# IN! Module 4 Video Transcript

Welcome to the fourth module of IN!’s self-paced series about college options for students with intellectual disabilities in Colorado. I’m your host, Shelby, the Education and Outreach Program coordinator for IN!. IN! is a non-profit that raises awareness of the college options for students with ID in Colorado.

So, many special education teacher preparation programs often focus on vocational programming and daily living skills. The idea of college is new to most of us in the field. Because of that, a common question teachers and parents have, as well as students themselves, is how to prepare for college. In this section you’ll receive tips and strategies to empower students and families with the support and tools they need to consider college as an option.

For family members who might be tuning in, while some of the recommendations in this section will be more specific to educators, there are many strategies in this section that you can apply within your own home to help prepare your student for college. If you’d like to hear more directly from parents of college students, or college students themselves, about their tips for preparing for college, I’ve included links to recorded speaker panels in the additional resources for this module.

By the end of this section, you’ll be prepared to discuss college options with students and families while honoring choice, teach self-advocacy and other important skills for college, and

advocate for inclusive opportunities to prepare students for future inclusion.

As we go, it’s possible that not all of the strategies will be feasible or relevant for you. My hope is that you’ll find a few new ideas that will work for you. If you take away nothing else, the most important thing to remember is that starting early is critical. The UP Program at Western Carolina University has a tip sheet for parents that I really like. You can find it in the additional module resources. The first paragraph reads, “Parents are quickly learning about the availability of college programs for their children with ID, and they are seeking admission to them at an unprecedented rate. As they do, they often ask us, “What can we do to increase the chance our child will be admitted?” Unfortunately, when they ask the question, it is often too late for them to do the kinds of things that will ready their child for college. The kinds of attitudes and activities that are most important should begin early in life and continue until the individual is ready to enter college.”

So that’s not to say that if you haven’t already started that it’s too late for your student to be able to go to college. It’s more to highlight the importance of having a long time to be able to really do those things that can make a student more competitive when looking at college, in terms of the college preparation that they’ve had access to.

So that preparation, starting as early as elementary school, if not earlier, includes discussions with students about their post-secondary options, person-centered planning, development of self advocacy, spending time in inclusive settings, and visits to college campuses. In this section we’ll share ideas and resources so you can help prepare your students, regardless of age or ability, to decide for themselves if college is their next step.

Finally, for the last bit of housekeeping before we dive in, if you are looking to receive professional development hours for this module, after watching the video, complete the reflection questions via the Google form linked in the video description.

## Changing the Conversation

I’ll start by talking about changing the conversation about college. Did you know that “teachers’ expectations have a greater impact on a student becoming employed or going to college than a student’s skills or disabilities?” That’s according to Think College, a national organization that collects data on the impact of college for students with intellectual disabilities across the country. That means that you, as a teacher, your beliefs truly have an impact on your student and their future, beyond anything that we are going to talk about in terms of skills that students might need for college, just talking about college and believing in students has a tremendous impact on their future outcomes.

You might often hear college graduates without disabilities reflect on their childhoods and say things like “It was always expected that I’d go to college. We talked about it growing up.” Unfortunately, due to lack of information, as well as misinformation, many students with disabilities don’t have these same conversations with their families and teachers. In fact, many students with ID have never been asked if they would like to go to college.

As a teacher or parent, you can plant the seed early. The message of college as an option not only motivates students and their families, but can influence more inclusive placement decisions as well as the types of instruction students have access to. Because college attendance can seem out of reach, starting this conversation early gives time for students to think ahead and for parents to navigate the questions they have.

Here are some ways you can begin the conversation about college. As early as elementary school, make a habit of asking students and their families about their goals after high school each time you meet them, and each time you review their IEP with them. Be sure to bring up the idea of college directly. Many parents may not be aware this is an option and may not bring it up on their own. On the flip side, for parents who are listening, teachers still may not know that this is an option and so you may be the one who also needs to bring the information with you to the meeting, because if no one is talking about it, then nobody really knows that that goal exists for the student.

The next tip is to invite students with disabilities who have gone to college to come speak with your class, or share a video of them at an open house or IEP meeting.

The third tip is as students get older and begin taking field trips to colleges, usually starting around 8th grade, ensure your class attends a college that offers inclusive services as part of the tours. I often see students with ID, who have started to participate on field trips to colleges, but they’re taking those trips to colleges where they’re not offering services, meaning that they’re touring a college that isn’t actually a viable option for them. We have schools that offer these services in our state and so I think it’s really important that we start to kind of change the expectation about what schools students are visiting and why.

The last piece you can do is to sign up for IN!’s monthly newsletter and forward our student stories from IN! to your students and families. That’s just another way for them to get more perspective, to get more information, and again to kind of just change the mindset of what is possible in terms of college.

You might be thinking it’s not really that simple. If you’re like many teachers, you might be worried that presenting college as an option is setting your student up for an unrealistic goal. The thing I like to keep in mind is that college is presented to all students without disabilities as a possible pathway after high school. This starts as early as elementary school and happens regardless of a student's background, their desires, anything that might be influencing whether they might go on to college. We are presenting it as a general option for all students without disabilities. Consequently, the same should be true for our students with disabilities. Whether or not we are the one who tells students about college as an option, families will learn about the options. By presenting college as an option, you are allowing families to make more informed decisions and opening space for more honest conversation about the students goals and possibilities. Just like any other student, students with ID have the right to discern for themselves if college is the path for them. Educating students and families about their options and preparing them to participate in a variety of post high school options should be the goal. Whether that’s college, employment, or something else. Students' individual choice and hopes and dreams should remain paramount. For more on individual preferences, let’s move on to our next strategy, utilizing person centered planning.

## Person Centered Planning

Teachers can use Person Centered Planning, or PCP, to both plan a student's schedule now and help them identify goals for the future. There are a variety of definitions for PCP but here is one from Cornell University that I find helpful: “Person-centered planning is a forum through which people join in intentional efforts to support, expand and deepen the direct and visible contribution a person with a disability makes to community life.”

This is a strategy you might already be familiar with, but maybe you didn’t realize what an impact it can have on preparing students for higher education. Students who have been part of person centered planning will be better equipped in college to work with the support teams available to them, including peer mentors, friends, inclusive service staff, and professors. Person centered planning will help them feel more confident expressing their goals, describing what supports they need, and accepting help and feedback from others. To some extent, motivation and goals contribute to overall success of students in college more than any specific skillset related to academics or social life.

There are many types of PCPs, such as PATH and MAPS. In addition, Speak Up Colorado is a class designed to teach people with disabilities to lead their own Person Driven Plan. Depending on your location, there may even be local community organizations who can facilitate these PCPs for the students, meeting at the classroom with the student, teachers, family, and important friends and relatives to develop a meaningful PCP. After working through a PCP, the IEP team and others can adjust a student’s classes, community experiences, and IEP goals to support their long term plan.

Person Centered Planning can be done in preparation for or in combination with a students’ IEP meeting. In addition to the formal strategies of Person Centered Planning options listed above, here are some other ways to ensure the student is included in their IEP.

Begin IEP development early. In addition to required assessments and reports, leave plenty of time to gather information from the student, their family, and other trusted adults. Some students may find it easier to participate if they are given ample time and modes to respond in advance of the meeting, as opposed to being asked questions on the spot. This is another way that you can potentially before the meeting just share some info about college and allow families more time to think about it, so that during the IEP you can talk more about what their thoughts are, and what their feelings are, and if this is a goal that they’re really interested in, so on and so forth. Next, when creating goals, begin with the long term goal and work backward. Goals related to college might address problem solving, using technology, using a schedule, and building literacy skills. For more IEP goal ideas, see the supplemental resources for this module. There are a ton of different goals that you, that you could have. I encourage you to really think about which ones might have the biggest impact for the individual student that you are working with. What are those things that are going to allow them to be more independent, to complete work more independently, to navigate life more independently? And then make goals kind of around, around what you think will have the greatest impact. It’s, it’s most likely that you won’t be able to do everything you want to do, or that the family or student would like to do, but you can still have a really big impact on preparing students for college by helping to navigate what some of the largest obstacles might be for that student and addressing those. Later on we’ll talk about other community resources you can also use to maybe fill in some of the gaps of things you’re not able to address with limited time and resources. The last piece here is to remember to direct questions and discussion to the student. Many students with disabilities spend medical appointments, therapy sessions, and more, being talked about versus talked to. When a student turns 18, many laws change and they have to be the one doing a lot more talking and decision making. Just being physically present at the meeting doesn’t mean that they are included or centered. You starting to direct more questions to the student can also help prepare the parent for when that changes happen when their student is 18 and the parent isn’t as involved in a lot of those conversations.

## Inclusion

The next sections will talk about tips for preparing students for academic, social, and career inclusion. Students without disabilities have access to various classes, peer groups, social activities, and extracurricular activities. For students with disabilities, however, a self-contained environment is often the default placement. College students with disabilities, just like students without disabilities, will learn, work, and live in inclusive communities. It is paramount, therefore, that they learn how to succeed in these environments as early as possible.

The tips in this section and those that follow are broken out by elementary, middle, and high school. These are just a general guide; many of the strategies can be used at any grade level. You might find that some recommendations for elementary aged students are super relevant to your older students or vice versa. I also recognize not all of these will be feasible for everyone, and that’s completely okay. That’s why we chose to include more than you might need. I trust you to pick the ideas that fit the needs of your own students. To start things off, let’s hear one student talk about what inclusion is like in college.

### Student Video: Brendan

My name is Brendan and I go to UNC Greeley. My best part is everything. [laughs] Because I just like walking by the campus, I like, um, I’m also in the club sport right now. Uh, I play two. I have taekwondo and rugby. For brewing science, I’m working an internship at Crabtree Brewery. And, I think it’s my first choice to uh do for my major because I like to like study about beer, how you make beer, and how you how you make like any types of beer. I’m a IPA kind of guy. Me and my parents are still talking about me going to live in, uh, Tennessee, Nashville, Tennessee, to work as a, a brewer there, because they have a cool football team I wanted to see, so. And I do I really want to like be a b-b-b-brewer, like to like, head of the, of the brewer. Um, to work my own job there. I’m ready to graduate and kind of, I’ll probably miss my friends at college. Kind of hard, so, and also it’s going too fast for me and for everybody.

### Academic Inclusion

Let’s get into academic inclusion. Starting in elementary school, encourage inclusion in general education classes as much as possible. The type of classrooms students are in early in their academic careers often sets the foundation for future grades. General education settings provide much needed experience for students regarding appropriate classroom behavior, academic expectations, and more. I recognize this is not possible in all situations, in all school districts, in all areas of our state. And so, do take this with a grain of salt. If, if it’s not possible for a student to participate in a general education setting, it is still possible for them to go to college. It is also still possible for them to develop the skills that they will need. It may take a little more intentionally outside of the school setting, but certainly I have seen students who have been in self-contained classrooms attend college and succeed.

In middle school and high school, if possible, continue to advocate for students to take standard education classes within the general education setting. This helps to ensure students are taking classes that are challenging and are continuing to support their development in areas like reading and writing. Learning to navigate this type of setting will prepare students with skills for navigating a typical college class. Especially in high school, a lot of classes like science and history are really set up in ways that may be similar to classes that students are going to be taking in college. Maybe they won’t take those subjects if they’re not the subjects of interest to them, but just kind of to give you an example of the similarities between class structure in general education settings in high school and college.

The next piece is to develop academic interests. A key part of college is taking classes in your area of interest. Exploring academic interests before college can help students find the best fit for classes when they do get to college. This can be done by taking academic classes, listening to audiobooks, watching documentaries, and talking about what the student is learning. If there are opportunities in your school, encourage students to take academic classes related to their area of interest, such as business, coding, childhood education, and so forth. Regardless of their specific interests, college requires accessing books and thinking about different content areas. Students should develop the ability to communicate key ideas about what they are learning.

Explore assistive technology tools, devices, and software that help students access books and curriculum independently. Many students receiving inclusive service support in college choose to use online textbooks or audiobooks as they have many accessibility features. Experiment with your students to choose which options work best for them. Some examples are using tools that offer speech to text or text to speech, learning to use the accessible features on a smartphone, and practicing listening to digital books that highlight the words and read out loud to the student. All college students use tools to support their success; students with disabilities are no different and will be best prepared for an inclusive academic college setting if they have a toolkit of resources they are already familiar with using. Next we’ll talk about inclusion within the employment setting.

### Career Inclusion

Students with intellectual disabilities that enroll in higher education programs have a 135% increase in employability. And the jobs aren’t the traditionally acquired jobs for people with ID...students with intellectual disabilities who have attended college have shown a 28% decrease in food preparation industries and a 59% drop in cleaning and maintenance occupations, compared to their peers with ID who have not continued their education.

One of the most important aspects of attending college is working towards a clear career goal. Unfortunately, it’s very common for people to avoid asking students with intellectual disabilities about their future plans. While the colleges certainly work with students to help narrow down or expand career options, it’s helpful for students to arrive with a little more information about their specific hopes and dreams for work. Having a career goal also helps in the college search, as students are able to look for a school that actually offers what they want to study. Consequently, before getting into specific strategies, I’m going to talk a bit about different types of students with different career goals.

First is the student who has a vague goal. The most common one seen by inclusive service offices are students who want to go into something like counseling or business, but do not have many specifics around what within those fields interests them. With these students, college preparation might include working with students to discover what they like about the field they’ve selected in order to provide a little extra goal direction.

Next is the student with a really specific goal that might not be obtainable in Colorado. For example, a student who wants to go into marine biology in a state where we do not have an ocean. With this student, efforts might focus on broadening their career goal, again by highlighting what specifically interests them, but with the intent of finding more areas of interest that might be more obtainable in our state.

Another common case I have seen is the student who wants to go to college, but who does not have a career goal in alignment with going to college. For example, the student who wants to work at the grocery store. In these cases, I find it helpful to talk to the student about their reasons for going to college. Sometimes you’ll learn the student doesn’t actually want to continue taking classes and is only interested in the social aspects of college, suggesting the need for a frank conversation about whether college is the right pathway. In other cases, it’s just that the student isn’t aware of the wide range of career options and how college could help them pursue those. In those cases, learning more about career paths related to college can help expand their goal. Either way, it’s worth a little bit of digging to talk with the student to make sure college is the path that will help them progress towards their career goal.

Encouraging students to think about their goals will help them determine the best pathway forward, whether that requires college or another training program. The following tips go beyond conversation and are intended as ways to help students explore career interests and hone in on their specific passions, as well as take on internships, competitive jobs, and more. As a teacher, you’re probably already doing some of these things. Hopefully this will give you a new idea or two, or reinforce the importance of the work you are already doing with your students.

We’ll start with elementary aged students. Even young children can get exposure to possible careers. Encourage career exploration through reading and discussing. Read books about career choices such as “I want to be like Poppin’ Joe” by Jo Mach and discuss students’ interests and dreams with them. You could also take field trips to a variety of workplaces and ask questions about the different roles employees have. Ask students which jobs appeal to them or remind them of things they already do. You can begin by asking students and their families what kind of activities and hobbies they enjoy. These are often great places to begin learning about career options. For example, if a family enjoys live music together, see what concert halls or DJ’s may be available for students to visit and/or interview. Next is inviting guest speakers to come share about their job with students. Specifically seek out those with disabilities who have obtained competitive, fulfilling jobs and maybe even those who have graduate from college themselves. Another option is to watch videos about different vocations. Or, to volunteer as a classroom at different locations to get a variety of exposure to different work settings. A lot of these really focus on just presenting different careers as opportunities.

Next we’ll move into tips for middle and high school. Help students identify their interests and skills. This could be done via career interest surveys and discussions. Once a student has identified an interest, work with them to look at what colleges might be a good match based on what programs of study they offer. As we talked about in the beginning, it’s important to help students differentiate between types of jobs. For example, there are a ton of different types of jobs with business or human services. Consider if there are clubs that would allow students to explore an interest in something. For example, Model UN might allow a student to explore an interest in politics, while robotics club might allow for exploration with computers and technology interests. Set up community based volunteer or internship opportunities based on interest. While it is often more convenient and sometimes only possible to have group volunteer work, if you can split up students for their experiences so they are individualized to their interests, it will be more valuable for students. If you have para-professionals in your classroom and your district permits it, try splitting up the students and taking turns leaving the campus for volunteer and internship opportunities. While the requirement for community service hours is often waived for students served by IEPs, you can advocate for your students to still meet this requirement as it provides immense value to their career exploration and job skills. Collaborate with families to identify opportunities during the school or over summer breaks, including volunteer or part-time jobs based on student interest. These are also a great time for job shadows. This time when students are away from school often presents a lot more unstructured time where students may actually have more flexibility in their schedule to actually engage in some of these career exploration activities that they’re not able to do, you know, during the school day or when they have a lot of homework after school and things like that. So I always like to say, these, these times, the you know school breaks during the year or summer break is a really great opportunity to talk with families about setting up some of those additional activities to explore careers. Community agencies can also help with job exploration and experience, especially if you aren’t familiar with your area yet or just need some extra help. I encourage you to reach out to your local workforce center and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to talk about services they may offer to your students. We’ll talk more about DVR in module 5.

For all of these ideas, the important thing to keep in mind is the goal of supporting students to differentiate their areas of interest and hone in on specific goals to help discern if college is the right path, and if so, which college might best help them meet that goal. Empowering students with the knowledge that there are many career options for individuals with and without disabilities, and encouraging them to pursue their true passions, can really change the trajectory of their lives.

Before moving on, I’d like to give you a couple student examples. One student entered college interested in education. She spent a week volunteering with a summer camp and realized she did not enjoy working with children in that capacity. After conversations with many supporters in her life, she realized her passion was around literature. She shifted trajectory and is now pursuing a career in library science. Another student wanted to work in healthcare, but knew becoming a doctor was not possible due to the level of education required. Through several internships, they confirmed their interest in working in a hospital setting and were able to find a position as a dietary aide, which they felt fit their abilities and passions well.

### Social Inclusion

Next up we will talk about preparing for social inclusion. As Keith Jones, inclusion advocate has said, “You cannot box people up in a room, 20x20, eight hours a day, and then ship them off into the world and expect them to have social interaction skills”. Starting and maintaining healthy relationships with peers is critical to the emotional health and independence of all students after high school. Not only will friendships and healthy relationships with staff and instructors help students feel well emotionally, but it will also help them transition to independence. Friends are an excellent source of natural supports. They look out for you, want the best for you, and can be someone to answer questions you don’t feel comfortable asking anyone else.

Here are some ideas to help your students develop valuable social skills for college inclusion. Starting in elementary school, encourage students to plan and invite friends to events. This can include birthday parties or other events at home as well as classroom parties. Initiating plans with friends is an area that many college students with ID spend a lot of time working on. Having these skills in advance will allow them to develop more relationships and become more social more quickly when they get to college.

Spend time helping students identify who their friends are, what makes a good friend, and who they enjoy spending time with. A question I often receive from high school students thinking about college is about bullies in college. What’s important to remember about college is just how many people there are; you really get to choose who your friends are. Distinguishing a good friend from a bad friend, or even a non-friend, can help students take steps to pursue the most meaningful relationships, as there will be many more to choose from in college, compared to K-12 school.

In middle school and high school, start to introduce commonly used forms of communication such as emailing and texting. Allow plenty of time for practice using these modes of communication and for teaching students about norms regarding replying, number of texts/calls, appropriate hours to do so, etc. Although some schools may not allow cell phone usage, or social media sites on school computers, if it is an identified IEP goal, schools may adjust IT settings or waive rules for teachers supporting students in this area. On a college campus, people are dispersed across a large area and students can no longer just rely on connecting with someone just by seeing them in the halls, again really showing how important email and texting can be just to stay involved socially.

Help students identify activity listings on websites and choose their preferred activity, including learning how to sign up and register for chosen activities. This could be practiced by accessing the school website and choosing games, dances, etc. to attend and adding them to a schedule. Most colleges will have a portal for campus activities where students can go to find out what’s going on around campus.

Encourage students to join inclusive extracurricular activities and sports. Many high schools have intentionally inclusive programs such as Special Olympics Unified Sports. You can also work with club advisors and coaches to help support students with ID to join their clubs and teams. As I’ve mentioned in the past sections, inclusive higher education involves interacting with lots of different people in an inclusive setting. Practicing that in high school can prepare students with the strategies they need to be successful in college clubs and activities.

Recruit and train peer mentors to support students when appropriate. Training is essential with peer mentors to ensure the relationship is equitable as well as supportive. When done effectively, peer mentoring helps students learn things that aren’t as easy to teach via direct instruction.

The goal to keep in mind with social preparation for college is getting involved and making plans. Most college students find themselves having to take a more active role in their social lives once they get to college and that should be what we are preparing students with disabilities to do as well.

## Independence

There are many skills that support success in college that might not be as obvious, but may be just as important as preparation for academics, career, and social life. In this section, I’ll talk more about skills that foster independence. Many of the tips in this section were taken from the Office of Inclusive Services at UCCS. Their 10 tip sheet can be found in the supplemental resources.

Independence is going to look different for every student, but all students should take steps towards directing their life, making choices, and doing things without direct adult support. Some examples include:

Responding to email. Because so much relies on emails, checking and responding to emails at least daily is a key skill to have for college. Professors send emails about class, employers send emails, support staff send emails. This can be a shift from high school where a lot is communicated to students in person throughout the day.

Using a calendar and following a schedule. In college, students will be expected to make it to meetings, work shifts, and classes all over campus and in the local community. A calendar helps to keep track of everything they have going on and gives them more responsibility for their own schedule, as opposed to let’s say another adult who is reminding them of things that are coming up.

Get lunch and snacks. At universities, there are generally dining halls students can go to for lunch. In contrast to high school, there’s a lot of options for which one to go to, what to eat that day, what time to go, who to meet there, how many times your meal plan allows you to visit the dining hall each week, and so forth. Practicing independence in regards to getting food for oneself is a step that can help prepare for this shift.

Find classes. In college, students will be navigating a large campus with many buildings. There are peer mentors who can help students when they first arrive to learn about the campus layout. But, students having some familiarity with the responsibility for finding their classes in high school will enter college more prepared for that shift to independence.

To prepare for independence, students might also take on more responsibilities at home. When they arrive at college, they will have a lot to learn. Starting to practice some skills at home can make the transition easier. If you are a teacher, you might consider talking to your student and their family about implementing some of these at home as part of the college preparation process.

For starters, work on using an alarm to get. Early morning college classes do exist, as well as work schedules. The more independent a student can be in getting up for the day and getting going with their morning routine in order to be on time for things that they might have going on, is really helpful.

Similar to this is just being on time. You can work on this by teaching students to set reminders on their phone and allowing plenty of time to get to wherever they are going. As a college student, you are expected to take responsibility for your own tardiness. One of the things that I think is different for college students that sometimes is overlooked is having to plan time to get across campus to your class or having to plan time to get from class to work, wherever that might be in the local community, or planning out how long it’s going to take to take the bus or a shuttle, things like that. And so, really working with students to again really set those reminders especially electronic reminders that don’t depend on another person telling them when they need to leave or go somewhere.

Next is develop a system for students to keep track of their schedule. So like I already said, in college, students will have classes, meetings with peers, tutors, staff, club, social events, lots of different things to keep track of. Having a way to self manage that is really helpful. Similarly, self managing medication is an important skill that can set students up for, again, more independence, especially if they want to move away from home. For mediciatin, one way that families can start to practice more independence in that regard might be with vitamins and having students plan out their own kind of vitamin schedule and then transitioning to other more critical medications they might be having to take.

So another thing that kind of falls into independent living skills, especially for students who want to live in an apartment, is cooking food for yourself. Students don’t need to have a super big repertoire of kitchen skills, but just having a few staple meals they can make for themselves will help set them up for that transition to having and managing their own kitchen in an apartment setting.

There’s also doing your laundry. I know lots of students without disabilities who don’t do this one. But, it is another way for students to practice having more responsibility and independence around home and again preparing to take on more of those roles when they do transition away from home, if that’s their choice for college.

The next one is really for all students and it’s packing your backpack and lunch for the day. There is not someone who is going to help you do that at college. It is the student’s responsibility to remember things like their computer charger, or things to take notes or snacks or water or whatever they need for the day on campus. One of the benefits to practicing these things while still at home is that parents or teachers are able to work with the student to problem solve solutions to challenges they face. For example, if a student always forgets their charger, you might help them come up with a visual reminder system for what goes into their bag.

Another one is for students who do not drive, learning to use public transit. That can provide a really great step towards independence. This includes ensuring that the student is explicitly taught and has practice using public transportation with mapping, scheduling, recognizing landmarks and stops, using a bus pass, appropriate bus etiquette and general safety. Many city transit systems offer group or individualized transit training and assessments that teachers can partner with or refer families to to support their students to develop those transit skills. While this may not be feasible in some rural areas, it’s helpful to try to navigate whatever transportation options are available, or even just practicing getting from one place to another place whether that’s on foot or on a bike, uh, however your environment allows for you to practice more of that independent navigation of a local community. Whether students live on or off campus, access and familiarity with public transportation will help students connect with one another, to campus, and again just provide more independence.

The final area I’ll note is money management. This includes developing a budget, using a bank card, using an online banking app, having students pay for things on their own, and learning what to do if they’ve lost their bank card or have run out of cash As a teacher, your role here might be more focused on conversing with families to encourage these behaviors at home. And again, that’s a lot of different things, but it might be just taking one of them and working with students to prepare, to prepare in that regard. Um, so it might just be starting with how do you pay for a meal when you go out with friends. And then getting later into more budgeting and things. So, as I said earlier, a lot of these things there’s a lot of different components and it can feel overwhelming, like there’s too many things, but kind of again having that assessment of what is going to make the biggest impact to have the greatest independence for the student as they prepare for college.

I also recommend connecting families with additional community resources to assist with skills and routines at home and in the community. Community Centered Boards are one resource to access supports in the community. For more information on connecting with community resources, check out Module 5, where I’ll go a lot more in depth on what they offer, how to get connected, who is eligible, and some other kind of tips around community resources that can help students prepare for college.

## Self Advocacy

At the root of all we have discussed so far is self-advocacy. Some of us often think of self-advocates as people who work on disability rights, perhaps giving speeches or being involved in activism in some capacity. However, being a self-advocate can also mean having the skills to know your preferences, your strengths, and how you can learn and work best, and making these preferences and needs known to others.

When a student gets to college, they will be responsible for asking for the help they need. Some college freshmen may feel uncomfortable with this if it isn’t something they’ve practiced. Encouraging students to use resources, identify their accommodations and modifications, and asking for support when needed will help them prepare to take on the responsibility in college for getting their needs met. I’ve talked to several students who have told me that they really regretted in their freshman year not asking for more help when they needed it.

Encouraging self-advocacy begins as soon as students are able to communicate, however they do so, verbally, using an aid, pointing, nodding, picture exchange, whatever works for that individual to convey their preferences. Some additional strategies to build self advocacy include,

incorporating choice and decision making into as many elements of the school day as possible. College campuses are filled with an abundance of choices as students navigate throughout the day and students can sometimes get frozen on maybe having to make one choice and then not moving onto the next choices throughout their day. And so working with students to make those choices and kind of keep going throughout their day regardless of the choice that they made.

The other one is again including the student in the IEP process. This could be as simple as having a student introduce themself or say one thing they like or dislike. It might also include talking with the student about things that are hard versus easy for them to do as well as their strengths and weaknesses. Starting this early can set the stage so that the family expects the student to continue to participate in future IEP meetings over the years to come regardless of who they are working with at that point in time.

And lastly, supporting students in understanding their learning style and needs. This may include discussing the student’s disability directly. That’s something that sometimes students, families, teachers may shy away from, but can help students again become more comfortable in just understanding what some of their needs might be and what some of the strengths are that also come with whoever they are as a person. Students who begin college knowing what supports they need will have an easier time navigating the different support offices on a college campus.

Ultimately, many of the things you already do could be helping to prepare students for college. Give yourself credit where credit is due. It’s easy to get focused on academic preparation alone, but preparing for independence and inclusion are really important pieces of the transition to college. To wrap up this section, I’ll turn it over to a few college graduates to share their advice for preparing for college.

## Student Video: College Seniors Share Advice for Future Students

Jazmine: My advice for high school students is to pursue their dreams and know that they can accomplish anything that they want to.

Ashley: Do what you like, but don’t feel any pressure to make someone else happy.

Mia: Do a lot of activities, go like being involved. Like, that’s, that’s what I am. I did the ASL club, swim club, and dance club. That’s how I get to know people.

Nick: Self advocacy, learning to speak up and just to talk about it.

Kacie: Being willing to ask for accommodations if you need them.

Mia: I advocate, my, to ask my mom and dad to let me come here in the first place.

Kacie: Like, remember what you’re working towards, for when you, when it feels like things are going hard.

Aditya: Be diligent and be focused and try to, try to have a mindset you excited to come to college.

Ashley: Outside of class, after you study, live it up. Just live it up.