



**TO:** Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES) Committee

**FROM:** Ceylane Meyers-Ruff

**SUBJECT:** Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities

**DATE:** December 3, 2020

**AUTHORIZATION(S):**

**SUMMARY**

**Issue for Discussion**

To provide the Board of Regents with information on recommendations from the Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities (Advisory Council).

**Reason(s) for Consideration**

For discussion.

**Proposed Handling**

This item will come before the ACCES Committee for discussion at the December 2020 meeting.

**Procedural History**

The Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities was established on December 16, 2013.

**Background Information**

The Advisory Council was established to advise the Board of Regents on policies and practices that will positively impact postsecondary students with disabilities. The Advisory Council has focused on strategies to improve the transition of students with disabilities to post-secondary education and training, financial aid flexibility, and disability-

related accommodations and supports that will assist students with disabilities in achieving their postsecondary goals.

The Advisory Council Co-chairs are Regent Christine Cea and Tamara Mariotti, Past President of the New York State Disabilities Services Council. The Advisory Council has three committees: Fiscal, Legislative/Regulatory and Technical Assistance. Advisory Council members include: students with disabilities, parent advocates, college disability services offices, disability rights organizations, the higher education sectors (SUNY, CUNY, independent colleges, proprietary colleges), state agency partners and Department staff from the Offices of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES), Higher Education and P-12 Special Education.

### **Impact of COVID 19 on Postsecondary Students**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), twenty-two percent (22%) of adults in New York have a disability. Individuals with disabilities are less likely to complete secondary school and to enter postsecondary education. For those students with disabilities who do pursue postsecondary education, their dropout rates are substantially higher than students without disabilities, and their graduation rates are lower than their peers. In New York State, over seventy-seven thousand (77,000) students with disabilities participate in postsecondary education. This number is likely higher because many students choose not to disclose their disability.

Students with disabilities experience significant challenges during their transition from secondary to postsecondary education. In postsecondary education, students with disabilities are expected to navigate a myriad of new expectations related to meeting academic standards, developing interpersonal relationships with peers and self-advocating for reasonable accommodations. While many postsecondary institutions have disability service offices that support student success, students with disabilities continue to have unmet needs. To address this issue, the Advisory Council recommended that the Board of Regents create an Enhancing Supports and Services for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities Initiative as one of the Board's 2021 Non-State Aid Budget and Legislative Priorities.

COVID 19 has created new challenges for postsecondary students with disabilities. According to the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), when postsecondary institutions transitioned from in-person to online learning new barriers were created for students with disabilities. Postsecondary institutions had to quickly address issues related to: adjusting reasonable accommodations, delivering coursework in accessible formats, training faculty and students on the use of technology, maintaining social connections between students, addressing the increased need for mental health services for students; and, assisting students with non-academic challenges related to unemployment, housing and food insecurity, and family illness. Many of these issues impacted not only students with disabilities but all students in postsecondary education.

## **Advisory Council Recommendations**

The Advisory Council convened a meeting in October 2020 to discuss the impact of COVID 19 on postsecondary students with disabilities. The Advisory Council made recommendations in the areas of Technology and Digital Accessibility, Peer Mentoring and Consistency Across Postsecondary Sectors:

### 1. Technology and Digital Accessibility

- Provide technology training to professors and students with disabilities that includes IT support and technical assistance for in-person and remote learning.
- Encourage postsecondary institutions to utilize universal design to provide support to students with disabilities. Offer flexibility in the way students with disabilities access material, engage with it and show their knowledge. Examples include providing textbooks in audio and video formats or allowing oral presentations or group projects instead of written exams.
- Encourage bulk purchasing of technology to decrease costs for secondary and postsecondary institutions.
- Establish standards for remote and synchronous (live) instruction. Post COVID19 educational options should include the choice of in-person learning, remote learning or both. Hybrid options should incorporate universal design to provide accessibility to all students.

### 2. Peer Mentoring

- Create peer mentoring programs to support post-secondary students with disabilities. Mentors could assist students with disabilities in developing self-advocacy skills.

### 3. Consistency Across Postsecondary Sectors

- Create consistency of supports and accommodations across the various postsecondary education institutions. There should be a seamless process that enables students with disabilities to easily transition their reasonable accommodations from one postsecondary institution to another (i.e. community college to four-year college). This would include the creation of standardized eligibility criteria and documentation requirements.

## Next Steps

The Advisory Council has identified the following next steps in support of the recommendations outlined above:

- Survey postsecondary institutions to identify current eligibility and documentation requirements for disability services and identify possible streamlining strategies.
- Review national practices identified by the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD) and Americans with Disability Act (ADA) Web Content Accessibility Guidelines to recommend strategies to improve the success of postsecondary students with disabilities.

### **Related Regent's Items**

#### [May 2017](#)

<https://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/517accesd1revised.pdf>

#### [September 2016](#)

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/916accesp12hed1.pdf>

#### [Creation of an Advisory Council on Access to Higher - December 2013](#)

<http://www.regents.nysed.gov/common/regents/files/1213accesd2%5B1%5D.pdf>

### **Recommendation**

To support the Advisory Council's recommendations and forward the recommendations to the appropriate SED program areas for consideration for implementation.

### **Timetable for Implementation**

Department staff will continue to work with the Advisory Council to clarify possible strategies for current and future recommendations; identify which recommendations could be advanced as part of a guidance document or regulations; and return to the Board of Regents to provide an update.

Attachments

## Attachment 1

### New York State Education Department Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities

- **Co-Chair**-Regent Christine D. Cea  
New York State Board of Regents
- **Co-Chair**-Tamara Mariotti,  
Mohawk Valley Community College
- Catherine A. Carlson  
Columbia-Greene Community College  
President, New York State Disability Services Council
- Nazely Kurkjian  
SUNY System Administration, Office of University Life
- Christopher Rosa, Ph.D.  
The City University of New York
- Susan Nesbitt Perez, Ph.D.  
Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities
- Donna Stelling-Gurnett  
Association of Proprietary Colleges
- Laura Arrington  
Family and Youth Education Coordinator, Starbridge
- Young Seh Bae, Ph.D.  
Community Inclusion & Development Alliance
- Barbara A. Glassman  
INCLUDEnyc
- Ahmat Adam Djouma  
Student enrolled in postsecondary education
- Ketrina Hazell  
Student enrolled in postsecondary education
- Natalie McQueen  
District 75, New York City Department of Education
- Tonya Robinson-Mayer  
ACCES State Rehabilitation Council (SRC)

- Zvia McCormick  
Resource Center for Independent Living, Inc. (RCIL)
- Julie Michaels Keegan  
DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW YORK
- Michael Helman  
Learning Disability Association (LDA)
- Vacant  
Licensed Private Career Schools
- Vacant  
Regional Bilingual Education Resources Network (RBERN)
- Lynne M. Thibdeau  
NYS Office for People with Development Disabilities
- Marcia E. Rice  
NYS Office of Mental Health
- Lauren Corp  
New York State Commission for the Blind

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- Dora Lee Stanley
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- Dr. Anael Alston, Assistant Commissioner

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- Kristen Desalvatore
- Dr. Leigh Mountain

