

*NJCLD Hosts Symposium on Transition to Higher Education
for Students With Learning Disabilities
May 30, 2008*

The [National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities](#) (NJCLD) hosted a half-day symposium, *Transition to Higher Education for Students with Learning Disabilities: Building Effective Partnerships and Resources*, on May 30, 2008. Attendees at the symposium included the NJCLD representatives of the 13 member organizations and invited guests from higher education, secondary education, government agencies, educational organizations, and parents and students. As described by Mary Beth Klotz, NJCLD Chair and a representative of the [National Association for School Psychologists](#) (NASP), the goal for the symposium was to provide a forum for discussion and sharing of ideas, strategies, and experiences on ways students with learning disabilities can successfully navigate and make the transition from secondary to postsecondary settings.

Lydia Block, representing the [Association on Higher Education and Disability](#) (AHEAD), presented an overview of the NJCLD report, “The Documentation Disconnect for Students with Learning Disabilities: Improving Access to Postsecondary Disability Services,” pointing out issues affecting documentation and summarizing recommendations. (The paper can be viewed on the NJCLD website at www.ldonline.org/njclld). Block urged everyone to become familiar with the conditions and constraints surrounding transition from secondary to postsecondary education and expressed hope that the symposium would be the beginning of ongoing communication among stakeholders.

Featured speakers were Laura Kaloi, Director of Public Policy, [National Center for Learning Disabilities](#); Elizabeth Evans Getzel, Director of Postsecondary Education Initiatives, Virginia Commonwealth University’s [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center](#); and Carol Kochhar-Bryant, Professor of Special Education, [George Washington University](#).

In Laura Kaloi’s Capitol Hill update, she pointed out that in the school year 2005–2006, the categories of students that did not include cognitive impairments totaled 85.3 percent of IDEA-eligible students, which confirms that the majority of special education students should and can learn at grade level. She reported that the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act is expected to go to the President for signature before the August 2008 recess, the Americans with Disabilities Restoration Act may pass the House in June, and the No Child Left

Behind Act's (NCLB) reauthorization is currently stalled. With the ability for the first time to compare students, the National Center for Learning Disabilities believes that NCLB has benefited students with disabilities.

Carol Kochhar-Bryant provided the secondary perspective and discussed how teachers, related service providers, parents, and students can work together on effective transition plans for students with learning disabilities who are approaching college entrance age. In reference to the IDEA 2004 requirement for a Summary of Functional Performance, she stated that 11% of students with learning disabilities in 2002 participated in a 4-year college and 23% participated in a 2-year college, although fewer than 23% of students with LD were still enrolled one year after high school. Because students with disabilities who graduate from college have similar employment rates and salaries compared to their counterparts without disabilities, the summary of performance should be a "passport," with self-determination identified as the most important functional area. The U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs is just beginning to gather information on this subject from professional associations in an effort to develop guidelines.

Elizabeth Getzel's presentation, "Access to Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities," focused on the work of the Virginia Higher Education Leadership Partners, a consortium of diverse stakeholders that has been working on the documentation issue since 1999. A summit was held and a vision for Virginia established, ensuring equal access to higher education for students with disabilities by reducing the barriers caused by documentation requirements. During the next several months, the consortium will be developing a document on summit proceedings and outcomes for distribution both state- and nation-wide. The members plan to meet with state legislators, review state policies, and collaborate with interested organizations to further the implementation of summit outcomes.

Joining the presenters for a panel discussion and participation from the audience were: Peggy Hayeslip, moderator and representative of the Association on Higher Education and Disability; Jade Gingerich, Director of Employment Policy, [Maryland Department of Disabilities](#); Donna Martinez, Director, [The Heath Resource Center](#), George Washington University; and Laura Breeden, a Parent Representative and former career consultant and coach at American University. The question-and-answer format offered the panelists the opportunity to address topics such as current challenges, successes and needs for improving

transitioning, models for collaboration, and professional development and resources for educators, parents, and postsecondary providers.

The discussion emphasized such key issues as student self-advocacy, the disconnect between required documentation in secondary and postsecondary education, the challenges faced by high schools in creating effective transition plans, the parent role, and employment challenges. When the question of room for compromise between secondary and postsecondary education was raised, the response acknowledged that access to higher education for students with disabilities is a major issue and much discussion will be required in order to remove the barriers.

This symposium represents the commitment of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities to promote ongoing communication and collaboration on the topic of transition from high school to postsecondary experiences. It was held at the new offices of the [American Speech-Language Hearing Association](#) (ASHA) in Rockville, Maryland, and hosted by Stan Dubinkske, Senior Advisor for Planning and a representative of ASHA on the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities.

Related References & Resources

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (2007). *The Documentation Disconnect for Students with Learning Disabilities: Improving Access to Postsecondary Disability Services*. Retrieved June 2, 2008, from www.ldonline.org/njclcd

NCLD Rewards and Roadblocks: How Students with Disabilities Are Faring Under No Child Left Behind, 2007. Retrieved June 2, 2008, from www.nclld.org/images/stories/downloads/advocacy/ncldrewardsandroadblocks.pdf

Izzo, M. V. & Kochhar-Bryant, C. A. (Eds.). (2006). Summary of Performance [Special series]. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 29(2).

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities is dedicated to promoting the education and welfare of individuals with learning disabilities. For additional information on the work of the NJCLD, contact Dr. Mary Beth Klotz, mbklotz@naspweb.org.