



AUTISM ALLIANCE OF MICHIGAN PRESENTS

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Help. Hope. Answers. Today



A Parent's Role in the College Search

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This newsletter article was written from the point of view of parents, educators and professional employment coaches working with a population of adults with autism and related disabilities. Please read this piece as well as descriptions of support systems for the autism community at local colleges to make further inquiries to find the best individualized options.

Parents of all college-bound students typically have a hand in selecting the college a student attends, whether it is through financial support or otherwise. For a student with disabilities, there are additional considerations. The support systems, accommodations and course work colleges offer will be important in the job market after graduation. Students not able to meet the Michigan Merit Curriculum that graduate with a Certificate of Completion, but without a High School Diploma, should not rule out attending college altogether. While addressing primarily graduates with diplomas herein, there are a growing number of college programs designed for those with intellectual barriers that address academic and/or life skills on a college campus.

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In general, the additional time and ‘growing up’ that occurs during the college years can drastically improve one’s success in the competitive workforce after attending a program.

Independence is the goal. As a parent, the opportunity to assess your child’s progress in high school will help in developing and getting a ‘leg up’ on a support system for college. A concrete understanding by both parent and student of the student’s strengths, weaknesses, quirks, triggers under stressful situations, behaviors and coping strategies, will help in forming a plan. Look carefully at the IEP recommendations throughout the high school years for a classroom perspective, while recognizing that college most likely will require, and include development of, a greater level of independence. Pertinent medical information should also be continually reviewed.

Some considerations might include:

- How independent is the student academically, emotionally and physically?
- How much support is needed to organize and prep for schoolwork at home and in school or to maintain the pace to complete assignments? What are the student’s time management skills, including for a full workload? Work tolerance should be considered and developed in college toward future career work tolerance.
- What accommodations might your student always need? College may be an opportune time to strategically fade supports; others may always be required, but over-accommodating is not beneficial.
- Ensure that assignments and grading are accurate assessments of technical skills and knowledge. Some programs may tailor work to the student or dilute content due to disability, causing students to be ill-prepared or surprised by the actual career field after college.
- Does the program include guaranteed hands-on experience, fieldwork or internship? Individuals with disabilities are often experiential learners who benefit from these opportunities. Some college programs, however, leave students to their own devices to identify and interview for prospects to ‘earn’ the internships associated with their program. Investigate policies and faculty roles in guaranteeing that the student will have these opportunities as his peers will, regardless of ‘interview’ skills or competition for placements.
- Is the chosen field of study in a demand field? What is the likelihood that it will lead to a job in 4 to 6 years? Individuals with disabilities begin with strikes against them in the competitive job market. Choosing careers in demand fields will lead to greater likelihood of opening doors in the future.

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Answers to these questions help parents assess a student's level of functioning independently through college and are crucial to landing that first job in the real world. Work together with school counselors and special education staff to help your student choose a realistic field of study. Help them develop a 'Plan B' to direct their talents elsewhere if post-secondary programs are not a viable or successful option.

When making the decision about a college or university, it may be prudent to inquire whether a Community College setting may be a first step in the higher learning environment to begin to develop a greater independence from the confines and supervision in high school. Community colleges tend to include smaller campuses, academic general classes and financial cost effectiveness. Other students with disabilities may excel academically and require a 4-year college program in order to be stimulated and acquire the higher degree and level of knowledge that automatically increases viability in a competitive job market.

Whether a student chooses a community college or university, it is essential to visit the campus and make an appointment with the Office of Support Services for students with disabilities. Create a list of specific questions such as: What kind of support systems are offered? Are there professionals familiar with Autism Spectrum Disorders and the unique supports that may be needed? Who will advocate for internship placement for a person on the Autism Spectrum? What percentage of students with autism get internships? What percentage of students with autism get a job placement after graduation?

In some cases, coursework is offered in lieu of an internship; beware and ask for clarification. It is expected by employers that those hired are prepared academically, including "hands-on" experience to show the ability to transfer learning to the workplace. An internship in a chosen field can be critical in obtaining that first job. References from internships can also be important during the job search after graduation.

Whether a student decides to attend a university directly or community college first and then a university, student responsibilities will be constant. To ensure success, parents should oversee the first appointments with the Office of Support Services for students with disabilities. It is the responsibility of the student to sign up for support every semester. Students can meet with professors in advance of courses with prepared notes and documents to help understand a student's unique needs.

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By the end of their studies, students should be able to navigate these meetings independently to prepare for self-advocacy with a supervisor in the workforce. It is recommended that students find a mentor in a teacher, professor or counselor on campus as part of the support system, keeping in mind that college faculty have a strong desire to mentor that may not be guaranteed in the workforce. In the future, these contacts may serve as references as well.

It is important to discuss and have a thorough grasp of an individual's disclosure rights related to an invisible disability or learning disorder. Disclosure may be necessary to be eligible for services, however, this may include a very general disclosure or identification as an individual with a disability or learning impairment. The Americans with Disabilities Act addresses an individual's rights across school and employment, and those who feel their rights have been violated should reach out for assistance.

Taking charge of one's own needs and negotiating the system is a big step toward further independence. Keep in mind that both parent and student are learning about independence from the safe confines of a high school building during the transition to college. It may be necessary to fill the role of guide, facilitator or advocate during the early stages. Keep in mind that colleges and universities are generally inclusive by nature, accepting of differences and forward-thinking when it comes to challenging social norms regarding disability. College may be the potential testing grounds for self-disclosure and self-advocacy. It can be detrimental to the confidence and self-esteem of individuals with disabilities to complete the college years without discovering their own voice and inner self-advocate.

The advice is simple: be safe and be brave. Gauge what supports may no longer be needed and shed the unnecessary support layers. Learn what is needed for future success and then go after it!





Michigan Colleges & Universities with Dedicated ASD Programs

LOCATION	COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY	PROGRAM TITLE	PROGRAM COMPONENTS/FEATURES	LISTED AS BEST FOR ASD	LISTED AS BEST VALUE FOR ASD	APPROXIMATE TUITION COST
Allendale	Grand Valley State University	START	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships with local communities & schools. Peer to peer mentoring and companionship. Effective Practices Leadership Initiative. Regional Collaborative Networks events. 	X		\$16,392/year
Ann Arbor	University of Michigan	CAPS: Autism Spectrum Self-Advocacy Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ASD specific scholarship opportunities. Housing accommodations. Academic counseling & exam proctors. 	X		\$15,358/year
Kalamazoo	Western Michigan University	Autism Services Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pre-fall semester programming (8 weeks). Peer mentoring "Best Buddy" Program. Organized workshops and social events. 		X	\$15,358/year
East Lansing	Michigan State University	Building Opportunities for Networking and Discovery (BOND)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhance and practice social & coping skills. Pursue new experiences in a safe & supportive environment. Develop academic skills & effective support systems. Structured opportunities for social communication. 			
Grand Rapids	Grand Rapids Community College	Noorthoek Academy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A nonprofit organization dedicated to provide a continuing education program in the arts & sciences for special needs student who want to pursue their education in a college setting. 			Resident \$114.00/credit Nonresident \$244.00/credit
Grand Rapids	Calvin College	Ready For Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To educate and empower adults with developmental disabilities by providing a supportive and structured College experience to help each individual achieve their greatest level of independence. 			\$34,000/year
Grand Rapids	Hope College	Ready For Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To educate and empower adults with developmental disabilities by providing a supportive & structured college experience. Year one is Discovery, Two is Equipping, Three is Experiencing and Four is Launching. If a student fully participates in the first three years of the program, receive a \$3,000 scholarship for the fourth year. 			
Rochester	Oakland University	Peer Transition Assistance Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This program offers the opportunity to pair up with another student mentor, which can assist the student with goal setting, organizational skill development, resource identification, and student involvement. OUCARES offers pre-employment training. 			\$9,514/year
Saginaw	Saginaw Valley State University	Think Cardinal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students with intellectual disabilities take courses in an audit status for: personal growth, developing independence and experiencing a college atmosphere. * In order to join SVSU in the Think Cardinal pathway, certain requirements must be met, including but not limited to: Students must have a Certificate of Attendance or Completion. 			
Traverse City	Northwestern Michigan College	Skills. Opportunity. Achievement. Reward S.O.A.R.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SOAR is a program for students with intellectual disabilities providing support so that they are able to participate in continuing education courses of their choice at the College. The Fall Courses include: Robotics Academy, Video Creation 101 and Video Game Creation with Scratch, Qigong (Tai Chi type exercise), Animal Care, and Hip-Hop. Students must be 18 and older and possess a High School Certificate of Completion OR Diploma OR GED. 			\$34,640/year
Ypsilanti	Eastern Michigan University	EMU Autism Collaborative Center College Success Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual counseling Weekly support groups as well as weekly skills groups that focus on academic, daily life, cultural support, & social issues. Facilitation and liaison support with faculty, staff, & university departments. Community events and outings. 	X		

What are the Best Colleges and Universities for Students with ASD? [20 Best value Colleges for students with Autism 2017-2018.](#)





NOVEMBER AT A GLANCE

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 Long Term Care / Medicaid Planning (Ann Arbor)	2 The Fowler Center WEEKEND RESPITE CAMPS Adult (Mayville)	3 SF Spartan Concert (E. Lansing) Special Education Law 101 (Detroit)
4 Fall Festival Event at the Mid-Michigan Children's Museum (Saginaw)	5 ESDM Advanced Training (Ann Arbor) Do's & Don'ts: Assistance Animals (Kalamazoo)	6 Active Learning Conference (Southgate)	7 MASSW State Conference (Kalamazoo) Restorative Practices and De-escalating Behaviors (Sidney)	8 2018 re:con (Traverse City) The Big WHY Behind Autism Behaviors: Understanding the Brain (Rochester)	9 Michigan POHI/SXI Conference (Detroit)	10 Best Practices for CAS and Those with Coexisting Autism (Detroit) FREE Autism Caregiver Bootcamp Series (Charlotte)
11 The Fowler Center WEEKEND RESPITE CAMPS Youth (Mayville) Sensory Friendly Tree Lighting w/ AAoM (Clinton Twp.)	12 Autism Diagnostic Interview, Revised (ADI-R) Clinical Training (Ann Arbor)	13 Parenting on the Spectrum (Grand Rapids) Annual Home and Community Based Waiver Conference (East Lansing)	14 Connor's friends (Grand Rapids) START - Evidence Based Strategies (Sidney)	15 IEP Webinar Series (Ionia) Indepen-Dance (Marquette)	16 Mon-Arc Dance (Monroe) GOGO Movie Night (Jackson)	17 FREE AAOM Autism Caregiver Bootcamp Series (Detroit) FALCONERS "Being Different is Natural!" (Lansing)
18 Abrams Planetarium Sensory friendly show (East Lansing) Caring Santa (Ann Arbor)	19 Nutrition Class for Marquette County (Marquette)	20 Nutrition for Manistique (Manistique)	21 Leisure Club "Festival of Trees" Adventure (Canton)	22 23  HAPPY THANKSGIVING		24 Celebration Cinema Sensory Showtimes (Grand Rapids, Portage, Benton Harbor, Mt. Pleasant, Lansing, Muskegon)
25	26 NAMlam Family-to-Family Education Meeting (Marquette)	27 Nutrition for Sault St. Marie (Sault St. Marie)	28 Youth Mental Health First Aid (Lansing)	29 #TalkingAAC 2018 (East Lansing) Respite Education and Support Tools Training (Escanaba)	30 Everybody Dance Now! Final Performance (Waterford)	

** For more information on any of these events, please contact the MiNavigator line at 877-463-2266.



AAoM's FREE Autism Caregiver Bootcamp Series

Comprehensive training for parents, grandparents, and other caregivers

November 10th, 2018 | 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

**ALIVE 800 W. Lawrence Ave.
Charlotte, MI 48813**

November 17th, 2018 | 8 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Wayne County Community College Downtown Campus | 1001 W. Fort St. Detroit, MI 48226

Participants will receive a Caregiver Toolkit which includes resources to navigate your child's care going forward, resources for your child's primary care physician and basic tools for your child.

To Reserve your spot, contact **877.463.2266** or Navigators@aaomi.org

