

**Executive Summary of
The Documentation Disconnect for Students With Learning Disabilities:
Improving Access to Postsecondary Disability Services**

*A Report from the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities**

The report outlines important concerns about documentation issues related to students with learning disabilities (LD) as they transition from high school to postsecondary settings. These issues center on the “disconnect” between the nature and extent of disability documentation generated during a student’s public school career and the documentation required to access services at the postsecondary education level. One of the main tenets of the report is that all persons involved in the successful and equitable transition of individuals with LD to postsecondary institutions need to understand each other’s constraints and perspectives. This understanding will be greatly enhanced when there is the shared goal of helping all students receive services to which they are entitled, and when educators from each level communicate and collaborate with each other. The purpose of the report is to outline the issues affecting documentation for postsecondary disability services and to suggest ways to bridge the gap between secondary and postsecondary settings.

Issues Affecting Documentation

The NJCLD with input from the field identified the following three issues affecting documentation:

ISSUE 1: There is a lack of consistency in the documentation requirements for students as they transition from secondary to postsecondary programs. Current assessment practices in secondary education do not always create documentation that is consistent with the requirements of postsecondary institutions. Additionally, at the postsecondary level, there is a lack of uniformity in determining whether an individual is eligible as a person with a disability and in identifying needed supplemental services and accommodations for access. There are no consistent or agreed upon principles related to interpretation of data and information to determine student eligibility, access to services, and appropriate accommodations.

ISSUE 2: There is a disconnect between the laws that govern secondary and postsecondary access to programs and services for individuals with LD. These laws are different in their purposes and structures; therefore, the requirements and mandates also differ.

ISSUE 3: Various driving forces complicate matters. Secondary and postsecondary institutions differ in their programs and expectations; testing agencies impose documentation requirements; and educational decisions are made by postsecondary personnel with varying qualifications.

* This is an official document of the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD). The following are the member organizations of the NJCLD: American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, Association of Educational Therapists, Association on Higher Education and Disability, Council for Learning Disabilities, Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness, Division for Learning Disabilities, International Dyslexia Association, International Reading Association, Learning Disabilities Association of America, National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Disabilities, National Association of School Psychologists, National Center for Learning Disabilities, and Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic.

Where Are the Disconnects?

Students must present comprehensive documentation to validate LD and their need for accommodations to colleges and universities in order to receive disability support services. High schools, however, are not required by law to provide the type and form of documentation that many postsecondary institutions specify; hence, a disconnect between the two settings often occurs. This report examines the underlying legal and practical reasons for the disconnect.

Ways to Bridge the Gaps

The report provides pragmatic information to bridge the gap between the documentation that secondary service professionals provide and the documentation that postsecondary service providers accept to support decisions about eligibility and accommodations. Best practice guidance from the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) as well as the Summary of Performance tool required for students transitioning from secondary to postsecondary settings. Also highlighted is information from a study commissioned by the NJCLD to analyze key documentation variables required by postsecondary institutions in order to identify any areas of compromise that could lead to strategies to bridge the gaps.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The NJCLD report outlines important concerns about documentation issues related to students when they transition from high school to postsecondary education institutions. Stakeholders must collaborate and compromise as they work to eliminate the legal, practical, and budgetary constraints of the documentation disconnect. The challenges presented by this disconnect have no simple answers given the legal, practical, and philosophical differences between these two educational entities. However, the NJCLD urges new ways of thinking, increased flexibility, and active collaboration from both secondary and postsecondary educators. Specific recommendations and strategies are provided in the report for secondary school personnel, families and students, postsecondary personnel, and policymakers. The disconnect issues are not insurmountable, but it is only through mutual understanding, joint advocacy, commitment, and collaboration that we will find ways to reconcile the very different legal structures, financial considerations, and processes under which secondary and postsecondary programs must operate.

The full report, including helpful references, web resources, links to sample Summary of Performance Guidelines and forms, and guidelines from AHEAD, can be accessed through the NJCLD website www.ldonline.org/njclld.