

EDUCATION

PUBLIC SCHOOLS OFFERING PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS WHO HAVE DISABILITIES

Public law 94-142 mandates provision of a public education to all students, including those who have disabilities within the local school system. However, if appropriate and needed, specialized education may also be provided in the home or hospital. In implementing this mandate, each state has established its own mechanism for determining and providing services to all who have physical, intellectual, or emotional disabilities. In general, this mechanism involves the formation of an administrative/ evaluative unit that meets as a team to diagnose the condition. The team will then recommend an individualized educational program and insure the implementation of its recommendations. The school's decision regarding special education may be appealed by a student's parent or guardians by requesting a hearing, either orally or in writing, before the state board of education or its equivalent. Information on specific public education laws may be obtained by contacting the State Educational Department. The Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities is also available to assist parents in understanding their rights (call Hartford 860-297-4300, 860-566-2102 TDD or toll-free 800-842-7303).

In addition, if a spinal cord injured person is able only to attend school for part of a day, secondary to their physical ability, he/she may have a right to have a teacher come to his/her home or hospital for the rest of the school day. It is also recommended that students contact their local education association to check on available amounts of tutoring time.

GENERAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT (GED) EXAMINATION

Persons who have not earned a high school diploma may do so by successfully completing GED examinations. The five tests, (English, Literature, Math, Science, and History), focus upon the general knowledge level expected of high school graduates. If necessary, the tests may be taken more than once. When minimum scores are earned, a GED high school equivalency diploma is awarded by the State Department of Education. Most colleges, universities, and employers recognize this diploma. The cost for these examinations is minimal. It is worth noting that GED tests are not as difficult as they may appear. For example, if a person passes three of the five tests, he/she must only retake the two he/she failed. Information on GED testing can be obtained by calling the Connecticut State Department of Education at 800-465-4014.

GED Preparation Courses

Many one-to-one tutoring and group instruction programs are available to help in individual preparation for the GED tests. To find such a program, contact the guidance department of your local high school, check the phone book for adult learning centers, contact a local community or junior college or call the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services for a referral to the program nearest you. Look in the blue pages under Education Department, Division of Rehabilitation Services.

Tutoring Services

Tutoring services are designed to be an adjunct to regular classroom teaching. Tutoring is provided for a wide range of subjects and may include learning problems and test anxiety. For further information on tutoring services, contact your local high school or the Connecticut Department of Education at 800-465-4014.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

A large number of colleges and junior colleges have students with disabilities in attendance. Although some of these schools are not fully accessible, they are mandated to ensure that all of their programs and all of their buildings are accessible. When choosing a school, accessibility is obviously a major factor. However, there are other important factors to consider when choosing the correct school. They include the quality of course offerings and the marketability of the training program. In addition, it is advisable to spend a day on the campus to experience first hand the school's campus and potential architectural barriers.

Nationwide, there is a growing awareness of the needs of students with disabilities on campuses. As a result, a number of schools have made commitments to improve overall accessibility. In addition, many schools have established offices to coordinate services to students with disabilities. The Connecticut Department of Higher Education can assist you in locating state universities, regional community colleges, and technical programs. For further information contact them at: (860)947-1800.

Colleges may have support services for students who have disabilities. There are many colleges in the country that have developed such services; a complete listing can be found in the publication, *The College Guide for Students with Disabilities*, by ABT Associates, Cambridge, Mass., or through the Board of Higher Education for the State of Connecticut.

PRIVATE TRAINING

A complete listing of private vocational schools may be found through the Yellow Pages or by contacting the State Department of Education. Before enrolling in a private training program, however, it is extremely wise to investigate the school's claims and curriculum. This may be done by talking to students already enrolled in the program and by ascertaining the school's placement record over the past 1-2 years (e.g. where are your graduates finding jobs?).

CONTINUING EDUCATION

Almost all school districts have adult education and/or continuing education programs through which a person can enroll in a wide variety of subjects ranging from college credit courses to personal interest “mini-courses” (e.g. silk screening, photo-graphy). Most courses begin in late afternoon or early evening and coordinate with regular academic year schedules. Information on a specific continuing education program and/or course selections can be obtained by phoning local school systems. Continuing education courses are accommodating to persons with spinal cord injuries wishing to enroll in a limited college program. The schools have no admission or minimum course load requirements and earned credits are usually applicable toward formal college programs.

Scholarships

Hundreds of scholarships exist through local, state, federal, and private sources. For scholarship information in Connecticut, write to the Department of Higher Education, 61 Woodland St., Hartford, CT 06105, 860-947-1800.

SOURCES OF FUNDING

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

BRS agencies provide financial support for training programs to eligible clients who are pursuing realistic and appropriate vocational goals. The extent and level BRS support is subject to counselor-client negotiation, supervisory approval, and available agency funds. In many instances aid will also help cover the costs of special adaptive equipment.

In general, BRS agencies will only cover “unmet needs” above and beyond the traditional federal, state, and campus-based aid programs. To apply for these programs the College Scholar Service’s Financial Aid Form (FAF) must be completed. This form can be found at high school guidance offices and the financial aid office of any institution eligible to receive state and federal funds.

BRS generally sends all necessary information and supporting documentation for students whose applications are submitted by a BRS counselor. When students are filing an application independently, a letter to the University Financial Aid office should accompany their financial aid application. This letter should explain any additional educational costs or medically related expenses such as special equipment, transportation, or supplies needed to attend college.

Benefits For Veteran and Their Dependents

The Veteran Administration sponsors several financial aid programs for veteran and their dependents. Eligibility for any of these programs requires having received an honorable discharge after active duty of 181 days (less if the veteran received a service-related injury) after January 31, 1955.

Educational benefits cover the costs of eligible vocational, correspondence, business schools; colleges, universities; professional, technical institutions and apprenticeship or work-study programs. Under the **GI Bill**, eligible student veterans receive a monthly stipend based on their level of enrollment (full-time students generally receive \$311/month). GI benefits extend until 10 years of release from active duty or by December 31, 1989, whichever is sooner. It is recommended that you call the VA to see which program applies to you. Under the **Veterans Dependents Educational Assistance Program**, the spouse or child of a veteran who is completely disabled or who has died in active military service may also be eligible for educational benefits through the V.A. Generally, children of eligible veteran receive monthly payments between the ages of 18 and 26; however, in some instances, children with disabilities may receive a special vocational or restoration course as early as age 14. Under the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, a stipend (\$407/month for full-time study) may be available to provide free tuition and books for 48 months or longer if studying part-time. Any veteran with a 10% disability may apply.

For information and application, contact your local Veterans Administration or make a toll-free call to the U.S.V.A. Benefits Information and Assistance Office at 1-800-827-1000.

There are also several veterans' organizations that provide assistance for their members or their members' children, e.g., American Legion, Am vets, Marine Corps League, etc. Look in the Yellow Pages of your telephone book under Veterans or Military Organizations for their phone numbers.

FEDERAL FINANCIAL AID PROGRAMS

Grants

The federal government provides Pell Grants and Supplementary Education Opportunity Grants (SEOG) to persons who wish to attend school and is in financial need. These grants may be used at most colleges, universities, and trade and proprietary schools. Prospective students should inquire directly to the school to see if it is eligible to receive these funds.

Pell Grants may be used to financially assist the student up to \$3125/year. The grants are dependent on the cost of tuition, the student's enrollment status (full-or part-time) and the student's financial need. The SEOG grants may financially assist up to \$4,000/year. To apply for a Pell Grant and/or SEOG grant, fill out the College Scholarship Service's FAF. This form can be obtained at most high school guidance offices and college financial aid offices.

There are other state grants available such as Connecticut Independent College Student Grant and Connecticut Aid for Public College Students. Contact college financial aid offices for details.

Educational Loans

The Perkins Loan and the Stafford Loan (formerly the Guaranteed Students Loan) are the two main educational loan programs.

The financial aid office at the school administers the Perkins Loans. Students can borrow up to \$3,000/year for the first two years of undergraduate study. The interest rate is 5%. The payback period begins 9 months after the student leaves school and the student has 10 years to repay the loan. To apply for a Perkins Loan, fill out FAF (see grants above).

The Stafford Loan is administered through banks and other lending agencies. The interest rate is 8.66%. Undergraduate students can borrow up to \$2,625/year for freshman, \$3,500/year for sophomore (one must earn 30 credits to be considered a sophomore) and \$5,500/year for Junior and Senior. Graduate students can borrow up to \$8,500 per year. The payback period begins 6 months after graduation and the borrower generally has 10 years to repay the loan. Contact local bank or lending agency or call the Connecticut Student Loan Foundation 1-800-237-9721.

Campus-Based Scholarships

Many colleges have additional scholarships. The eligibility criteria include donor specific requirements, honorary scholarships and prizes, athletic scholarships and grants-in-aid. Most are awarded on the basis of academic potential and financial need. Most schools offer a “financial aid package”, a combination of grants, scholarships and loans. Award amounts vary based on the student’s need, the amount of funding available through the school, and the cost of each school program. Contact the school directly to find out about these programs.

Private and Local Scholarships

Hundreds of scholarships exist through local and private sources. Generally, these funds are targeted to students who intend to pursue a particular field of study, to members of a particular nationality or ethnic group and to members of specific civic, religious, or business organizations. Many professional groups also offer aid to students with disabilities such as the following:

American Alliance for Health, Physical Education and Recreation
Attn.: Consultant, Programs for the Handicapped
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20036

American Occupational Therapy Association
6000 Executive Boulevard
Rockville, Maryland 20850

American Physical Therapy Association
1156 15th Street, N.W.

Washington, DC 20005

Physical Education and Recreation Officer
Division of Personnel Preparation
Bureau of Education for the Handicapped
7th and D Streets, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202

In addition, public libraries are an excellent resource for locating reference material on private sources of financial aid.

Sources of Financial Aid Information

Many schools offer counseling and application assistance to students in need of financial aid. Increasingly, high schools and community groups, such as Educational Opportunity Centers (EOCs) sponsor college fairs and financial aid workshops. These sessions are an excellent way to learn more about financial aid opportunities and how to apply for them.

Campus Contacts

There are special sources of assistance at each Connecticut College and university. To assure equal educational opportunity, "Campus Contacts" are available to assist students with disabilities in meeting their needs. A directory of Campus Contacts can be obtained by contacting the Educational and Employment Information Center in Hartford.

A FINAL WORD

The information presented here is only a beginning in identifying potential education opportunities for persons with disabilities. Developing the training and skills you will need to be successful in your venture requires being both creative and realistic. **Don't give up!!**