

# **DISABILITY TASK FORCE REPORT**

Prepared by the Washington Student Achievement Council

Pursuant to Substitute Senate Bill 5180

Task Force on Students with Disabilities

**December 2014**

**Contents**

Disability Task Force Report ..... 0

Executive Summary..... 1

Bill Summary and Task Force..... 3

Introduction ..... 5

Disability Rights Laws..... 7

Overview ..... 8

    Transition..... 8

    Sharing Best Practices ..... 9

    Documentation..... 9

    Outreach ..... 11

Recommendations ..... 11

    Recommendation 1 ..... 11

    Recommendation 2..... 14

    Recommendation 3..... 15

    Recommendation 4..... 16

    Recommendation 5..... 18

    Recommendation 6..... 19

    Recommendation 7..... 20

Future Work..... 21

    Next Steps..... 23

Appendix A ..... 24

Appendix B ..... 28

    Task Force Members and Student Achievement Council Staff ..... 28

Appendix C..... 30

Appendix D ..... 31

    Comparison of the IDEA and the ADA Requirements ..... 31

References ..... 32

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

In 2013, SB 5180 was passed establishing a statewide task force to make recommendations to improve access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. The 29 member task force represents a wide variety of interests and groups including both K-12 and postsecondary education, citizens, as well as government and non-government organizations. This report focuses on critical issues and recommendations associated with student transition, postsecondary documentation requirements, outreach, and sharing best practices among institutions.

## **Key Findings and Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

State Board of Education (SBE), in conjunction with the Disability Task Force, should develop guidelines for school districts that provide direction on how the Essential Elements of a High-Quality High School and Beyond Plan can be incorporated into and support IEP secondary transition services.

### **Recommendation 2**

Washington should develop online content and printable materials to help students with disabilities and their families identify target benchmarks to work toward at various stages of their middle and high school careers. The content should be developed by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and the Disability Task Force, and should be available electronically through WSAC's ReadySetGrad.org.

The content should give students with disabilities information on both academic and non-academic skills they will greatly benefit from developing and being able to demonstrate in multiple environments. Below is a non-exhaustive list of these skills:

- Describing one's disability, its impact(s), and articulating the accommodations needed to assist in mitigating these impacts.
- Persevering in learning when faced with challenges
- Taking responsibility for good academic habits
- Effectively communicating with a wide variety of audiences
- Managing time
- Managing money
- Describing one's strengths

- Advocating for oneself

Ideally these skills are taught over time and included on students' IEPs throughout their K-12 school years.

### **Recommendation 3**

The state should allocate new funding to postsecondary institutions so they can offer more comprehensive services and provide more staff support to students with disabilities throughout the system.

### **Recommendation 4**

The state should ensure that all students—regardless of income—have access to the formal evaluations required by postsecondary institutions.

### **Recommendation 5**

The state should allocate funding to increase professional development opportunities for K-12 and postsecondary educators and staff on disability-related training, specifically:

- 1) Professional development should be provided to K-12 school counselors, educators, and administrators on transitioning from K-12 to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. Professional development programs should be guided by an advisory group comprised of parents, K-12 and postsecondary education professionals, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.
- 2) Public postsecondary institutions should require training for their faculty, staff, and administrators on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, including Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0.
- 3) Public postsecondary institutions should offer specialized training on recruiting students with disabilities. This training should be offered to any postsecondary personnel who do outreach to high school students, including but not limited to postsecondary recruiters, admissions counselors, and outreach coordinators.

### **Recommendation 6**

The state should allocate funding to:

- 1) Develop and support more postsecondary in-person and web-based student leadership, peer-mentoring, and outreach opportunities, such as the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment Youth Leadership Forum and DO-IT Scholars.

- 2) Provide additional work-based learning opportunities, including internships and job shadowing experiences, through collaboration between secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, and other organizations.

### **Recommendation 7**

The task force should establish a workgroup to address the barriers that prevent adaptive devices from following students over the course of their education. This workgroup should be composed of individuals with expertise in the rules governing each of the funding sources likely to be used to purchase adaptive devices. The workgroup should conduct a feasibility study to:

- Identify, evaluate, and verify barriers that restrict an adaptive device from following students.
- Identify, evaluate and verify the procedures a school or district could employ to overcome any of the identified barriers.
- Recommend policy changes that would make it possible for an assistive device to follow students when they move to another school, district, postsecondary institution, or to a rehabilitation agency.

## **BILL SUMMARY AND TASK FORCE**

Substitute Senate Bill 5180 passed during the 2013 Legislative Session, creating a task force to identify and recommend strategies for improving access to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. The goal of the task force is to “develop recommendations that will directly increase the success rate for students with disabilities who are transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education, which are distinctively different parts of the educational system.<sup>1</sup>” The task force is charged with making recommendations to advance the following goals<sup>1</sup>:

1. Make the transition from K-12 education to postsecondary education more seamless and successful.
2. Select a statewide method for sharing best practices between and among K-12 education institutions and postsecondary education institutions.
3. Review documentation of disabilities at postsecondary education institutions, including developing resources for how school districts, in collaboration with students and their families, can get disability documentation applicable for postsecondary education institutions completed before a student’s high school graduation.

4. Create a plan for how school districts and postsecondary education institutions can improve outreach to students and their families regarding available options in postsecondary education.<sup>a</sup>

The task force is composed of 29 members appointed by the Governor and nine different stakeholder organizations. The task force represents a wide variety of interests and groups from both K-12 and postsecondary education, citizens, as well as government and non-government organizations.<sup>b</sup> Although task force members have different areas of expertise and backgrounds, they share the goals of a) improving access to postsecondary education and training for students with disabilities and b) increasing the postsecondary completion rate of students with disabilities.

The task force established a set of shared values and principles, intended to be high level statements to guide their work. The following principles and values frame our recommendations and will continue to guide our efforts.

- Consistent with the goals stated in the Americans with Disabilities Act, we aim to enhance independence, full participation, equality of opportunity, and economic self-sufficiency for students with disabilities.
- We value self-determination and self-advocacy among students.
- To the extent feasible, we endeavor to build on programs already in existence to accomplish the legislative goals outlined in SSB 5180.
- We value interagency coordination and communication between K-12 and postsecondary sectors.
- We must be mindful of differences among geographical regions. Something that works for an urban district may not be well suited to a rural one.
- We seek to identify and remove barriers that impede student success during transitions from high school to postsecondary institutions and beyond.
- We endeavor to ensure every student has an opportunity to have a successful transition from secondary to postsecondary education and training,<sup>c</sup> and to increase the postsecondary completion rate of students with disabilities.

---

<sup>a</sup>See Appendix A for full text of Substitute Senate Bill 5180.

<sup>b</sup>See Appendix B for a list of task force members and Student Achievement Council staff providing support to the task force.

<sup>c</sup> Training includes vocational and technical education.

## INTRODUCTION

Postsecondary education and training provide tremendous benefits to individual citizens as well as society as a whole. People who earn postsecondary credentials benefit from higher earnings and improved quality of life. They are less likely to rely on social services, and in return they provide a skilled workforce to the economy.<sup>2</sup> Despite these benefits, individuals with disabilities, particularly students who receive special education services, consistently transition less successfully to postsecondary education than their peers.

### Washington State Higher Education Continuation Rates for High School Graduates Class of 2011 and Class of 2012<sup>3</sup>

	All Students	Special Education Students <sup>d</sup>
<b>Number of Graduates</b>	132,177	11,110
<b>Number of Graduates Enrolled in Higher Education</b>	75,886	2,596
<b>Percentage Enrolled in Higher Education</b>	57%	23%

Source: Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) analysis of ERDC data<sup>3</sup>

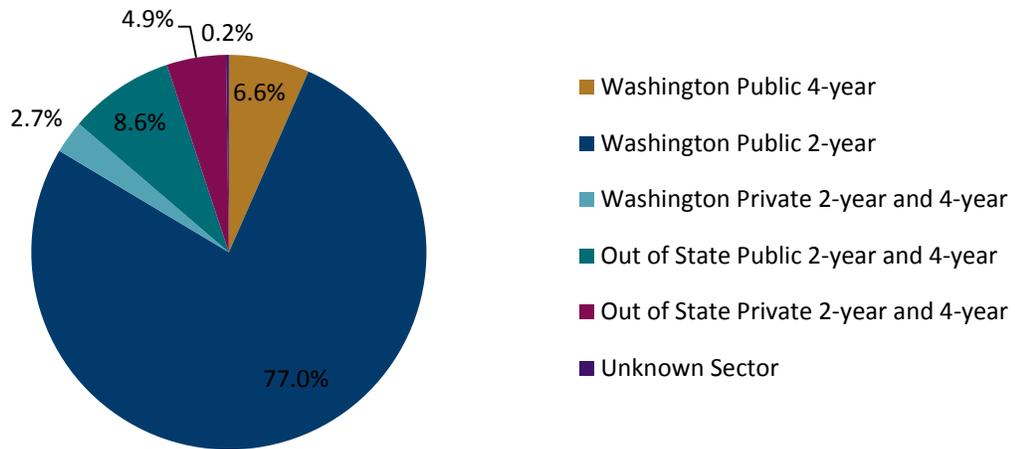
As demonstrated in the table above, special education graduates continue onto higher education at less than half the rate of the total student population. Of those that continue on, the majority attend a 2-year public college in Washington (77 percent).<sup>e</sup>

---

<sup>d</sup> A special education student refers to a student enrolled in special education during the enrollment period associated with their high school graduation record.

<sup>e</sup> See Appendix C.

## Special Education Students in Higher Education 2011-2012



Source: Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) analysis of ERDC data<sup>3</sup>

Students with disabilities face challenges that prevent them from entering and succeeding in postsecondary education programs. Some of these challenges include:

- Lack of meaningful planning for transition services as part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP). This planning begins when a student reaches age 16, or earlier if deemed appropriate.
- Inadequate preparation for college-level demands and the skills needed to be successful in postsecondary education. These include study skills, time management skills, communication skills, self-advocacy skills, and the ability to employ effective learning strategies.
- The change in governing laws between K-12 and postsecondary education shifts responsibility from the school system in K-12 to the student in postsecondary education. This is because K-12 education is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and postsecondary education is not.
- Difficulty obtaining professional disability documentation required to receive accommodations in postsecondary education.

After entering postsecondary environments, students with disabilities face additional challenges. These include insufficient knowledge of support systems and resources they may need to obtain services and/or accommodations, as well as the adjustment to independent living.<sup>4</sup>

## DISABILITY RIGHTS LAWS

There are three main federal disability-related laws that impact students:<sup>f</sup>

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)  
<http://idea.ed.gov/>
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)  
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/hq9805.html>
- Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act  
<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>

All three laws apply in elementary and secondary education, but the IDEA requirements do not apply beyond high school. Because IDEA is the basis for many of the services provided to students in K-12, this represents a dramatic change for students and families. Without proper planning, this change can create a significant barrier for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to postsecondary education. Students and families accustomed to the IDEA environment are often surprised by the reduction in scope of help or “life support” they receive in the postsecondary environment under the ADA and Section 504.

For example, the ADA and Section 504 require postsecondary institutions to provide appropriate academic adjustments and reasonable accommodations. However, they do not require academic modifications, which are allowable under the IDEA throughout K-12, including high school. Academic modifications can fundamentally alter the curriculum or reduce course requirements. For example, an academic accommodation may allow a student to take an exam in a quiet room or have an exam read aloud a reader. An example of an academic modification is allowing a student to take an exam multiple times or write a shorter length paper. This is a significant difference because modifying the curriculum and individualizing instruction are core IDEA principles. In other words, there is no special education in the postsecondary setting.

In addition to the three laws listed above, there are others that impact education for students with disabilities. For example, the current authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) requires schools to disaggregate statewide test score statistics by various subgroups, including students with disabilities. However, there is no similar requirement in postsecondary education. State laws reflect and support the federal provisions of the IDEA, ADA, Section 504, and ESEA.

---

<sup>f</sup>Appendix D outlines some major differences between the elementary and secondary legal framework defined by the IDEA and the postsecondary legal framework defined by the ADA (and by extension Section 504, since in most cases, Section 504 and the ADA have the same effect in postsecondary education).

In Washington, we emphasize local control in K-12 education governance through publically elected school boards. This means that schools have some leeway in adopting practices that meet legal requirements. Similarly, public and private postsecondary institutions in Washington have a degree of autonomy with regard to the practices they implement to meet ADA and Section 504 requirements.

Although some communication and coordination mechanisms exist (e.g. the State Board for Community Colleges' Disability Support Services Council (DSSC) and Washington Association on Postsecondary Education and Disability (WAPED)), there is considerable variation in disability-related policy and practice across institutions. Furthermore, there are currently no broadly used statewide mechanisms for sharing information between K-12 and postsecondary educational sectors.

We also lack a broadly used statewide mechanism for informing families and students about transitioning out of K-12, which means that families and students cannot easily find information vital to success in postsecondary education. For example, postsecondary institutions have varying documentation requirements in order for a student to receive an accommodation. What constitutes adequate documentation is generally determined case by case and is based on unique student circumstances. Developing a more general policy approach is a matter of current debate between K-12 and postsecondary education providers. Consequently, students with disabilities and their families face a steep learning curve during the transition from secondary to postsecondary education.

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Transition**

All students experience difficulties transitioning from high school to college and college to a career, but for students with disabilities the challenges associated with these transitions are heightened. The task force has identified several challenges, which if addressed, could ease these transition periods for students with disabilities.

- 1) The High School and Beyond Plan and its components (as defined by the State Board of Education) are not adequately integrated into planning for Individualized Education Program (IEP) transition services.
- 2) There is a lack of focus on essential non-academic skills (e.g. self-advocacy skills) and goals in IEP transition services.
- 3) K-12 personnel as well as college faculty need to know more about:
  - Laws governing K-12 vs. postsecondary education settings.

- Challenges students with disabilities face in accessing and succeeding in postsecondary education.
  - Unique opportunities available to students with disabilities, such as specific work-based learning opportunities and internships.
- 4) There is a need to facilitate sharing specialized equipment and accommodation resources between and among school districts and postsecondary institutions.
  - 5) Students with disabilities are not prepared for the advanced level of material and course complexity in postsecondary education, where accommodations are allowable but curriculum modifications are not required by law.

## **Sharing Best Practices**

A recurring theme throughout task force discussions is a lack of communication and collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary education institutions. Because the different sectors are governed by different laws (K-12 by IDEA, which does not apply in postsecondary), communication between sectors is essential in order to improve secondary-postsecondary transition for students with disabilities. Currently, there is no widely used statewide vehicle that allows for communication or sharing of best practices between K-12 and postsecondary education institutions.

In 2013, the Disability Task Force and WSAC (task force staff) established a Listserv to facilitate communication among task force members. The task force is exploring the possibility of opening this up to a broader audience of K-12 and postsecondary educators.

Listservs allow educators to share resources, questions, professional development opportunities, opinions and problems. They also provide a forum for newer educators to connect with more experienced educator mentors.

However, listserv communication also presents a challenge. Emails are often not tracked or logged. The task force has also discussed creating a blog or website where a link to sign up to the listserv could be housed. The website could provide resources, including a “Frequently Asked Questions” section to address questions that have routinely been posted to the listserv.

## **Documentation**

Students with disabilities struggle with different expectations and responsibilities in postsecondary education. In K-12, IEP development and accommodations are initiated by the school district and offer opportunities for parent/student input. In contrast, postsecondary students are responsible for both initiating contact with on-campus services and gathering and submitting any required documentation to receive academic accommodations. This is due in large part to a critical shift of responsibility from the school

system to the student. In postsecondary education, students assume responsibility for documenting their eligibility, seeking services, and requesting reasonable accommodations. Instead of the responsibility being placed on the school system, it is now placed on the student.

Parents and caregivers do not have the same role in advocating for their children as they previously had in K-12 education. This is because once a student turns 18, parents no longer have access to their records. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits parental access to records.

In addition, disability documentation requirements vary among postsecondary education institutions, and what is acceptable at one institution may not meet the requirements of another.

In 2014, the disability task force sent a survey to Disability Services (DS) offices at every public 2- and 4-year institution, as well as private institutions that are members of the Washington Association on Postsecondary Education and Disability (WAPED). The goal of the survey was to collect information about documentation standards, allowable accommodations, and best practices in postsecondary education. The survey had a 33 percent response rate. Key survey findings include:<sup>5</sup>

- Overall, more students self-identify as having a disability than those who request and receive services at Disability Services (DS) offices.
- “Visible” disabilities—including visual, mobility, or hearing impairment—make up only about 4 to 18 percent of students with disabilities at colleges campuses. The rest are “invisible” disabilities, such as psychological and learning disabilities.
- The most common type of disability at college campuses is learning disabilities.
- 88 percent of public institutions said that a decrease in state funding over the last five years negatively impacted their institution’s student services offerings, levels of staffing, and capacity.
- 100 percent of schools have documentation guidelines for establishing student eligibility to receive accommodations. These guidelines vary slightly among institutions.
- 96 percent of students with disabilities require professional third-party documentation in order to receive accommodations.

- No colleges allow accommodations that are substantial modifications to the course/curriculum, such as modified reading or math levels.<sup>g</sup>
- Only 29 percent of colleges allow waivers to the graduation requirements, such as foreign language requirements. However, 76 percent of colleges allow course substitutions.
- DS providers said the most critical need for students with disabilities was financial assistance with documentation costs.
- The most frequently asked question that DS providers receive is if a student’s IEP is acceptable disability documentation, and if it transfers over from K-12.

## Outreach

Students with disabilities, like all students, benefit from postsecondary institutions that offer specific programs suited to their needs. Thus, it is important for students with disabilities to know what postsecondary options are available to them and which options will meet their unique needs. Students with disabilities have many options such as career and vocational training schools, community and technical colleges, or baccalaureate colleges and universities. In order to ensure students are receiving proper and relevant information, effective outreach strategies and support services must be employed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The task force has identified seven recommendations they believe would improve transitions from secondary to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. The following recommendations are listed in order of priority determined by task force members.

### Recommendation 1

State Board of Education (SBE), in conjunction with the Disability Task Force, should develop guidelines for school districts that provide direction on how the Essential Elements of a High-Quality High School and Beyond Plan can be incorporated into and support IEP secondary transition services.

K-12 schools are required to develop an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for every student determined eligible under the IDEA, regardless of the disability category under

---

<sup>g</sup> This is because “course modifications could change the essential requirements of the course.”<sup>5</sup> However, schools do offer pre-college courses for those who are not prepared for entry level courses.

which they qualify. The IEP is developed with active participation from parents, students, teachers, and other professionals. IEPs are informed by evaluation data, including transition assessments. Evaluation data establishes students' current levels of academic and functional performance, and also assists in determining students' preferences, interests, needs and strengths. A review of this information helps the IEP team develop appropriate and measurable postsecondary goals related to: education/training (a required goal area), employment (a required goal area), and independent living (required if determined appropriate by the IEP team).

After establishing the student's postsecondary goals, the rest of the IEP is developed to support these goals. This includes identifying annual IEP goals and transition services that support postsecondary goals, as well as Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) the student may need to reach the annual goals.

The High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) is a graduation requirement for all students in Washington State, and rules for the HSBP are set by the State Board of Education (SBE). However, neither statute nor rule currently requires that specific components be included in a HSBP.

SBE has developed guidance for what elements should constitute a meaningful HSBP. This guidance exists in SBE's document, "Essential Elements of a High-Quality High School and Beyond Plan." It is a resource that specifies important components such as setting short-term and long-term goals, identifying strengths, participating in community experiences, and planning for postsecondary education and/or careers. The timing and process of the HSBP varies by school, however planning typically begins in the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Alignment between the HSBP and IEP transition services also varies. The HSBP is not necessarily aligned with the transition services outlined in the IEP transition plan, or vice versa. Although there is significant overlap between IEP transition plans and HSBPs, there are areas of divergence. The table below shows the components of each plan, placing similar items next to each other.

### **Comparison of Similar Components in the IEP and HSBP**

<b>Individualized Education Program Transition Services<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Essential Elements of a High-Quality High School and Beyond Plan<sup>7</sup></b>
Age-appropriate transition assessments.	Identification of assessments necessary to achieve goals.
Write measurable postsecondary goals (education, employment, independent living).	Identify educational goals. Identify a career goal.

<b>Individualized Education Program Transition Services<sup>6</sup></b>	<b>Essential Elements of a High-Quality High School and Beyond Plan<sup>7</sup></b>
Identify transition services (instruction, related services, community experiences, and employment).	Identify supports and services available in high school and postsecondary.
Write the course of study.	Determine four-year plan for coursework.
Coordinate services with adult agencies.	Not specified.
Write the annual IEP goals.	Identify personal goals.
Based on individual student program.	Develop practical skills, such as developing a budget for after high school.
Based on individual student program.	Participate in postsecondary program experience.
Based on individual student program.	Complete postsecondary program applications.
Based on individual student program.	Participate in volunteer service.
Based on individual student program.	Participate in work-based learning opportunity.
Based on individual student program.	Complete career-related documents.

As one can see from the table, many elements in a HSBP are also present in an IEP transition plan. Some components of the HSBP could be valuable in helping students with disabilities reach a larger goal in their IEPs. For example, “Participate in postsecondary program experience” could help students identify their educational and career goals and familiarize themselves with postsecondary environments. These activities may ease the process of transitioning from K-12 to postsecondary education.

In practice, schools sometimes substitute IEP transition plans for HSBPs. Unfortunately, this means that students with disabilities will not have the same opportunity for robust transition planning as other students. Students with disabilities may end up missing out on components such as “participate in a volunteer experience” or “develop a budget for after high school.” It is important that all these components are considered in addition to the requirements of the IEP during the planning and guidance process.

Because of this, the task force recommends integrating IEP transition plan components with those of the essential elements of a high-quality HSPB. In essence, the components of a HSBP can be used to create more robust IEP transition services.

## **Recommendation 2**

Washington should develop online content and printable materials to help students with disabilities and their families identify target benchmarks to work toward at various stages of their middle and high school careers. The content should be developed by the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and the Disability Task Force, and should be available electronically through WSAC's ReadySetGrad.org.

The content should give students with disabilities information on both academic and non-academic skills they will greatly benefit from developing and being able to demonstrate in multiple environments. Below is a non-exhaustive list of these skills:

- Describing one's disability, its impact(s), and articulating the accommodations needed to assist in mitigating these impacts.
- Persevering in learning when faced with challenges
- Taking responsibility for good academic habits.
- Effectively communicating with a wide variety of audiences.
- Managing time.
- Managing money.
- Describing one's strengths.
- Advocating for oneself.

Ideally these skills are taught over time and included on students' IEPs throughout their K-12 school years.

The online content would be a resource for students as they develop personal and academic goals and offer guidance on establishing roles and responsibilities for students and parents during the transition process. For example, while parents may be used to being the primary advocate for a student with a disability in secondary school, that responsibility should shift to the student to the maximum extent possible upon transition to postsecondary education. Providing opportunities for students to practice and ease into that role before postsecondary education is critically important.

ReadySetGrad.org is currently WSAC’s outreach website to students and families. One benefit of using Ready, Set, Grad as a platform is that it is already designed to communicate the steps and activities necessary for students to prepare for college. The website identifies benchmarks students should meet based on their grade or student status. It is designed for students to begin using the resources as early as 6th grade all the way through college. . WSAC has been working with a contractor to ensure Ready, Set, Grad meets accessibility requirements.

It is the task force’s goal that these materials will also be available to print and distribute to school districts. They could be printed as an interactive “slider guide” for students. A contractor has estimated the cost for developing these materials:

**Cost Estimates for Distribution to Washington Special Education Students**

	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>Cost</b>
<b>One cohort of special education students</b>	11,000	\$7,083
<b>All high school special education students</b>	43,300	\$14,909
<b>All middle and high school special education students</b>	75,500	\$21,887
<b>All special education students in the K-12 system</b>	140,200	\$37,673

**Recommendation 3**

The state should allocate new funding to postsecondary institutions so they can offer more comprehensive services and provide more staff support to students with disabilities throughout the system.

“We [Disability Services (DS) offices at postsecondary institutions] have had to prioritize our services to focus on satisfying the minimum legal requirements, without the staffing or resources to be able to offer help in areas like instructional guidance, academic coaching, follow-up with students, etc... We have not been able to do the little things that sometimes make a big difference to a student’s success.<sup>5</sup>” - DS Provider, Washington State

In postsecondary education, it must be determined if accommodations will be necessary to for students to have equal access to course content. When it is determined that

accommodations are necessary, the institution is required to provide them—regardless of budget.

The costs associated with providing accommodations often exceed budgets. This means other critical student services, such as counseling, tutoring, and career guidance are reduced or eliminated altogether. Yet, these individualized supports can help students with disabilities successfully navigate challenges they face during their transition to postsecondary education; and increase the likelihood that they will complete their postsecondary education. Unfortunately, these student support services have decreased dramatically over the years, particularly staffing levels. Students with disabilities are disproportionately affected by these cuts, which impacts their ability to persist in and complete postsecondary education.

In addition, cuts to Disability Services (DS) office staff have led many schools to reduce the services their offices can provide to the bare minimum. Of the public institutions that said their DS offices had been affected by state funding cuts, 73 percent mentioned that staffing levels had decreased or stayed the same over the last five years.<sup>5</sup> One DS provider said, “Currently, our full time counselors have a 1 to 375 ratio [to students]. A more ideal ratio is 1 to 200, so counseling work can be more than just getting students set up with services and accommodations...[so we can] do some focused work on assisting with retention, persistence and graduation of students with disabilities.”<sup>5</sup>

#### **Recommendation 4**

The state should ensure that all students—regardless of income—have access to the formal evaluations required by postsecondary institutions.

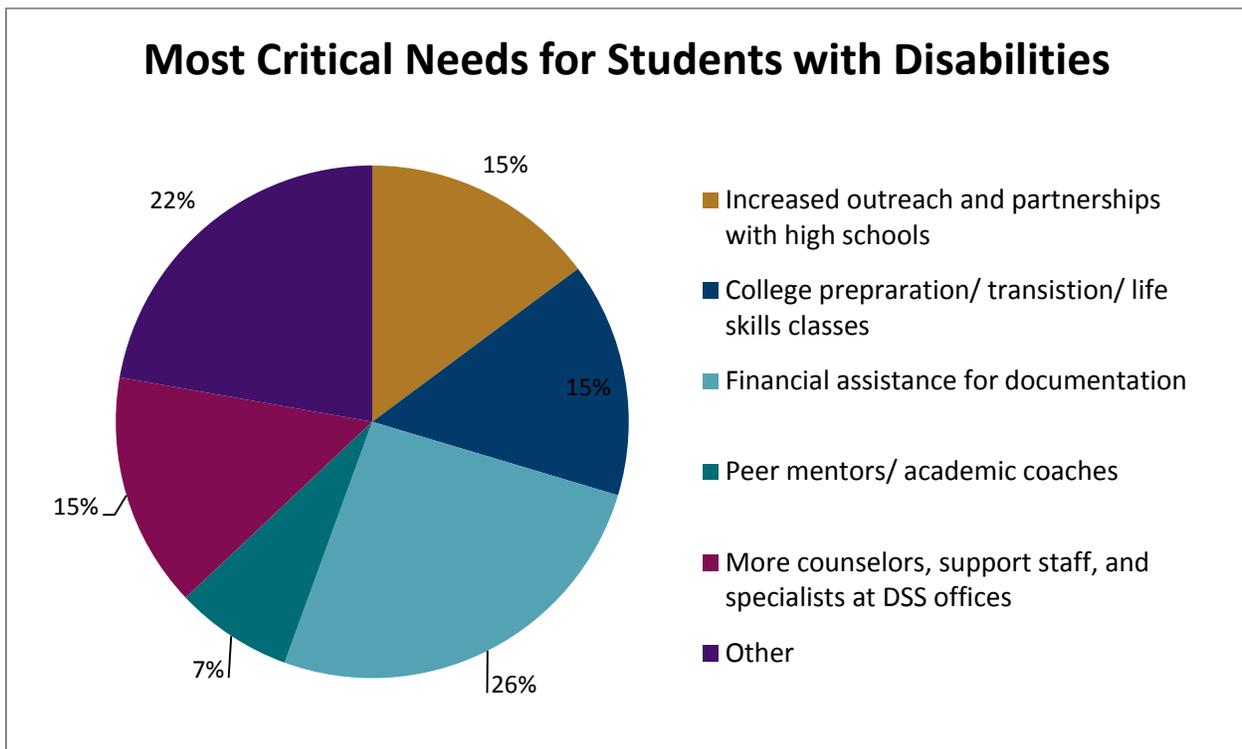
A common misconception is that IEPs from K-12 transfer to postsecondary education. *They do not transfer between sectors.* IEPs and the most current evaluation data regarding eligibility for special education services may be considered by postsecondary institutions when determining accommodations, but students must often get a professional evaluation. In fact, according to the Washington institutions that responded to the task force survey, approximately 96 percent of students registered with DS offices required professional third-party documentation in order to receive accommodations.<sup>5</sup>

There are multiple reasons why the assessment students receive as part of their IEPs are often insufficient for postsecondary institutions. First, the assessments that special education students receive in K-12 are often done by school psychologists, and in postsecondary education most schools require an evaluation from a clinical psychologist (depending on the disability). Second, the assessments done in K-12 may not be recent enough for postsecondary institutions. For certain disabilities, like traumatic brain injury, a

student’s functional limitations may change over time, thus changing the nature of the disability and necessary accommodations.

Furthermore, postsecondary institutions do not receive state or federal funding to provide assessments for students with disabilities. As a result, many students who require more robust documentation must pay for a professional evaluation or assessment to document their disability. This can be very costly, especially for students from low-income households. For example, the cost of a psychological evaluation can range from under \$1,000 to \$3,600.<sup>8</sup>

Postsecondary DS providers agree documentation costs are a critical issue for students with disabilities. When asked what critical needs, if addressed, could ease the transition to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, the most common response was financial assistance with obtaining disability documentation (26 percent).<sup>5</sup>



Source: Disability Task Force Survey of Washington State Higher Education Institutions<sup>5</sup>

In order for students with disabilities to have equal access to postsecondary education, they should not face this additional financial barrier. Lack of household resources should not prevent students with disabilities from receiving the accommodations they need to be successful in postsecondary education and training.

## Recommendation 5

The state should allocate funding to increase professional development opportunities for K-12 and postsecondary educators and staff on disability-related training, specifically:

- 3) Professional development should be provided to K-12 school counselors, educators, and administrators on transitioning from K-12 to postsecondary education for students with disabilities. Professional development programs should be guided by an advisory group comprised of parents, K-12 and postsecondary education professionals, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.
- 4) Public postsecondary institutions should require training for their faculty, staff, and administrators on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, including Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0.
- 5) Public postsecondary institutions should offer specialized training on recruiting students with disabilities. This training should be offered to any postsecondary personnel who do outreach to high school students, including but not limited to postsecondary recruiters, admissions counselors, and outreach coordinators.

The Center for Change in Transition Services (CCTS) at Seattle University is one developer of secondary transition training modules in K-12. CCTS provides secondary transition training to Educational Service Districts (ESDs), school districts, and teachers. They also collect student outcome data, and collaborate with other agencies to coordinate services for students with disabilities. CCTS develops, gathers, and disseminates high-quality resources related to secondary transitions, and they provide valuable and much needed technical assistance with the delivery of secondary transition services. Unfortunately, CCTS is operating at capacity, which constrains its ability for outreach about the variety of services they provide.

Outreach should be expanded to reach more populations, including K-12 counselors and families. This would help ensure that key educators have a solid base of knowledge about secondary transitions, which would increase the likelihood that these services will be better coordinated and more effective for students.

In addition, certain postsecondary personnel would benefit from increased training. Every postsecondary institution has at least one disability services (DS) provider. These providers meet with students to determine their respective accommodations and services, and sometimes serve as a liaison between the student and college faculty. Although DS providers are well versed on ADA and accommodations the institution is required to provide by law, faculty and other postsecondary staff often have minimal or no knowledge

about ADA or Section 504. This can create tension between students and their professors and make it difficult for students with disabilities to successfully communicate their needs to instructors.

To remedy this, all faculty, administrators, and staff at postsecondary institution should receive training ADA requirements and section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, including Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0. This could be taught by the DS provider(s) at each institution or by another party with ADA expertise.

Postsecondary institutions should also include students with disabilities in their targeted outreach efforts to increase diversity. Often, the postsecondary personnel responsible for recruiting high school students are not trained to interact with students with disabilities. In order for students with disabilities to have the same opportunities as other students, any personnel who provides outreach must have a basic understanding of the challenges students with disabilities face and the postsecondary options available to them.

## **Recommendation 6**

The state should allocate funding to:

- 1) Develop and support more postsecondary in-person and web-based student leadership, peer-mentoring, and outreach opportunities, such as the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment Youth Leadership Forum and DO-IT Scholars.
- 2) Provide additional work-based learning opportunities, including internships and job shadowing experiences, through collaboration between secondary schools, postsecondary institutions, and other organizations.

Peer-mentoring and education programs are extremely beneficial for students with disabilities.<sup>9</sup> There are some successful programs that give students the opportunity to experience college life while in high school. One example is DO-IT Scholars, where students spend the summer on a university campus. They are placed with a college peer-mentor, learn to use adaptive technology, and explore careers. DO-IT Scholars currently serves 16 to 20 students.

Another program for students with disabilities is the Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment Youth Leadership Forum, which currently serves 30 to 40 students. It allows high school students to develop their personal and social skills so they can become leaders in their communities. Programs such as the Youth Leadership Forum and DO-IT Scholars could be expanded if more funding was available.

In addition, work-based learning experiences are valuable for students with disabilities. The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) reviewed research and determined work based learning experiences are the best predictor of post-school employment success for students with disabilities.<sup>10</sup>

### **Recommendation 7**

The task force should establish a workgroup to address the barriers that prevent adaptive devices from following students over the course of their education. This workgroup should be composed of individuals with expertise in the rules governing each of the funding sources likely to be used to purchase adaptive devices. The workgroup should conduct a feasibility study to:

- Identify, evaluate, and verify barriers that restrict an adaptive device from following students.
- Identify, evaluate and verify the procedures a school or district could employ to overcome any of the identified barriers.
- Recommend policy changes that would make it possible for an assistive device to follow students when they move to another school, district, postsecondary institution, or to a rehabilitation agency.

The devices purchased for students can be so uniquely fitted to their particular needs that there is no practical possibility of the original school being able to use it with another student. Examples have included a wheelchair seat and back molded to the body of the student and communication devices with highly customized interface switches and programming.

There is an absence of a generally accepted method for transferring adaptive equipment between and among school districts, rehabilitation programs, and other public entities. As a result, a student transferring schools may cause these entities to repurchase the same device that had been supplied to the student by a previous school. In some cases, the process of re-purchasing is repeated multiple times, with several schools and a vocational rehabilitation program each separately and sequentially purchasing the same type of assistive device for the same student, while previously purchased and non-transferrable devices become obsolete.

These practices waste public funds and cause unnecessary disruption to the students' lives and educational progress. It can take schools several months to purchase an assistive device, leaving the student without a necessary aid for significant periods of time.

## FUTURE WORK

The task force explored some issues but did not reach consensus or refine the details in time for the 2014 report. The task force will explore these concepts further in 2015. Some of these issues include:

1) Consider timing of when IEP transition services should begin in K-12.

According to IDEA, IEPs must contain transition services beginning at age 16, or younger if the IEP team determines it appropriate.<sup>11</sup> IEP planning may benefit students with disabilities if begun earlier in secondary school.

Early transition planning is critically important, mainly because of the coordination and time required to put supports and services in place for students.<sup>12</sup> Some states are already requiring schools to begin transition services for students earlier in the IEP planning process. One example is Pennsylvania, where state law requires transition services begin by age 14.<sup>13</sup>

The task force may consider combining this with Recommendation #1, as a guideline for K-12 educators. If so, timing would be coordinated with the HSBP timing.

2) Secondary to postsecondary transition training should be considered as a possible requirement for pre-service educator preparation programs.

Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB) does not require specific training on secondary transitions for students with disabilities. The task force plans to explore the possibility and feasibility of adding this to K-12 educators' pre-service curriculum.

3) There is a need for a common language for terms that are used in K-12 and postsecondary education.

Currently, there is some confusion over the variety of terms used by K-12 and postsecondary educators. A better understanding of these terms would help the sectors communicate more effectively. Some of these include:

- Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- 504 Plan
- Transition Services
- Evaluations
- Assessments
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

- 4) A gap exists between information contained in K-12 assessments and what is required for documentation by postsecondary institutions.

Almost all postsecondary institutions have guidelines for establishing student eligibility to receive accommodations. These guidelines may vary by institution, which can make it difficult for K-12 educators and students to know what information postsecondary institutions need.

The task force has suggested that more consistent documentation guidelines among postsecondary institutions may enable K-12 schools to align student assessments with the disability documentation that postsecondary institutions need. K-12 schools would also need to coordinate the timing of these assessments to make sure they are relatively current (a student's 11<sup>th</sup> or 12 grade year).

- 5) Students with disabilities who also receive foster care services face additional challenges.

Special education students are vastly overrepresented in foster care services. In Washington in 2010, there were 6,819 students receiving foster care services. Of those students, 33.5 percent were in special education even though special education students only made up about 13 percent of the student population.<sup>14</sup>

Extended foster care services allow students to continue receiving services after age 18 if they are still enrolled in secondary education. Students with disabilities in foster care may need to have additional IEP goals on how to continue receiving foster care services after age 18.

- 6) Postsecondary DS providers may benefit from a forum to share accessible and alternative format textbooks among postsecondary institutions.

Currently, each college has its own system for locating and creating accessible materials for students who need alternative print formations. This impacts quality and consistency, and students can fall behind in classes if conversion is not done quickly.

Some states, such as California and Georgia, have already developed a centralized processing center. This has been successful and allowed DS providers to deliver timely and efficient accommodations to print-disabled students.<sup>15</sup> The task force plans to explore these models in 2015 and see if there are models that could be replicated in Washington.

## **Next Steps**

In 2015, the task force will develop specific action plans for each recommendation. The task force may bring in additional experts who have specific knowledge relating to the task force's recommendations.

The task force has also found that to meet its legislative intent, their work may need to continue after 2015. The length of additional time needed is still uncertain.

## APPENDIX A

SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5180

Passed Legislature – 2013 Regular Session

State of Washington

63<sup>rd</sup> Legislature

2013 Regular Session

AN ACT Relating to improving access to higher education for students with disabilities; creating new sections; and providing an expiration date.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.1.** The legislature finds that postsecondary education helps individuals to become productive and contributing members of society, and that individuals with disabilities are equally benefited by obtaining postsecondary education. The legislature also finds that students with disabilities face a disproportionate number of challenges when transitioning to postsecondary education, and that people who have disabilities are less than half as likely to have a baccalaureate degree compared to people who do not have a disability. The legislature finds it is incumbent upon the state to address these challenges in order to provide all students in Washington state with an equal opportunity to pursue a successful future.

In calling together a diverse group of experts from throughout the state, the legislature intends to develop recommendations that will directly increase the success rate for students with disabilities who are transitioning from secondary to postsecondary education, which are distinctively different parts of the educational system.

NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.2.** (1) A legislative task force on improving access to higher education for students with disabilities is established.

(2) The task force must collaborate to carry out the following goals:

(a) Make the transition from K-12 education to higher education more seamless and successful;

(b) Select a statewide method of sharing best practices between and among K-12 education institutions and postsecondary education institutions;

(c) Review documentation of disabilities at postsecondary education institutions, including developing resources for how school districts, in collaboration with students and their families, can get disability documentation applicable for postsecondary education institutions completed before a student's high school graduation; and

(d) Create a plan for how school districts and postsecondary education institutions can improve outreach to students and their families regarding available options in higher education.

(3) The task force must consist of not more than twenty-nine members and must include the following members:

(a) Seven members appointed by the governor as follows:

(i) Four private citizens with experience advocating and providing services for students with disabilities, at least one of whom must currently be or who in the past was a parent of a student with a disability, at least one of whom must be a current student at a postsecondary education institution in Washington, and at least one of whom must have experience advocating for veterans with disabilities; and

(ii) Three representatives from nonprofit organizations focused on advocating for citizens with disabilities or providing services for citizens with disabilities, or both;

(b) Eight members appointed by the office of the superintendent of public instruction as follows:

(i) Two representatives from the office of the superintendent of public instruction;

(ii) Two representatives from educational service districts; and

(iii) Four representatives from local school districts that have high concentrations of students with disabilities enrolled in the district;

(c) Four members appointed by the state board for community and technical colleges as follows:

(i) One representative from the state board for community and technical colleges; and

(ii) Three representatives from public community or technical colleges;

(d) Four members appointed by the council of presidents, including one representative from the council and three representatives from a regional university as defined in RCW 28B.10.016;

(e) One member appointed by the superintendent of the state school for the blind, from the state school for the blind;

(f) One member appointed by the secretary of the department of social and health services, from the department of social and health services;

(g) One member appointed by the executive secretary of the governor's committee on disability issues and employment, from the governor's committee on disability issues and employment;

(h) One member appointed by the chair of the developmental disabilities council, from the developmental disabilities council;

(i) One member appointed by the superintendent of the state school for the deaf, from the state school for the deaf; and

(j) One member appointed by the workforce training and education coordinating board, from the workforce training and education coordinating board.

(4) The purpose of the task force is to make recommendations to the legislature and to coordinate and implement the goals in subsection (2) of this section.

(5)(a) When making the recommendations regarding subsection (2)(a) of this section, the task force must consider:

(i) How to ensure students' interests, goals, and strengths guide the transition planning process;

(ii) How to enable collaboration and communication between and among schools, institutions of higher education, and relevant state agencies to provide an effective transition;

(iii) How assessment and disability documentation that is acceptable to postsecondary institutions should best be determined and obtained;

(iv) How to identify the types of supports and accommodations that students will need in postsecondary environments;

(v) How students can plan their high school coursework to sufficiently prepare for the higher education environment; and

(vi) If a statewide database of student disability accommodation equipment, software, and resources owned by school districts and postsecondary education institutions should be created to assist students' educational transitions and, if created, what public entity is best suited to be responsible for the creation, maintenance, and the scope of that database.

(b) When making recommendations regarding subsection (2)(c) of this section, the task force is encouraged to consider:

- (i) What should constitute a proper and complete documentation of a disability;
- (ii) How recently the documentation must have been completed; and
- (iii) Which testing information, if any, must be included in the documentation.

(6) The student achievement council must provide staff support to the task force within existing funds. The task force is encouraged to use technology to expand access and limit costs.

(7) The task force shall report its recommendations for each goal to the legislature by December 1, 2013, and annually each December 1<sup>st</sup> thereafter until expiration of the task force.

(8) This section expires January 1, 2016.

## APPENDIX B

### Task Force Members and Student Achievement Council Staff

Organization	Name	Position	Appointed by
Office of the Education Ombudsman	Stacy Gillett	Education Ombudsman	Governor
Washington Access Fund	Jack Brummel	Executive Director	Governor
NA	Carol Solow Freedman	Citizen/Parent	Governor
NA	Karen DeYoung	Citizen/Parent	Governor
University of Washington Tacoma	Rai Nauman Mumtaz	Student	Governor
	NA		Governor
	NA		Governor
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	Doug Gill	Director of Special Education	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction	Kristin Hennessey	Program Supervisor, Equity and Civil Rights	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Educational Service District 112	Mary Mertz	Associate Superintendent, Specialized Services	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Educational Service District 101	Fran McCarthy	Director, Center for Special Education Services	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Moses Lake School District	Heidi Johnson	Assistant Director for Special Services	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Shelton School District	Cheryl Williams	Board Director	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Lake Washington School District	Paul Vine	Director of Special Education	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Issaquah School District	Marnie Maraldo	Board Director	Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
State Board for Community and Technical Colleges	Scott Copeland	Policy Associate, Student Services	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
Green River Community College	Deb Casey	Vice President for Student Affairs	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
Shoreline Community College	Kim Thompson	Associate Dean of Students	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Appointed by</b>
Bellingham Technical College	Mary Gerard	Coordinator for Disability Support Services	State Board for Community and Technical Colleges
Central Washington University	Wendy Holden	Access & Disability Consultant	Council of Presidents
The Evergreen State College	Meredith Inocencio	Director for Access Services	Council of Presidents
University of Washington	Bree Callahan	Director, Disability Resources for Students	Council of Presidents
Council of Presidents	Jane Sherman	Associate Director for Academic Policy	Council of Presidents
Washington State School for the Blind	Lori Pulliam	Director of Transition Services	Washington State School for the Blind
Washington State Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss	Rick Hauan	Director	Washington State Center for Childhood Deafness and Hearing Loss (formerly State School for the Deaf)
Department of Social and Health Services	Andres Aguirre	Director, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	Department of Social and Health Services
Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council	Aaron Morrow	Vice Chair, Council Member	Washington State Developmental Disabilities Council
Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment	Toby Olson	Executive Secretary of the Committee	Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment
Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board	Nova Gattman	Legislative Liaison/Policy Analyst	Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board
Washington Student Achievement Council	Randy Spaulding	Director of Academic Affairs and Policy	NA- Task Force Staff
Washington Student Achievement Council	Anne Messerly	Policy Associate	NA- Task Force Staff
Washington Student Achievement Council	Mark Bergeson	Associate Director of Academic Affairs and Policy	NA- Task Force Staff

## APPENDIX C

### Number of Special Education Graduates 2011-2012 Enrolled in Higher Education by Type of Institution

Type of Institution	Number of Students Enrolled
Washington Public 2-year	2,031
Washington Public 4-year	174
Washington Private 2-year and 4-year	71
Out of State Public 2-year and 4-year	228
Out of State Private 2-year and 4-year	128
Unknown	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,638</b>

## APPENDIX D

### Comparison of the IDEA and the ADA Requirements

Comparison of the Requirements and Procedures of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)		
Rights guaranteed by the law	IDEA (K-12)	ADA (College)
	Free, appropriate public education (FAPE)	Prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability
Who is covered	Every eligible child age 3-21; Concept of zero reject.	Students who are “otherwise qualified”
Identification and evaluation of students with disabilities	District is responsible for identifying students with disabilities, evaluating them, and covering costs	College has no responsibility to identify or evaluate students with disabilities. Student must self-identify and provide appropriate documentation. If an evaluation is needed, the expense is the student’s responsibility
Determining Services	Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed by team Curriculum modifications and special programs are common	Reasonable accommodations, including auxiliary aids and services, must be requested by student. Academic adjustments that equalize opportunity for participation are required; Substantial modifications to curriculum and lowering standards are not required
Personal devices and services such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and personal care attendants	Provided by district if determined to be necessary (and included in IEP)	Colleges are not required to provide these
Role of parents	Parents must be included in decision-making	College students are over 18 and are considered adults. No parent consultation is required
Appeals process	Right to due process as spelled out in the law	College grievance procedure or complaint with the USDOE Office of Civil Rights

Source: College of New Jersey<sup>16</sup>

Note: In postsecondary education, the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act have essentially the same effect, because most postsecondary institutions (including private ones) receive government funding of some sort. The exception is private postsecondary institutions that do not receive government funds.

## REFERENCES

---

- <sup>1</sup> Substitute Senate Bill 5180. Chapter 231, Washington State Legislature. (2013).
- <sup>2</sup> Baum, S., & Payea, P. (2013). *Trends in Higher Education Series*. Retrieved from <http://trends.collegeboard.org/>
- <sup>3</sup> Washington State Office of Financial Management, Education Research and Data Center. (2013). *High School Feedback Report 2011-12*.
- <sup>4</sup> Peterson, L. Y., Van Dycke, J. L., Roberson, R. L., & Sedaghat, J. M. (2013). Promoting Student Transition from Entitlement Services to Eligibility Resources. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 49(99), 099-107.
- <sup>5</sup> Disability Task Force Survey [Survey]. (2014, September 11).
- <sup>6</sup> Center for Change in Transition Services. (n.d.). Transition Services Flow Chart. Retrieved from [http://www.seattleu.edu/uploadedFiles/CCTS/2 Transition Services Flow Chart post card 2 sides 12-09.pdf](http://www.seattleu.edu/uploadedFiles/CCTS/2%20Transition%20Services%20Flow%20Chart%20post%20card%20sides%2012-09.pdf)
- <sup>7</sup> State Board of Education. (2014, July 11). Essential Elements of a High-Quality High School and Beyond Plan. Retrieved from <http://www.sbe.wa.gov/documents/BoardMeetings/2014/July/11SupplementalMaterials.pdf>
- <sup>8</sup> (2014, November 7). *Disability Task Force Meeting #10*. Meeting conducted from Green River Community College, Kent.
- <sup>9</sup> Burgstahler, S. (2003, September 1). Research to Practice Brief: Improving Secondary Education and Transition Services through Research. Retrieved from <http://www.ncset.org/publications/viewdesc.asp?id=1168>
- <sup>10</sup> National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, N. (n.d.). Youth with Disabilities. Retrieved from <http://www.nsttac.org/ytw/wble-examples/youth-with-disabilities>
- <sup>11</sup> Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. Pub. L. No. 101-476, 104 Stat. 1142. (2004).
- <sup>12</sup> Colorado Department of Education. (2000). Transition Requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Retrieved from <http://dredf.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/FF-TransPlan.pdf>
- <sup>13</sup> Pennsylvania Code and Regulations. Special Education Services and Programs. § 14.131.

- 
- <sup>14</sup> Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. (2012, January). Students in Foster Care Annual Report 2010-11. Retrieved from [http://www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/2011documents/StudentsFosterCareAnnualReport\\_2010-11.pdf](http://www.k12.wa.us/LegisGov/2011documents/StudentsFosterCareAnnualReport_2010-11.pdf)
- <sup>15</sup> Alternative Media Access Center. (n.d.). About AMAC. Retrieved from <http://www.amacusg.org/about.php>
- <sup>16</sup> Dell, A. G. (2003). Comparison of the Requirements and Procedures of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). (College of New Jersey) Retrieved from <http://www.tcnj.edu/~technj/2004/transition.htm>