

Ask the Expert Q&A #1

Preparing for College: Transition to Adulthood

Presenters:
Staci Carr Ph.D. &
Josh Taylor, Ph.D.
VCU-RRTC, Autism
Center for Education

Q What are some important considerations as far as academics for the transition from high school to post-secondary education?

One of the first things to consider is that post-secondary outcomes for students with autism continue to be poor. A 2015 study found that approximately 36% of students with autism who graduate from high school enter any college or technical training (which is evenly split between academic and vocational programs). There are resources and options available for all students, but there is a huge need for educators to get the information out there for these students and raise expectations. Studies show that the expectations of teachers, parents, and students alike are excellent predictors for enrollment and success in college down the road for these individuals.

Q There are parental expectations, your self expectations, and the expectations of the IEP team. How do these expectations help students in the future, especially in an IEP process?

Students need to be involved in the IEP process, especially in high school, but also in lower grades. There are resources that support students as young as elementary age in participating to some degree in the IEP process, but when students get to college, it's very different for them. The IDEA legislation governs and gives services for students in K-12, but does not apply to college students. Instead, they are protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act, which only provides assistance with accessibility. This then places responsibility on the student to seek out the services of the disability office, self-disclose their disability, take ownership of the process, and negotiate with professors about any accommodations they may need. Because of this need for self-advocacy, it is really important to get students ready to know themselves, know their strengths, and know what accommodations they need to be a successful college student.

Q Are there any resources to assist the teachers in getting their students to become more involved in the IEP process?

In Virginia we have resources dedicated to getting students involved their IEP process which is the I'm Determined Project that focuses on the idea of self-determination (www.imdetermined.org). They have apps, videos, resources, and holds a yearly conference to promote student leadership, making sure that students have the skills to advocate for themselves, setting goals, and taking ownership at navigating their own lives.

Q What are some tips for the school IEP team about preparing students for college?

The key is to have high expectations for your students. The more challenging courses students take, the more likely they are to enroll in college and succeed. Informing students about the options out there regardless of their skills and areas of needs is very important. At VCU, the ACE-IT program focuses on delivering an inclusive college experience for students with intellectual disabilities (including autism), providing great supports, and combining academic instruction along with vocational interests. There are many programs similar to ACE-IT across the country.

This Q&A has been taken from "Ask the Expert Series" which are short videos that discuss important topics for parents, educators, community member, and individuals with ASD and can be found on the VCU-RRTC-ACE website: <https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/asktheexpert/>