

# In Their Own Words: College Students with Autism

2018 National Autism Conference



Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network

Think back to your first year  
of college ....

What do you  
remember?

What was easy?

What was a  
challenge?

What did you wish  
you had known?



"We make the erroneous assumption that high schools are getting students ready for college, and they're not really. ... That's not their primary task. High schools do a wonderful job of getting students ready to graduate from high school."

Dr. Gerard Hoefling, Drexel University

<https://www.vox.com/2015/5/14/8594375/high-school-sets-up-autistic-kids-to-fail-in-college-heres-how-to-fix>

# Dear Jane

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- Read your “Dear Jane” letters
- Do you recognize any of your students in these letters?
- What obstacles might a student like the one in your letter experience in college?
- What themes do you see in your letters?

# Dear Jane ...

I'm the smartest kid in my classes BY FAR. But my teachers are telling me I should contact Disability Services at the college I've been accepted to. I don't even have a disability, so I have no idea why they would say that! (Well, I do have autism, but that's a good thing, right?)

**--The smartest in the class**

I hate high school. I'm younger than everyone else because I skipped 2nd grade because my mom says I'm really smart. The other kids don't seem to like me, and my honors classes are hard. My mom wants to get me into more honors classes next year, but I don't want to ... what should I do?

**--Lost in High School**

# Dear Jane ...

My son is so smart. He takes honors and AP classes, and just has a brilliant mind--he learns after just hearing information once! He misses a lot of assignments, and the school just doesn't seem to be accommodating him. He doesn't always get the best grades on tests unless I remind him to study. I worry about this affecting his grades and his next steps.

**--Smart but struggling**

My daughter is quirky--she's quiet, wears the same clothes all the time, and just wants to watch TV. I tried to get her a summer job, but she failed the group interview. They say she has autism, but I don't know--she's just like everyone else in my husband's family. I am very worried for her future. What can I do?

**--Mom of a quirky kid**

# Dear Jane ...

I never want to hear the word autism again. I'm just like every other kid in high school, except I have this special ed teacher wanting to talk to me all the time. And because I have an IEP, all my teachers in regular classes think I'm stupid. Why can't they all just leave me alone!

**--Tired of the "a" word**

I have executive dysfunction. School is a waste of time. I'm smarter than most kids in my classes, but I can't make myself do work. I sit and stare at my work for hours and get nothing done. Nothing will help me. I can't wait for this torture to be over.

**--Can't wait till I'm 18**

Helping students, teachers, and parents see the difference ...

**High School**



**AND PLAN FOR IT!**



**College**



**Career**



# How did AACHIEVE get started?

## The idea has been around ....

### **PREPARING STUDENTS WITH AUTISM FOR COLLEGE, AND PREPARING COLLEGES FOR STUDENTS WITH AUTISM**

*Felicia Hurewitz*  
Drexel University

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Students with autism who also have the potential for successful employment, community integration and independent living are arriving at Pennsylvania's colleges and universities in great numbers. Accommodations for these students necessarily differ from those historically provided by college disability services offices. Additionally, these students have been ill-prepared by their public high schools to transition to college. These new students with disabilities are being expected to fit into structures developed by high schools and colleges for an earlier wave of learning disabled college-bound students. We argue that the models for transition planning and accommodation must be reconsidered to meet the needs of this population. A few college programs to support students specifically with autism are available at an additional cost to parents and students.

The following actions are necessary:

1. A directive to the Pennsylvania Department of Education and school districts to strengthen transition planning for such students, including training to provide these services, and
2. Funding of pilot programs at colleges and universities to provide the supports already established as best practice.

# Our History

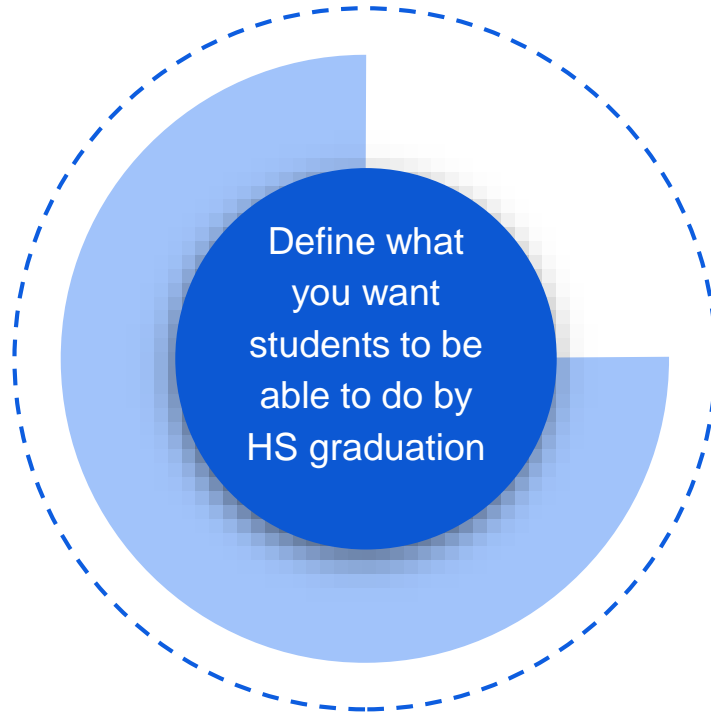
<p>Year 0: Jane Thierfeld Brown begins work with PASSHE schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Identify and train staff</li><li>● Develop program components</li><li>● Secure space</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Edinboro University</li><li>● Indiana University of Pennsylvania</li><li>● Kutztown University</li><li>● West Chester University</li></ul>
<p>Year 1: JTB and PaTTAN begin working with high schools</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Sought out high schools that were highest “feeders to identified PASSHE sites</li><li>● Monthly meetings with school staff, students, and families</li><li>● Continued work with colleges</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Blairsville-Saltsburg School District</li><li>● Norwin School District</li><li>● Tamaqua School District</li><li>● West Chester Area School District</li></ul>
<p>Year 2: JTB and PaTTAN expand work with high schools and colleges</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Added new high schools</li><li>● Added new PASSHE school and two community colleges</li><li>● Started parent networking group</li><li>● Continued monthly meetings</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Girard School District</li><li>● Upper St. Clair School District</li><li>● Riverside School District</li><li>● East Penn School District</li><li>● Saucon Valley School District</li><li>● Great Valley School District</li><li>● Unionville-Chadds Ford School District</li><li>● Slippery Rock University</li><li>● Lehigh Carbon Community College</li><li>● Bucks County Community College</li></ul>

# Who needs to be involved?

Students	Teachers	Administrators	Families	Community
<p>Student centered</p> <p>Focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-awareness</li> <li>• Self-advocacy</li> <li>• Problem solving and goal setting</li> </ul>	<p>Special Education teachers</p> <p>General Education teachers</p> <p>Speech Language Therapists</p> <p>Counselors</p> <p>Transition Coordinators</p>	<p>Special Education Administrators</p> <p>Building Administrators</p>	<p>Education about the differences between high school and college</p> <p>Support through the transition</p>	<p><b>OVR</b></p> <p><b>College Disability Services Office</b></p> <p><b>Employment</b></p> <p><b>Peers in HS and/or college</b></p>

# What are the outcomes?

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# What do parents need?

## TIME

- Time to meet and talk
- Access to resources to support the growth of both the school staff, the student and the parent

## KNOWLEDGE

- Skills needed for success in college
- Age of Majority/Transfer of Rights
- Entitlement vs. Eligibility
- Typical college accommodations
- IDEA vs ADA/Section 504
- Resources (e.g., OVR)

# What do students need?

## UNDERSTANDING

- Strengths and needs
- Participating in IEP and planning
- Accommodations
- Expectations

## PARTICIPATION

- Action planning
- Goal monitoring
- Problem solving

## RESOURCES

- College visits
- Supports
- OVR
- Parents and educators working together

# What do schools need?

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- Program and system considerations
- Students graduating to outcomes
- Resources for skills beyond the typical curriculum
- Focus on action planning (by the student—not the teacher)
- Support to foster self-determination and self-advocacy
- Assessments

# A Parent email....

- My son is a freshman at State U. He is studying to be a genetic engineer. He has often complained that the teachers are expecting him to do the same course work load that everyone else is. The only other resources that are being offered to him is note takers (he can't always count on that) and taking his tests away from the class with extended time. **He has Aspergers and they are wanting him to write all the same amount of essays as everyone else. Plus keep up on the rest of the course load.** How can I get him more help? The disabilities services there are in agreement with the teachers. Thank you for any help or advice you can give me.



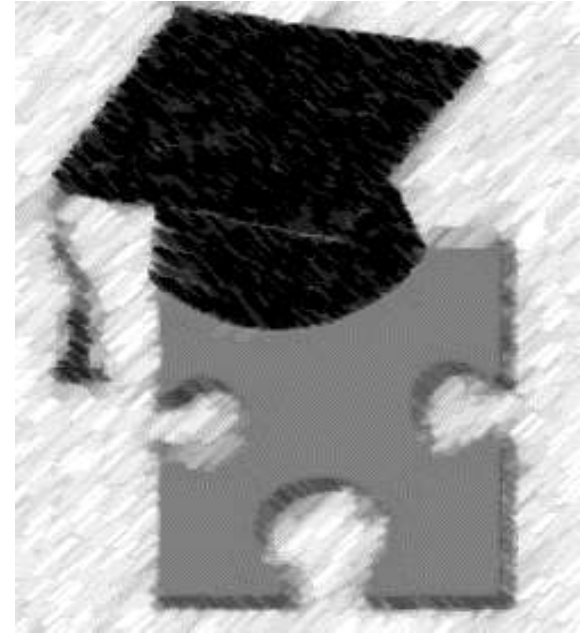
	IDEA	ADA
Type of Law	Education, Entitlement	Civil rights statute, Eligibility
Responsibility	Parent and school	Student
Ensures	Success	Equal Access
Services	Evaluation, remediation, special accommodations	Reasonable accommodations
Focus	Diagnostic label	Level of functional impairment
Disability	One of 13 categories	<b>Impairment in major life activity</b>

# Questions and Comments

Thank you for coming

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**Commonwealth of Pennsylvania**

Tom Wolf, Governor

# And Now... Our Panel of Students

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