

## Improving Transition Services for College-Bound Secondary Students with Learning Disabilities

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**Abstract:** While students with learning disabilities (LD) attend college in large numbers, they often have difficulty completing their college education. In this study, college disability service providers were questioned to determine what improvements are needed in the secondary transition process to help students with LD succeed in college. The sixteen providers from across Georgia responded to a questionnaire designed to gather information about college students with LD and to determine what improvements could be made in transition services. The respondents reported that students with LD often displayed learning weaknesses in reading comprehension, self-advocacy skills, critical reading skills, and study skills, and strengths in the areas of persistence, motivation, and compensatory skills. The respondents recommended that students with LD take more language arts classes, math classes, study skills classes, and science classes in high school. They further recommended that secondary special educators improve transition services by ensuring that documentation is updated, helping students develop self-advocacy skills, and ensuring that students understand the difference in expectations between high school and college.

Transition is a federally mandated part of the individualized education program (IEP) of a student with disabilities, and it is meant to help bridge the gap between the student's high school experience and their future (Sitlington, 2003). The transition plan of a student with LD includes statements relating to student preferences and needs, course of study in high school, related service needs, community experiences, employment objectives, and daily living skills (Levinson & Ohler, 1998). Yet, in the case of students with learning disabilities (LD) who are college-bound, transition plans often fail to meet their needs (Blalock & Patton, 1996). Despite all the detailed planning required, transition plans may leave out key elements needed to help students with LD succeed in college, such as improved study skills and advocating for themselves (Janiga & Costenbader, 2002). Students with LD find it difficult to achieve academic success in universities, colleges, and technical colleges across the United States (Levinson & Ohler), and many transition plans developed by special education teachers and committees fail to give students with LD the prerequisites they need for college.

Literature in the field suggests that transition for students with LD moving from high school to post-secondary school does not adequately prepare students for the challenges of self-advocacy, larger workloads, the greater demands of college professors, and the need for improved study skills. Without improvements in transition services, students with LD will continue to fail in college, or in many cases not make the attempt. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to identify strengths and weaknesses that students with LD present in college and to determine strategies for the successful transition of those students from high school to college.

## Literature Review

In colleges and universities in the United States between 6 and 9% of undergraduate students reported having a documented disability (NCES, 1996). In many cases, students with LD do not even attempt to go to college. Wagner et al. (1991) found that only 14% of students with LD surveyed had attended some type of postsecondary school two years after finishing high school. In contrast, 53% of non-students with LD had begun post-secondary school. Even after five years away from high school, only 31% of students with LD surveyed had attempted some type of post-secondary education (Wagner et al.). Subsequent studies found that once students with disabilities enter college, they often need significant academic help to remain in college and graduate (Mull & Sitlington, 2003).

According to Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz (1997), students with LD encounter many challenges as they attempt to transition from the high school environment into the world of college. The skills needed to be successful in college are so complex that it may take years to teach them. Smith, English, and Vasek (2002) identified ten difficulties students with disabilities face as they begin their freshmen year of college, and university disability service providers often struggle with how to best cope with these difficulties. These difficulties range from lacking time management skills to having unrealistic goals for their future. The transition process offers the opportunity to determine which strategies may best help students with LD be successful in college. If effective strategies and skills are not utilized, students with LD are likely to fail in college (Smith, et al.).

One particular challenge for students with LD moving from high school to college is the change in the level of communication between the student and the teacher; one-to-one communication decreases in post-secondary settings compared to high school settings (Dalke & Schmitt, 1987). Other factors also impact the chances for success for college students with LD. One of these is class size. The typical class size of a college course is often far greater than the class size in a high school classroom. In addition, the competition among students also increases on a college campus; college professors typically expect a higher level of expertise than do high school teachers. However, the greatest challenge is the change in the support network. In high school, students with LD functioned in an environment where they were guided through their studies by a resource teacher. In college, the academic workload rests squarely on their own shoulders, and students with LD are often not prepared for these changes (Dalke & Schmitt).

Therefore, one key skill that a student with LD must learn to help them prepare for these changes is how to advocate for themselves (Smith, et al., 2002). In high school, parents, special education teachers, and counselors often work together to ensure that accommodations on class assignments are provided for students with LD. Once students enter college, they find out quickly that the role of the advocate is solely theirs. It is now their responsibility to contact professors and request accommodations by presenting advocacy letters directly to their instructors. If the transition plan in high school specifically addresses self-advocacy, the student with LD will be more likely to receive the accommodations they need to ensure success in college (Smith, et al.).

However, advocating on their own can be a problem for students with LD going to college. Students with LD must learn communication skills and how to advocate for themselves.

Students with LD may feel intimidated when they try to ask a professor for help. During the transition process, they can practice those communication skills (Smith, et al., 2002).

## Methodology

The goal of this qualitative study was to gather information which would lead to improved transition services for college-bound high school students with LD in Georgia. An open-ended questionnaire was used to help obtain rich responses specific to the research questions. The questionnaire consisted of four questions, and was e-mailed to 48 disability and ADA post-secondary service providers across Georgia.

Sixteen responses were received. Nine of the responses were from personnel from four-year universities, three were from personnel at two-year colleges, and four were from personnel at technical schools. Fifteen of the 16 schools that responded were public institutions. The responses were coded and placed into categories by questionnaire item, and a frequency table was used to aid in the interpretation of the data.

### *Population/Sample*

In an effort to ensure an adequate representation of post-secondary institutions, the targeted schools were a combination of both public and private. Forty-two schools across Georgia were selected. Any specialty schools, such as Bible colleges or schools that served a small student population, were not considered.

The participants in this study were special service/disability service providers at universities, colleges, and technical colleges throughout Georgia. In some instances, disability providers shared a number of titles, including testing coordinator or counselor. Upon a review of websites of the schools listed, a large number of the schools had what is known as a “disability services coordinator.” The person holding this title was most often the target participant. For other schools, the participant in the survey was the counselor or testing coordinator, or ADA coordinator, who coordinated the implementation of modifications for students with LD.

### *Instrumentation and Data Collection*

The special service providers were asked to report information concerning their knowledge of strengths and weaknesses in students they serve, and to suggest any changes needed to improve the transition of learning students with LD to post-secondary school. A questionnaire was utilized to collect the data, and consisted of four specific open-ended questions:

- What are the learning weaknesses you have observed in the students with learning disabilities you have worked with at your college/university?
- What are the learning strengths you have observed in the students with learning disabilities you have worked with at your college/university?
- Are there courses you believe students with learning disabilities should take in high school to help improve the transition of these students to college?
- What can high school special educators do to improve the transition of students with learning disabilities from high school to post-secondary school? Please provide as many specific suggestions as possible.

No limitations were placed on the length of the response. The questions were left open-ended to provide the respondent as much flexibility as possible when answering.

The questionnaire was developed by the researcher to target specific information that would allow for increased success for high school students who are college-bound. Prior to data collection, the questionnaire was reviewed by high school transition coordinators in several southeast Georgia counties. The original survey contained only one question: "What can be done to improve transition services for students with LD to improve success rates in college?" However, after feedback from the transition coordinators, additional questions relating to strengths, weaknesses, and subject content were added. The additional questions increased the content validity; the questions specifically match the purpose of the study.

The questionnaire on transition services was e-mailed to 48 post-secondary special service providers across Georgia. Follow-up e-mails were sent to each special service provider one week after the survey was sent in an effort to increase response rate. At the end of four weeks, 16 service providers had responded, a response rate of 38%.

### *Data Analysis*

Copies of the responses to the questionnaire were made and each response was coded into categories according to question. For example, two responses relating to courses students with LD should take in high school included phrases such as "study skills and time management" and "organization and study skills" were placed into a category entitled "compensatory skills." Using a method of constant comparison (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the categories were revised, and themes and "recurring regularities" (Guba, 1978, p. 53) emerged.

### *Results*

This qualitative study was guided by the four survey questions. The responses resulted in emergent themes for each of the questions posed to the post-secondary disability service providers. While several of the questions yielded similar responses, other responses were significant due to their uniqueness.

#### *Learning Weaknesses of Students with LD*

Several respondents identified poor reading comprehension skills as a significant academic weakness for students with LD. One respondent noted that students with LD who struggle with reading comprehension often require learning support or remedial classes, extra courses that the student often must pay for, yet not receive credit towards graduation. Another respondent indicated that students with LD with reading comprehension weaknesses "have difficulty with learning in all courses." Special education in high schools, according to one respondent, sometimes "spoon-feed the students" and do not "force students to learn the basics," such as reading comprehension. With difficulties in reading comprehension, students with LD find it difficult to "access the curriculum," meaning the "student falls behind rapidly." One respondent noted that the weaknesses in reading are not foreign to non-disabled students in college either, because "like many college students, they don't like to read their textbooks." Along with reading comprehension, a few of the respondents indicated that students with LD had poor basic decoding and critical reading skills, and often exhibited difficulties with vocabulary.

A second weakness in college students with LD reported by special service providers was the lack of self-advocacy skills. As one respondent pointed out, this is because “high school personnel tend to do things for the student and not in conjunction with the student.” One respondent wrote that students with LD “don’t seem to know how to ask for what they need.” Another respondent indicated that “most students from public schools are very poor self-advocates.” Though concern was expressed about a lack of self-advocacy skills, one respondent wrote that students not being prepared to advocate for themselves “is becoming less of a difficulty as our admission requirements increase.” When self-advocacy was mentioned as a weakness, an additional comment that often followed was that students with LD must be more “proactive in their educations.” As students with LD enter college, because they are not used to advocating for themselves, they often want the disability service providers at the college level to “tell them what accommodations” they can actually have in their classes.

A number of respondents stated that lack of effective study skills are often a weakness they find in the students with LD. One respondent wrote that students with LD “typically have very poor study strategies...they cannot link appropriate strategies to their stronger learning channels,” and that “they are often unaware of the myriad of helpful strategies available.” A few respondents wrote that students with weaknesses in study skills often show an inability to use available resources and assistive technology. Students with LD “have never heard of voice dictation or text reading software.” One respondent commented that because these students lack expertise with assistive technology devices, they are “even more inefficient in completing academically related tasks.”

The respondents listed other weaknesses, but to a lesser degree. These included poor writing skills, poor math skills, lack of motivation, poor attention span and focus, poor organizational skills, inadequate test taking skills, lack of time management skills, poor note taking skills, and relying too heavily on having course content modified for them. In the area of time management, one respondent noted that “most students with LD must spend longer hours studying than their non-disabled peers.” In many cases, this respondent found that “this is often not part of their equation” and that time management skills “need to be taught and practiced from early elementary school.”

### *Learning Strengths of Students with LD*

Several respondents indicated that students with LD often display academic strengths related to their motivation to learn and their ability to use compensatory skills. Responses to academic strengths can be placed into two categories; the first category relates to affective behaviors the students with LD display, such as persistence/motivation to succeed and an awareness of their own learning strengths and weaknesses, and the second relates to skills needed for academic learning, such as strong compensatory skills, self-advocacy skills, and an awareness of study strategies, such as the use of planners to keep track of assignments.

In category one, several respondents indicated that an observed learning strength of students with LD is persistence and motivation. One respondent noted that students with LD are often “willing to keep trying and take classes over if needed.” Students with LD may have learning weaknesses, yet they are “determined to do well and will put in the extra time it takes” to be successful in college. One respondent indicated that the motivation to be successful may be more extrinsic, for he/she noted that “they appear motivated, many by the requirements of the HOPE scholarship.” However, other respondents indicated that the motivation may be more

intrinsic, for students with LD “seem to really want to learn” and have “the drive to not give up even though they have a disability. Students with LD are persistent, according to several of the respondents, and are “extremely tenacious.” They do not let their disability impede them from passing their college courses, and if necessary will repeat classes until they pass.

Another affective behavior in category one noted by respondents was the awareness that students with LD have of their own learning strengths and weaknesses. In order for these students to have academic success in college, they must acknowledge they have a learning disability and must be aware of which learning style works best for them. As one respondent noted, “the students who have been most successful are those who fully acknowledge their LD and its impact on their learning.” Out of the responses related to this self-awareness emerged one key point, that students with LD must meet the same entrance requirements as their non-disabled peers. One respondent noted that “students that meet the entrance requirements have often worked a great deal on determining what their learning styles are and how best to make use of the information when studying.” Students with LD who are aware of their disability “don’t mind asking for help or for the accommodations entitled to them.”

The second category of learning strengths displayed by students with LD relates to skills needed for academic learning, often referred to in the literature as “compensatory skills.” The respondents listed several compensatory skills, including self-advocacy, a strong work ethic, and learning strategies such as time management and use of planners. One respondent noted that some students with LD “demonstrate a willingness to request assistance and to come forward again if additional help is needed.” Another respondent noted that students with LD sometimes display “an amazing array of coping skills.” These strong compensatory skills may be enhanced by parental support, as “only some students who receive support at home and have parents who are education-minded have communication skills and appropriately can advocate for themselves; others may never benefit from this kind of example and training.” Self-advocacy skills and a willingness to ask the disability service providers and professors for help were noted by several respondents. One respondent indicated that students with LD have the greatest success when they “advocate for themselves with their instructors and do not deny the disability.”

Other learning strengths demonstrated by students with LD included a strong work ethic and a variety of learning strategies. One respondent stated that students with LD sometimes come to college with “a great work ethic, these students are open to coaching and eventually succeed.” Others utilize a variety of independent learning strategies such as time management strategies and calendars. Such students work closely with their college disability service office and stay organized with their classes. Time management involves students organizing the time necessary to study, keeping their schedule arranged with their disability service provider, and organizing time to complete class assignments. Several of the respondents suggested that the use of learning strategies was related to the student’s ability to utilize technology. Using specific learning strategies is a strength, but they work most effectively, said one respondent, when they “readily access the technological accommodations which may be available to them at the college level.” Good organization skills and the ability to use computers make it “easier for them to use assistive technology.” One other respondent noted that “more students are coming into college with experience using assistive technology.”

### *Secondary Coursework for Students with LD*

Though most of the respondents emphasized the need for “rigorous coursework” for students with LD, others suggested that classes teaching “compensatory skills” were vital for these students to have academic success in college. All of the questionnaire responses were placed into one of three categories. Category one related to classes teaching compensatory skills, such as study skills and test-taking strategies. Category two consisted of responses related to the need for rigorous coursework in high school. Category three consisted of responses calling for increased access to vital core content classes, such as additional English and math courses.

In category one, several respondents mentioned study skills classes as a need for students with LD. One respondent recommended “a course on learning styles, learning strategies, test taking strategies, and time management.” While some respondents noted compensatory skills as a strength for some of the students they work with, a large number noted that a majority of students with LD do not display these skills. Respondents called for a variety of coursework related to compensatory skills, including life skills and how to self-advocate. One respondent gave the following response that summarized the need for teaching these skills: “Although resources are tight, workshops or seminars for students showing them how to be self advocates would be great. In college, the student must approach us for help. We can’t approach them. They need to know that when they come to college, their instructors may not provide individual attention like the teachers they had in school might have provided.”

While some respondents had listed knowledge of assistive technology as a strength, several others noted that basic computer skills need to be a part of the curriculum for students with LD. For example, some students with LD need to know how to access “software like Kurzweil or JAWS or Dragon Dictate” and must have basic computer knowledge in order to use them effectively. Such basic technology skills support organization, as students may use a laptop in class to organize calendars, take notes, and “plan accordingly for tests.”

One respondent focused heavily on life skills. This respondent noted that students with LD who go to college may feel overwhelmed by the pressures of living on their own, including handling personal finances for the first time. This respondent also said that students with LD often do not have the support network in college that they had in high school. Students with LD “leave home for the first time, without a support system like they were used to in high school. They need to budget time, money, and other resources adequately, and to become their own advocate.” The respondent noted that all of these challenges are usually new for the student.

In category two, though the responses were not as numerous, several respondents wrote lengthy answers calling for rigorous coursework in high school. All of the respondents calling for tougher courses were from larger universities, rather than smaller colleges. One respondent noted that “courses that emphasize reasoning and writing skills would best prepare students with LD for the rigorous course of study” in college. Additionally, one respondent noted that students with LD should not assume they will get a foreign language exemption. They stated that “it is not a given that all universities will offer course substitutions.” While it is common for universities to offer course substitutions, this respondent pointed out that the student with LD should not assume this will happen, as the Board of Regents “inspects the student’s psychological report very carefully to see that there is evidence of serious processing problems in learning language.”

In category three, several respondents stated that any extra courses students with LD can take in the core content areas would be beneficial. In many cases, the respondents noted that the extra core classes should focus on fundamental skills such as “a class in basic math or applied

math to improve basic skills.” One respondent called for students with LD to take “a review course in simple calculation: times tables, subtraction/addition tables, a review course in algebra.” Another respondent focused on a variety of issues, stating “reading comprehension, vocabulary development, calculator skills and sketching out of math word problems” would be helpful, along with “measurement and conversion skills.” Among the content classes listed, the general consensus appeared to be the need for more remediation in math, with one respondent noting that “students with learning disabilities have a hard time” in math classes. Other respondents mentioned reading and writing skills as a significant weakness, noting that students with LD could use “a course in writing essays, particularly under timed conditions.” Any classes that improve “reading and writing skills” are important.

### *What Can Secondary Special Educators Can Do to Improve Transition?*

Of the four questions asked on the questionnaire, the question about improving transition resulted in the largest variance of responses. Responses ranged from a few lines to over two pages, and it was clear post-secondary disability service providers have many ideas about what needs to be done. The responses were placed into three categories, all of which were based on interactions between the various participants involved in the transition process. The first category of responses related to the interaction between special education teachers at the high school level and disability service providers at colleges. Results indicated that college disability service providers are often not given the information they need to best serve students with LD. Psychological reports are not updated and the IEP information is not specific. Category two related to problems concerning the interaction between secondary special education teachers and students with LD. These students may not receive the instruction they need in self-advocacy skills and are unaware of the significant differences between academics in high school and college. Category three related to the need for improvements in interactions between the parents of students with LD and the college disability service providers. Parents may be encouraged to become more involved in the process and research the requirements of the college their child plans to attend. Across the diverse answers to this question, respondents listed specific problems that existed at their individual schools and gave concrete suggestions for what may be done to address these problems. While the responses did yield problems that were specific to individual schools, most gave a variety of similar ideas for improvements to transition in general.

In category one, respondents suggested that communication between high school special education teachers and college disability service providers must improve. To help secondary special educators improve the transition services for students with LD, respondents provided several suggestions, including:

- Having special education teachers ensure that the psychological and IEP documentation provided to colleges is updated and complete. One respondent noted that “they need updated testing that meets the university system guidelines. This generally does not happen, and it rarely meets our criteria.” Another stated that “students also need an updated psychological if they are going to request accommodations on national tests.”
- Invite college disability service providers to high school IEP meetings. One respondent noted “as an advocate for students, I’d be happy to address these issues at conferences and parent/student meetings.”

- Reduce the complexity of the language used on IEPs and be clear what accommodations the student will require. “The IEPs are great as long as we have a recent psychological with IQ scores and current levels of performance.”

Though the responses in category one were not as numerous as other categories, the respondents were clear that the channels of communication must be more open between high school and college participants in transition.

Category two related to the improvements that may be made through interaction between the special educator and the student during the transition process. Based on the responses, special education teachers must improve the specific instruction in transition-related skills, particularly skills that in the past have not been part of the traditional high school curriculum. The respondents called for the following changes to be initiated by high school special educators:

- Explain to students how self-advocacy works at the college level and model specific self-advocacy skills, such as asking teachers for assistance and requesting accommodations. Several respondents suggested that special educators “help the student become a strong self-advocate,” and “encourage the student to begin to be independent.”
- Review with students the admission, academic, and confidentiality standards required by post-secondary institutions. Respondents recommended to “tell them that college is very different from high school,” and that “information about a student’s disability is totally confidential in college, whereas in high school, everybody knows.” One respondent referred to the need for independence, and suggested that “students get accustomed to their high school counselors and teachers taking care of them. This does not happen in college.”
- Talk with students regularly about academic strengths and weaknesses. It is important to “be sure that students have read and understand their psychological evaluation and the appropriate accommodations.” One respondent noted “if they have not accepted their disability and cannot acknowledge that they need help and verbalize what their strengths and weaknesses are or accept the need for medication, high school special education teachers should refer them for counseling so they can work on acceptance and insight issues.”
- Teach study and adaptive skills to students with LD. Respondents suggested that secondary special educators “teach students how to schedule time for studying, to take the initiative to get help in tutoring lab, how to take notes from a lecture, and how to study for a test.” Further, the students should “practice independent living skills during their senior year so he or she is doing things like medication management, money management, laundry, and so on.”
- Respondents listed other possible strategies for high school special education teachers. Though mentioned less frequently, they are worth noting. They included:
  - Educate students about laws related to their disability, such as IDEA.
  - Teach students to “drive” their IEP meetings and get more personally involved in the transition process.
  - Encourage students to meet all college prep requirements.
  - Explain to students the purpose of the core curriculum in college.
  - Have students apply for accommodations on the SAT, ACT, and Georgia High School Graduation Test. Respondents suggested that special educators “be sure that students get the proper accommodations on the high school graduation test,” and “make sure the students get accommodations for the ACT/SAT. I talk to

parents ALL the time whose children were not admitted to our college because of substandard SAT/ACT scores and I find out that the student is LD and took the tests without accommodations.”

- Encourage students with LD to access tutoring in college.
- Encourage students to go to college orientation.
- Help students get an exemption from the foreign language requirement.
- Refer the student to Vocational Rehabilitation for additional services.

In category three, the emphasis was on improving the interaction between the parents of students with LD and college disability service providers. From the responses provided, it was clear that parents of students with LD need more information to help their children prepare for college and to be more involved in the transition process. In some respects, the disability service providers hoped that high school special educators could instruct parents in the major differences between college and high school. In other cases, these providers wished to initiate more individual interaction with parents early on, perhaps as early as the student’s junior year in high school, to help make the transition process work more efficiently. The suggestions the respondents made included:

- Explain to parents and students that grades can decrease a whole letter grade in college (“A” students become “B” students in college), and that disability services are different. Parents and students need to be aware that “the level of work and independent learning goes up a lot” and “students are often unaware about the differences in responsibilities between high school and college.”
- Have parents and students talk with college disability services provider during the student’s senior year, or visit the college’s website for updated information.
- Explain the requirements of the HOPE scholarship.
- Have parents acknowledge the reality of their child’s disability and prepare them for the “big transition” to college.

Though several respondents pointed out that due to confidentiality regulations, sharing information with parents is very limited, but they did often state that involving parents early before college begins is an important component for success. Many stated that students often benefit from this interaction.

### *Limitations of the Study*

There were several limitations in this study. First, it is often difficult to apply a study’s findings from one geographic region to another. This is particularly true when studying transition for students with LD in college, since requirements for transition vary from state to state. The second limitation was the response rate from the special service providers. If the response rate was exceptionally low (less than 20% of the questionnaires e-mailed), then it would be difficult to make an accurate analysis about what transition problems are occurring in Georgia. Fortunately, sixteen of the forty-two questionnaire recipients responded (38%).

Identifying the post-secondary disability providers was also a concern. At most universities and colleges, the title of “disability services coordinator” exists. However, at some smaller colleges and technical schools, the job or providing services for students with LD is spread out among various titles. Titles such as “counseling and disability services” exist at many smaller schools. Attempting to be clear on what exactly a “disability services” provider was a challenge.

## Discussion and Recommendations for Future Research

Based on information provided by the respondents to the transition questionnaire, it is apparent that many changes are needed in the current transition process. Hicks-Coolick and Kurtz (1996) conducted interviews of nine college counselors from various colleges across Georgia to determine how school social workers could help with the transition of students with LD. In the process of their interviews, they found a high level of dissatisfaction with transition. Ten years later, not only do the same frustrations exist, but due to the increasing number of students with LD attending college, the challenges have become greater. Students with LD need to become better self-advocates and improve basic math, reading, and writing skills. They need to recognize the differences in academic expectations between high school and college. Special education teachers must model self-advocacy skills for their students and prepare them for college by teaching study skills, adaptive skills, and organizational skills. Parents must become more involved in the transition process, and at an earlier stage. Special educators must ensure that documentation of the learning disability is updated and that IEPs are clear about what accommodations the student may need; otherwise, delays in transition may cause the student with LD to fall behind, become frustrated, and fail.

Based on the responses to question three related to courses students with LD need in high school, it seems that curricular changes may be needed. According to Gerber and Price (2003), many special educators lack the skills or training needed to teach specific transition strategies, such as self-advocacy training. Respondents clearly stated that special educators have to do more to help students with LD learn how to act independently, advocate for themselves, study more efficiently, organize their study time, and work closely with disability service providers in college. These results suggest that a change in the Georgia curriculum for students with LD is needed to incorporate active study skills, adaptive skills for real life situations, and self-advocacy training, combined with inclusion into the college prep or general education curriculum as often as possible. Students should be given opportunities by all of their teachers to work independently. While concerns about the ability of students with LD to navigate the general curriculum are sometimes valid, often these students can attain academic success if given the chance with appropriate accommodations. Respondents often noted in the strengths of students with LD that those students who demonstrated strong self-advocacy skills had a much greater chance of making it through college.

Along with changes in the curriculum, special educators must improve the communication among all participants in the transition process. Documentation must be clear and updated to give disability service providers at the college level the chance to adequately and efficiently help the students with LD at their school. Students must be given effective instruction in basic skills, by both general and special educators, so that they have a chance to pass their core content classes. Students must know what their disability is and what their psychological testing report and IEP means. They must be the ones making the difficult decisions, such as which college to attend, what accommodations they need to be successful, and which major they will select. The student must have ownership of the transition process, or the process will almost certainly have problems or fail completely. However, empowering the student will do much to improve the process.

The process may be most significantly improved by involving the post-secondary disability service providers earlier in the process. It appears that they wish to be involved as early as a college-bound student's junior year in high school, and they want parents to be more

involved in the process. Special educators should meet with college disability service providers more often, and must make sure that information relating concerning the student is clear and concise. Special educators may invite these providers to their schools to conduct intake interviews with both the student and parents. If a student has received accommodations on the SAT and/or ACT, disability service providers must be made aware of this. Also, special educators should visit college campuses to become aware of the differences of how college programs work so that they can relay this information to their students.

Far too often, transition plans are merely pieces of paper that make up several pages of a student's IEP. In many cases, the plans do not provide adequate structure and tools to parents, special educators, and post-secondary disability service providers, and the students are the ones that often bear the consequences. Students with LD often take longer to finish college, and, unfortunately, in many cases do not finish the task (Mull & Sitlington, 2003). If changes to curriculum, communication, and collaboration are made, then effective transition services may increase the chances of success for students with LD. Clear goals and the skills that students with LD need as they approach college should be the focus of the transition plan. While many students with LD do possess many strengths, their potential may not be realized without sufficient support from effective transition planning.

### *Recommendations for Future Research*

Results of this study suggest several recommendations for future research. First, best practices related to strategies for teaching self-advocacy need to be identified and used by secondary special education teachers. Research in the effectiveness of self-advocacy strategies could lead to changes in the secondary curriculum for students with LD. Second, while disability service providers were questioned in this study, similar research needs to be conducted using a sample of college faculty. Their input related to observations made in the actual college classroom could prove even more valuable than the results provided in the current study.

Of course, as mentioned previously, the results of research conducted in one state are difficult to generalize to many other states. This research could be continued by questioning disability service providers from universities, colleges, and technical schools across the United States. Results could be studied to look for trends among various states or regions from across the nation. Are all states suffering from the same transition problems for students with LD, or are the problems more random, with each state or region having their own specific problems?

Students with LD have much to offer. Due to the increase in the population of students with LD in colleges and universities, the increased student population due to HOPE scholarship opportunities in Georgia, and the increased pressure on universities to improve retention rates, transition for students with LD is not only more in the spotlight than in the past, but is an important economic issue as well. Students with LD have demonstrated that they can compete with their non-disabled peers, but only when they have the necessary tools for academic success.

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