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 site or download our Education for People with Disabilities fact sheet.

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. Understood.org provides a section on children's rights that can help parents navigate this tricky and sometimes confusing system. 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 may be the most relevant to parents, Section 504 and ADA could also be useful. To find information on all the laws affecting special education, I recommend you to visit the Laws & Guidance 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 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 quick and useful fact sheet 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 [MAAPS Checklist for](#)
Parents, this Special Education School Visit Checklist, and this Choosing Schools 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 Correa, Reeve Foundation Information Specialist

Websites

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

180medical: Scholarships
Awards educational scholarships to people with spinal cord injury, spina bifida or transverse myelitis.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EW_nWRtKDWc
ABC Medical: Managing College Life with a Disability—Are You Ready?
A webinar that has been posted to YouTube.

https://accessiblecollege.com/
Accessible College
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.

https://www.affordablecollegesonline.org/college-resource-center/students-with-multiple-sclerosis/
Affordable Colleges Online: College Students with MS: A Guide to Campus Resources and Support
This website offers tips for college students with MS as well as educational scholarships for those with MS.

http://www.aahd.us/initiatives/scholarship-program/
American Association on Health and Disability (AAHD) 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.

http://www.aapd.com/
The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD)
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.

http://www.ahead.org
Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)
8015 West Kenton Circle, Suite 230
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.

http://www.aucd.org/
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
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.

BankRate: The Fully Accessible Guide to Paying For College For Students With Disabilities

http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center/
Center for Parent Information and Resources
c/o Statewide Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)
35 Halsey St., Fourth Floor
Newark, NJ 07102
Email: malizo@spannj.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 Transition to College with Paralysis
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
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.

www.collegechoice.net
College Choice: 50 Best Disability Friendly Colleges and Universities

www.dreamcollegedisability.org
DREAM (Disability, Rights, Education Activism, and Mentoring)
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.

https://finaid.org/
FinAid: Go to Guide for College Financial Aid
This page lists several scholarships for students with disabilities as well as financial aid resources for students with disabilities.

http://going-to-college.org/

Going to College
Virginia Commonwealth University
Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports and Job Retention
1314 West Main Street
P.O. Box 842011
Richmond, VA 23284-2011
Phone: 804-828-1851, 804-828-2494 (TTY)
This site is an online resource for teens with disabilities to learn about college life and what to do to prepare for it using the voices of college students with disabilities. It’s also a resource for parents to help their son or daughter learn about college and prepare for success.

http://www.heath.gwu.edu/

HEATH Resource Center
The George Washington University
HEATH Resource Center
2134 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20052-0001
E-mail: AskHEATH@gwu.edu
A national clearinghouse on postsecondary education for people with disabilities.

http://www.kidschance.org/

Kids’ Chance
Victoria Burkhart, Executive Director
Kids’ Chance of America
Phone: 484-945-9903 or 877-933-0222 (Toll-free)
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.

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

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

www.nccsdonline.org
www.NCCSDclearinghouse.org
National Center for College Students with Disabilities
c/o AHEAD
8015 West Kenten Circle Suite 230
Huntersville, NC 28078
Phone: 318-542-1164
Toll-free: 844-730-8048
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.

http://www.ncdae.org/
National Center on Disability and Access to Education (NCDAE)
Center for Persons with Disabilities
6800 Old Main Hill
Utah State University
Logan, UT 84322-6800
Phone: 435-797-8284, 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.

http://www.miusa.org/ncde
National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange (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.

http://www.ndpc-sd.org
National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD)
NDPC-SD assists states in dropout prevention, reentry and school completion for students with disabilities.


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.

http://sci.washington.edu/info/newsletters/articles/08_fall_return_to_school.asp
Northwest Regional Spinal Cord Injury System at University of Washington: The Road Back to School after Spinal Cord Injury article

http://www.pva.org/
Paralyzed Veterans of America Scholarship Program
801 Eighteenth St. NW
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

www.ThePreJaxFoundation.com
PreJax Foundation
1741 Travertine Terrace
Sanford, FL 32771
Phone: 407-734-3114
Email: info@ThePreJaxFoundation.com
A non-profit organization that gives college scholarships to people with MS or to children whose parents have MS.

https://www.facebook.com/RampLessTraveledfoundation/timeline?ref=page_internal
Ramp Less Traveled
Ramp Less Traveled is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting individuals with spinal cord injuries in the pursuit of higher education. Ramp offers a combination of scholarships and mentoring opportunities, partnering their recipients with someone experienced in navigating the confusing maze from hospital floor to college dorm. With ongoing and comprehensive support, they help individuals with spinal cord
injuries gain access to the academic, social, and emotional opportunities that college provides.

**Sentinels of Freedom**
Phone: 925-380-6342
Email: info@sentinelsoffreedom.org
Provides educational scholarships to severely wounded post-9/11 veterans.

**SwiftStudent: Disability Expenses Request Letter**
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**
3075 Adeline Street, Suite 120
Berkeley, CA 94703
TTY: 510-848-1005
Toll-free: 800-644-2666
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**
This program seeks to award scholarships to African Americans college students with a mobility–related disability. Please see the link for details.

**University of Utah**
Center for Disability Services
201 South 1460 East, Room 105
Salt Lake City, UT 84112-9055
Phone: 801-581-6211
Scholarship info for people with spinal cord injuries who attending or plan to attend the University of Utah.
U.S. Department of Education: Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (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

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

A 66-page booklet available for free download

Resources for Undocumented Students:

Fast Web: Financial Aid and Scholarships for Undocumented Students

Facebook Group

College Success: Physical Disabilities, Chronic Health & Mental Health Facebook Group

A joint production of Accessible College, Lighthouse Guidance, and Ed Redefined.

On Demand Videos

Shepherd Center: University Accessibility

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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