

Video Transcript

Preparing Students with LDs to Transition from Secondary to Post-Secondary

Narrator: The transition from secondary to post-secondary can be a challenging time for students with LDs. In order to mitigate this, there are a range of resources and support available both before and after the transition.

Deandra C. : The jump from post-secondary is not really a jump, but it's a giant leap. The expectation is really not expressed until students really walk through that front door and the expectation and the demands that are immediately enforced on students. So students often express concerns around how to communicate, right? A lot of times students have had support throughout teachers and parents and so now there's this expectation that they now have to take the initiative and navigate the classroom settings, be able to navigate their time, all entirely independently.

Charity: I was one of those outcast students and so when I was going to transfer into college, I got very scared and thought that I would be outcasted in college and no one would really like me because of who I was.

Nickei: I was terrified at the thought of transitioning mostly because I was just really comfortable where I was in secondary school. I had my support system, which was great. I had all my friends, I had my teachers. I felt like I was doing really well in school, but then I was like, "Oh my God, I'm going to be by myself with nobody. What am I going to do? What if I need help?"

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Navneet Rai: So many of our students really feel overwhelmed with the information that they receive. They also have a sense of anxiety because it's uncertain. They've forged many relationships in high school with their support staff, such as their special education teachers. And so building new relationships can be very difficult.

Narrator: The Peel District School Board takes a proactive approach to helping students with LDs prepare for their move into post-secondary education.

Navneet Rai: So today we are hosting a transition fair for special education students and their teachers. We've invited representatives from different pathways, the college, university, apprenticeship, and workplace pathways, to share information for our students on how to access accommodations in those pathways.

Shelley Bell: I think the transition fair is extremely valuable. I do go through some of the information with the students, but I think it's extremely important that they see the contact with the college, with the universities, with the apprenticeship. And I think they also benefit a lot from seeing the students talk about their experiences because I'm just a teacher who probably went through it 20, 25 years ago, but it's really nice for them to see that other students have gone through it and been successful and they had worries and concerns but they still made it through and they're thriving and doing well.

Narrator: Students are encouraged to be proactive and self-advocate when preparing to move into post-secondary education.

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Navneet Rai: A big part of this transition fair is having the students attend on their own, without their parents, so that they can ask questions and learn that they will be adult learners in this new journey. And many, they'll have to navigate that on their own.

Nickei: Self advocacy is definitely something that I learned in high school and it is a really important skill in the college level because nobody is going to ask. Your teachers in high school may come up to you and be like, "Hey, you don't look like you're getting this. How can I help you?" The professors are not going to ask you if you need help unless you already establish a connection with them. So you have to make sure that you speak to them when you are falling behind. You speak to them about the accommodations you receive and how they can help you.

Narrator: Encouraging students to start early and ask questions, both in their secondary school and chosen post-secondary institution, can help with transitions.

Charity: So at Erindale we had a lot of supports in place for students with IEPs and making that transition because it was such a big transition between high school and college. I had no idea who to talk to at college. So I went to Ms. Perez and Ms. Bridgeman and all my other teachers and asked what they thought I should do and what I needed to get done. And so they helped out a lot.

Deandra C. : One of the number one ways students can really identify what supports are available across different institutions in

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post-secondary, whether college or university, is really connecting to the open houses. So for example, Sheridan offers several open houses throughout the year and it's an opportunity for students who are considering different colleges or post-secondary to go in and talk to different departments. And at all those locations there will be advisors who are in accessible learning departments and we are there who can kind of review questions. The students may ask how do they register? Is it available? What are the options with an IEP?

Charity: When I did go to the open house at Sheridan College, I felt the professors and everyone around me were very knowledgeable and understood that IEPs are very important and they did understand that these are accommodations to help us be the best versions of ourselves.

Shelley Bell: We do a very in depth transition plan with the kids. So I teach the grade 12 learning strategies course. So throughout the entire course we prepare them for that transition. So we take a look at what pathway is best for them, lines up with their strengths. We take a look at what those costs are going to be. We take a look at accessibility numbers, who they can contact once they've applied. We take a look at emails, who they can contact. So we set up the transition plan and it's like a portfolio at the end of the semester that they take with them.

Deandra C. : If students do decide, for example, that Sheridan is their preferred choice of college, then at that point, connecting with accessible learning. And so accessible learning and a lot of disability offices

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are housed in student affairs, which is often the space where students can access supports on all things student life related.

Shelley Bell: One of the resources online that I really encourage students to use is the transition resource guide. It is extremely comprehensive. It covers everything from applying to scholarships, OSAP, bursaries, different pathways and if they want to bridge programs, starting college and bridge to university. So the site is extremely comprehensive and it has a lot of really good samples of even professor letters and ways to contact the accessibility centers, depending on which campus or college or university that the students go to.

Shelley Bell: Each student has different worries or concerns about different issues. So some might be more concerned about the large class sizes, others might be more concerned about the pace of the lectures. So I think it's really important to have an individualized transition plan. Again, that's a very thorough process for each student to have the teachers involved in that process and also to have the students explain what that transition is going to look like to their parents.

Deandra C. : When they do connect to us we often encourage students to attend a transition IEP session. And at Sheridan college that is offered for all students who are coming into post-secondary for a September start to understand how they can transition. And that's often when they accept their offer and they can come in and learn about who we are, what supports they can access, what documentation is

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required, what an intake looks like, and talking about about their Sheridan experience with a student who may have an IEP.

Narrator: Giving students information on post-secondary resources can help them access support after the transition.

Navneet Rai: We hear that many of the students are surprised to learn that they can receive the same level of accommodation support that they have always been receiving in high school and that colleges and universities really care about students being successful. And that's the message that we really want students to walk away with from this transition fair.

Deandra C. : There's potentially more supports at the post-secondary level. The big difference though is that students have to initiate the request, which is very different from high school. Whereas oftentimes they're automatically given and sometimes there's not a conversation around rationale and why. For example, at Sheridan, there are an entire learning team. Our learning team is housed, again, with accessible learning to support students who have struggles around learning. That can include memory strategies for studying, that could include strategies around time management. They can include technology integration into their learning and note taking and they are individuals who can help students navigate those.

Charity: High school, they have more like a wide variety and this is what you get. Whereas in college they have like this giant list, it's like three pages long and they have so many accommodations and they're

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like, "Okay, what do you need?" And so with Sheridan, they're very one-on-one like that and that made me feel more reassured and safe.

Narrator: Preparing for the transition to post-secondary requires forward planning and persistence from students.

Deandra C. : So in summary, really the takeaway that I would tell any students to do is really to understand their strengths and weaknesses and best being done by reviewing their IEP. So being able to know that information and also being able to ask for help. If they cannot know how to navigate that, at least by asking for help, someone can help them support that process and teach those key skills so that they can successfully start that transition and navigate with success.

Shelley Bell: I do believe planning well in advance for their transition does allow them to be more successful. I do find sometimes the grade elevens, it's just an introduction and they want to explore everything and then by the time they hit grade 12 it does become a little more serious. And then by the end of, say May, June, then that's when we start to see a little bit more of the anxiety or the worries come out. So I think it's very appropriate to start in advance because the exciting part is there, the formality of going through the process is in place, and then when the worries and stress comes out, you're like, you already have the plan. So you should be good and you've done all the research, now you just need to, again, make sure that you reach out when you go to post secondaries.

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Charity: If I had to give anyone a piece of advice to transfer from high school to a post-secondary, I would tell them to manage their time wisely. Because once you're in college, everything's like bada bing, bada boom, it's like one after the other. Always, always, always. And so it's always on the roll.

Nickei: Don't give up because it gets really hard. You think you're doing... Sometimes you think you're doing really good and then it turns out you're not as successful as you thought you were. And then you need to make sure you're doing your office hours and you're talking to your professors and everything. And although it feels really hard, everybody feels like that. Everybody is struggling. And that was something that was really comforting to me when I was told that everybody is feeling just the same way I am and it's completely normal, but you just have to push through or else you won't get there.