

COLLEGE AND CAREER PREPAREDNESS FOR STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

*Guidance for
schools,
families, and
community
service
agencies*



Arizona Department of Education/Assessment Division
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On behalf of the Arizona College and Career for students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities focus group and the College and Career Assessing Special Education Students (ASES) Summit Team, ADE/Assessment Division is pleased to present the following guidance document. This document was developed to assist schools, families and community agencies in creating higher expectations for students with significant cognitive disabilities achieve a fulfilled life beyond high school.

This guide was developed by the Arizona Department of Education, Assessment Division, in collaboration with representatives from ADE/Exceptional Student Services, public education agencies, Raising Special Kids, the Division of Developmental Disabilities, State Institutions of Higher Education, and parents of students with disabilities.

Background

With Arizona's adoption of College and Career Ready Standards, public education agencies must accept responsibility for preparing all students to be college and career ready. For students with significant cognitive disabilities, this expectation should not be nor look any different. A paradigm shift from previous thinking as to what life might look like for student with significant cognitive disabilities beyond high school to what it can look like compels us to look closer at the skills needed and ways students with significant cognitive disabilities will be able to demonstrate the skills and abilities to meet this expectation.

Changing Expectations

Understanding how a student with significant cognitive disabilities is prepared for experiences beyond high school begins with everyone having high expectations for all individuals.

Self-determination is a necessity for individuals to have exposure to opportunities that would allow them to make choices, offer input as to what and how their lives will be upon leaving high school college and career prepared.

All of the following attributes must be taught and practiced as much as possible in a variety of least-restrictive environments both in and beyond the school setting with the new mindset of incorporating 21st Century skills as defined below, as they are ALL essential for college and career preparedness.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities can demonstrate their preparedness for college and career upon leaving high school by:

Exhibiting **communicative competence**, by utilizing a communication system that will allow the individual to be relevant in his or her community. This will be specific to each individual and may range from no technology to low/high technology augmentative communication device(s).

Demonstrating **fluency in reading, writing and math**, by displaying his or her knowledge and skills as appropriate to the student's abilities and should include any assistive technology supports the student is using (such as speech to text, text readers, or augmentative communication devices). This could be shown by reaching proficiency, demonstrating an understanding of processes and concepts and generalized into careers or daily lives.

Displaying **age-expected social skills**, in a variety of environments and social settings. Age-expected social skills could include greeting individuals, asking and answering questions, engaging in acceptable peer interactions at work, navigating online social networks or virtual environments.

Possessing **independent work behaviors**, through the generalization of skills such as work place social skills, time awareness, self-determination, and self-efficacy through career exploration in least restrictive settings.

Establishing **skills in accessing support systems**, by self-advocating with family and/or community members and/or community services and support agencies.

Adapted from (Kearns, et al., 2010¹)

This should not be a checklist to determine if an individual is ready for college and career; rather a way to promote how the student can best prepare to enter into his or her life beyond the classroom setting!

¹ Kearns, J., Kleinert, H., Harrison, B., Sheppard-Jones, K., Hall, M., Jones, M. (2010). *What does 'college and career ready' mean for students with significant cognitive disabilities?* Lexington: University of Kentucky.

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