

An Open Letter to Parents of Students With Disabilities About to Enter College

Dear Parents,

I have been working in the area of students with disabilities at the college level for more than 30 years, but that is not why I am writing to you today. I am writing as a parent, and thus as someone who shares all your current anxieties. My daughter, who graduated from high school in early June, will be going away to college this Fall. She has Cerebral Palsy, uses a wheelchair, and has limited speech capabilities, so you can be assured that I have been very involved in the educational programming and planning she has received during her years in the public school system. I *wanted* to be involved, but I also *needed* to be involved since, by law, the school could not do anything for, to, or with my daughter regarding her disability without my permission. I sat through countless IEP meetings over the years, I was insistent on certain issues of academic support when I needed to be, and I agonized over everything from teacher selection to her successful social integration with classmates. And now, as I prepare to pack her up and take her off to college in the Fall, I recognize that this rol

because it takes me a long time to put my thoughts in writing, but I never needed

may be surprised to hear those words come out of his/her mouth at the interview!

interrupt. If you disagree with something the disability service provider says, or if your SWD says something that you know is incorrect, or if you see your SWD agreeing with/to something when you know they have no idea what they are agreeing to

Let the interview play out. Give the disability service provider a chance to draw your SWD out further, give your SWD an opportunity to clarify matters, or simply wait to see if the

confusion/disagreement remains. It is important to know just how independent and accurate students are in describing their needs. You will get your chance.

DO prompt your son/daughter to speak up and share those important points as the interview progresses. Instead of explaining to the disability service provider

don't you explain to Ms. ____ why it is important for you to have a calculator for math and science classes. Is it because you have trouble lining up the columns,

open-ended question that encourages your SWD to flesh out the response. At the same time, you are hinting to the interviewer that there is an issue here to be discussed (See? I told you that you would get your chance!)

Why not take notes as the interview progresses? When your son/daughter has exhausted the list of topics to discuss, and the disability service provider has shared all the information they thought was important, it is YOUR turn to talk. Go ahead and ask your questions. The most

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