Implications Brief #13
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National Center for the Study of Postsecondary Educational Supports (NCSPES)
University of Hawai‘i at Manoa

Issue Area: The Role of Families of Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education; Study 13

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Summary of the Issue:
Youth with disabilities have been educated in increasingly inclusive settings for the past 25 years, yet, students with disabilities are often not prepared to enter college. Students with disabilities do not have opportunities to develop skills to advocate for themselves in secondary school. The launching period into adulthood is a time when typical families have decreasing parental responsibilities as youth grow in social and financial independence. However, families of youth with disabilities often encounter an increase in their responsibilities during this time. Students with disabilities need assistance accessing the system of supports found at the post-secondary level. Students with disabilities who participated in the National Focus Groups (NCSPES, 2000) found the array of supports conflicting and wanted the system of supports to be more coordinated.

Study Questions/Method: Using focus groups for students with disabilities, their family members and disability support coordinators we are doing an study to explore the experiences and perceptions of students with disabilities, family members of students with disabilities and Disability Support Coordinators regarding the role of family members in providing supports to students with disabilities in post-secondary education. More specifically:

1. What are the discrepancies among the experiences and perceptions among these groups?
2. What role parents/family play?
3. In which functions do students with disabilities need assistance?
4. Who provides each type of assistance and support?
5. How should supports and assistance be coordinated?

Findings: Preliminary impressions seem to show that families are appropriately supportive in financial and emotional encouragement. Students with disabilities seem to generally welcome family support.

Implications by Audience:
- Students with disabilities need to identify the support they need and want from their families.
- Disability Support Coordinators need to include family members regarding students’ decisions if students agree to this type of inclusion.
- Family members need to learn to value their supportive roles.
- High school counselors and special education teachers need to inform parents of the change in legal status of those who are eighteen years old.

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