

The purposes and need for documentation in postsecondary education differ from those in secondary education. The rights and services accorded to students under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) do not carry over into the postsecondary system. Disability Services Offices must follow requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

In order to determine a student eligible to receive reasonable accommodations at the postsecondary level, the Disability Services Coordinator must be able to document the individual has a mental or physical condition that substantially limits a major life activity and needs the requested accommodation to access educational courses and activities. Major life activities include, but are not limited to, caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, seeing, hearing, eating, sleeping, walking, standing, lifting, bending, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, concentrating, thinking, communicating, and working, as well as a list of major bodily functions.

“Key considerations in determining whether documentation is sufficient to support the existence of a disability and the need for requested accommodation includes:

1. The qualifications of the individual making the assessment, including whether the individual has knowledge or experience in the area of the particular disability;
2. The use of appropriate criteria; and
3. The familiarity of the expert with the student's condition.”

(University of Central Oklahoma, 2003, OCR Docket #06032067)

It is important to remember the accommodations provided under the ADA and Section 504 are designed to afford an equal opportunity, to level the playing field, for persons with disabilities. Only reasonable accommodations are provided. Modifications that would substantially alter the nature of a course or activity are not allowed at the postsecondary level.

## **Assessment Strategies for Transition Planning**

The Office of Special Education Programs, OSEP, has clarified that Part B of the IDEA does not require schools to conduct additional testing solely for the purpose of eligibility in another system or obtaining accommodations on college entrance exams. However, the requirement for appropriate assessment for transition planning and provision of services leading to the student's identified postsecondary goal is clearly described, as is the requirement that the IEP team reevaluate the student for eligibility every three years. The information gathered through the process of IEP development and service provision would often be sufficient to meet the documentation needs of the postsecondary institution.

The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children defines transition assessment as an "...ongoing process of collecting data on the individual's needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demand of current and future working, educational, living, personal and social environments."

- Transition assessment can help determine if identified post-secondary education goals are appropriate and establish the steps needed to achieve post-secondary outcomes.
- When determining needs for assessment and documentation, consider the eligibility requirements of the anticipated postsecondary agency the student will be accessing as well as the current IEP needs. Use diagnostic/prescriptive assessment to improve instruction/intervention in areas of achievement and skill development related to college success (writing, organization, reading etc.) Include this information in the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAPF) of the IEP.
- Review assessments through a "transition lens" to develop measurable postsecondary goals, courses of study, transition services, annual goals, agency linkages, and the Summary of Performance.
- ACT tests, along with CSAP, PLAN, PSAT, Accuplacer, Work Keys and other academic tests are valuable assessments that help inform the student and teacher what academic skill areas need further development to qualify for and engage in post-secondary education. Because ACT testing is required for all 11<sup>th</sup> graders in Colorado, it is important to arrange for appropriate accommodations to allow a student to accurately demonstrate his/her skill level. Please note: accommodations to the ACT approved at the state or local level will invalidate scores for college purposes.

## **Evaluation**

- It is the recommendation of THE Work Group that focused assessment(s) be administered in the specific area(s) of disability during the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade to determine need in the area of disability, to document limitations related to the disability and to assess accommodation needs for the ACT, in the high school setting, and to prepare for transition to the postsecondary setting and employment.
- Specific focused, norm-referenced assessment tools should be considered in evaluation planning. When assessing a student's learning, use assessment tools that have been normed on the appropriate age/grade group. Suggested age appropriate assessments can be found in the CDE *Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities, particularly in Section 5:8 Areas of SLD*. [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/SLD\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/SLD_Guidelines.pdf)

- The evaluation report should include relevant disability history and use of effective accommodations, any evaluation conducted outside of the public school setting, if applicable, and current academic functioning. Other suggestions include:
  - ✓ A summary of the history of academic and functional performance.
  - ✓ Identification of previous testing and time frame in which it was conducted (age/grade level).
  - ✓ Description of all areas of deficit (math, reading, writing, etc.)
  - ✓ Indication of what assessment scores are based on (percentiles, grade equivalent, age equivalent, NOT raw scores).

### **RtI and Transition**

Students from a public secondary education setting are identified with a Specific Learning Disability through a *Body of Evidence* that demonstrates a child meets the criteria for eligibility. Full scale IQ testing is not required to determine the presence of a learning disability under the RtI model and an IQ – achievement discrepancy may not be used to determine eligibility.

However, a multidisciplinary team is required to use RtI process data and diagnostic/prescriptive assessment results to determine if a student has an Specific Learning Disability (SLD) in basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, written expression, mathematical calculation, mathematical problem-solving, oral expression, and/or listening comprehension. This information is important to provide to the Disability Services Office at the postsecondary level to document the need for requested accommodations.

When conducting transition planning, consider the post-secondary education and employment demands the student will face following high school graduation. If the data available is not sufficient to determine a student’s accommodation needs in high school and in both a work and college setting, see suggestions listed under “Evaluation”.

### **Transition Planning Requirements**

If a high school student with a disability is potentially college-bound, the success of the transition to postsecondary education and training must be a focus of the following: measurable post secondary goals, measurable annual goals, transition assessments, services and activities.

IDEA also requires school staff to determine the appropriate adult agencies that will be necessary to help a youth transition to successful post-school outcomes and facilitate linkages as needed. This would include linkages to the Disability Services Offices at the area technical school, college or university level for accommodations. Because the student will need to meet with the Disability Services Coordinator (not the parent or guardian), it is critically important that the student have practice in self-advocacy skills and be ready to discuss his/her disability and learning needs.

## Applying for Accommodations

- Transition planning should include identifying which specific accommodations will help a student access curriculum and learn successfully in high school and post-secondary settings.
- The IEP needs to address specifically what limitations exist related to the deficit identified on the SLD Determination form (e.g., for written expression specific areas of difficulty might be dysgraphia, spelling, and/or composition) and which accommodations ensure equal access to the curriculum.
- It is recommended that a licensed school psychologist be involved in eligibility determination and IEP meetings for students with Specific Learning Disabilities. Working with transition issues has been identified as an appropriate role for school psychologists (Ulmer, 2005). Appropriate signatures and credentials should be included on all documentation. For many adult service agencies including College Disability Service Offices, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Division of Developmental Disabilities, the inclusion of school psychologists in the assessment and planning process is critical in determining eligibility for accommodations and services.
- When assisting a student who is applying for post-secondary accommodations, provide the following (this information should be included in the Summary of Performance):
  - ✓ A completed Disability Determination Form for each disability addressed in the student's IEP. **Each form should include signatures of appropriate professionals qualified to determine the student's disability (psychologist, speech-language pathologist, or reading specialist).**
  - ✓ Both the most recent IEP and the latest Eligibility IEP if the last IEP was an annual review. Include relevant information such as career aptitude measures, self-advocacy skills, medical or psychiatric diagnoses, high school courses of study (ICAP) and/or descriptions as well as interpretation of RtI data that can be understood by the student and parent.
  - ✓ Accommodation history and effectiveness: suggest a focus on possible higher education accommodations such as note-taking support, computer use, spell check use, extended test-taking time, alternative test-taking setting, reduced course load, use of calculator. Please see addendum with a list of accommodations available for college/university students with disabilities.
  - ✓ Indication in the IEP the student received accommodations for testing approved by ACT. Include ACT accommodations request form and approval letter from ACT in the documentation submitted when requesting accommodations in post-secondary education.
  - ✓ Documentation of foreign language waiver with rationale, if applicable.
  - ✓ CBM (curriculum based measures) graphs (aim line vs. current functioning) with list of attempted interventions and their results.
  - ✓ Documentation of any diagnoses made outside of the public school system (i.e. medical, psychiatric, learning etc.)
  - ✓ In some cases, timed and untimed assessment results can provide valuable information.
- Shifting and/or reallocation of resources among school special services teams to support successful college transitioning is recommended. Assigning a staff person in each high school who is knowledgeable about eligibility requirements for postsecondary accommodations would be helpful to guide this process and provide consistency in working with colleges.

## References

Colorado Department of Education (2008) *Guidelines for Identifying Students with Specific Learning Disabilities*. Retrieved from [http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/SLD\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/download/pdf/SLD_Guidelines.pdf)

Colorado Department of Education (2008) *Rules for the Administration of the Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA)*. Retrieved from <http://www.cde.state.co.us/spedlaw/download/ECEARules2008.pdf>

National Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT). <http://dcdt.org/>

National Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD). <http://www.ahead.org/>

Ulmer, T. (2005). School psychologist involvement in transition services. *The School Psychologist*, 59(2), pp. 60-63.

## ADDENDUM A

### *Accommodations Appropriate for a College Setting*

Below is a list of accommodations that may be available in a college/university setting. Documentation is required to support the need for requested accommodations.

NOTE: Modifications which significantly alter the essential scope or content of the curriculum are not allowed in the post-secondary setting.

#### **Alternative Testing:**

Extra time     Double time     Quiet room     Testing Center     Scribe  
 Calculator     Computer     Enlarged print     Spell checker     Reader

#### **Physical Environment:**

Preferred seating (\_\_\_\_\_)  
 Breaks during class

Special furniture (\_\_\_\_\_)  
 Food/drink in the classroom

#### **Technology/Adaptive Technology:**

Assistive technology lab  
 Tape/digital recorder  
 Assistive listening device

#### **Other:**

Sign language/oral interpreter  
 Real-time captioning  
 Note taker services  
 Service animal with student  
 Personal attendant with student  
 Priority registration  
 Flexibility with attendance  
 Extension on assignment due dates

#### **Alternate Format Text/Books:**

Books on CD  
 Enlarged texts/handouts  
 Scanned Text/handouts  
 Braille materials

## ADDENDUM B

### Documentation Checklist

The following items can be found in a student's IEP records and in his/her Summary of Performance. These items are helpful to post-secondary disability service staff when determining eligibility for accommodations in post-secondary education institutions.

- Evaluation reports used to document a student's eligibility or re-eligibility for special education services.
  - ✓ Report should indicate age appropriate assessments used to determine SLD with interpretation of scores that reflect grade level (vs. raw score). Comparison of timed and untimed assessment results may be useful. Norm referenced assessments could include:
    - Test of Written Language (TOWL)
    - Test of Word Reading Efficiency (TOWRE)
    - Test of Silent Word Reading Fluency (TOSWRF)
    - Gray Oral Reading Test, Key Math
    - SPELL Spelling Performance Evaluation for Language & Literacy
    - Stanford Diagnostic Mathematics Test
    - Wide Range Achievement Battery (WRAT)
    - DRP (sub test of the *Language!* Curriculum)
    - Woodcock-Johnson and/or Wechsler sub-tests
    - ACT and/or SAT
    - CSAP
  - ✓ Include CBM (curriculum based measures) graphs (aim line vs. current functioning), a list of attempted interventions and results and academic achievement scores with percentiles.
- The SLD Determination Form (and other Determination Forms for additional disabilities if applicable)
- Disability documentation from outside professionals
- Accommodation Information
  - ✓ Justification for accommodations including changes as noted in PLAAF section of IEP.
  - ✓ Indicate accommodations applicable to a post-secondary setting in the IEP (see Addendum A for list of possible post-secondary accommodations).
- ACT accommodations request form and approval letter from ACT
- Most recent Annual Review IEP and/or the latest Eligibility IEP
- Summary of Performance (SOP) form or Summary of Performance with Portfolio form.
- Secondary foreign language waiver and rationale, if applicable