

Greetings, I hope that you and your family are healthy and well.

Our College Planning and Transition Conference for Learners who are Neurodiverse is one of only a few full-day college conferences in the nation that is designed and produced specifically for learners who are neurodiverse who have an interest in postsecondary educational pursuits (and the family members, allies, and transition professionals who support them). During our Conference, topics, and discussions include but are not limited to:

- the college search and college admissions application planning;
- college application and admissions advice;
- evaluating available academic support and college success and support services needed in relationship to academic and psychosocial need;
- assessing a good college fit;
- assistive technology and learning strategies to improve academic success;
- accessing accommodations in college;
- accessing public, private, and community services to support college transition;
- college transition best practices at both the K-12 and the Post-Secondary Education (PSE) level;
- addressing issues relating to a student's psychosocial readiness for the college transition;
- discovering what can be learned from current college students who are neurodiverse and their families.

This year's Let's Talk LD 2020 College Planning and Transition Conference has been reimagined. In keeping with our conference theme, **Neurodiversity, Intersectionality and Social Change**, we have challenged our speakers and attendees to consider with great seriousness the kind of consciousness raising that must occur, both within and outside of the neurodiverse ecosystem, to create actionable means of addressing complex issues of the injustice faced by learners who are neurodiverse as they journey from college student access, through college student success, to career success. As stakeholders in the college transition and/or Special Education ecosystem, we too must engage in critical self-reflection and consider the role that we play in impeding the advancement of learners who are neurodiverse. If we are to consider fully the impact of these inequities, we must also consider how we might work collaboratively to identify and remedy educational and social injustices that undermine the college access, college success, and career success that neurodiverse BIPOC students and other adversely impacted underserved students face.

So you may be asking yourself, what does college planning and transition for neurodiverse learners have to do with INTERSECTIONALITY and/or SOCIAL CHANGE?! I would argue EVERYTHING!!! The fact is, many systemic and institutional barriers persist that make college access difficult for many learners who are neurodiverse (those who have been diagnosed with Attention-Deficit Hyperactive Disorder, Specific Learning Disabilities, and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder). Raising awareness about WHAT those systemic and institutional barriers are is the first step to addressing the challenges of college access. HOW to address the systemic and institutional challenges is achieved through SOCIAL ACTION! Let's Talk LD believes in coalition building, which is cornerstone to our social impact work. Social action is our community working together for the common good. In this case, the common good is creating a Community of Practice committed to problem-solving around the issue of improving college access, retention and graduation rates for scholars who are neurodiverse. This really is the core objective of our College Planning and Transition Conference.

According to the National Center for Learning Disabilities "*Transitioning to Life After High School*" Report (2017),

- Less than half of students 17 or older (41%) with SLD reported playing "at least an equal part" in developing goals for their transition plan and/or IEP.
- 29% had not met with school staff to develop a transition plan.
- About half (55%) had IEPs that identified the need for postsecondary education accommodations.
- 45% of parents of students with all types of disabilities reported that most goal-setting decisions were made by school staff.
- 32% of parents of students with SLD said they wanted more involvement.
- One-fourth (26%) of students with SLD had transition plans that involved schools contacting two- or four-year colleges or vocational schools on their behalf.
- Of the 1 in 9 undergraduates (11.1%) who disclosed any kind of disability to their college in 2011-2012, only 1 in 20 (4.8%) reported having learning disabilities even though it is the largest disability category for K-12 students [Retrieved from [Transitioning to Life After High School](#)].

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Unfortunately, students with learning disabilities have much higher rates of dropout than their counterparts. ...only 34% of these students have completed a four-year degree eight years after their high school graduation. (National Center for Special Education Research, NLTS2, September, 2011)

We must consider how to develop meaningful and impactful college planning and transition "best practices" for learners who are neurodiverse. Those practices **MUST** be thoughtfully considered through the lens of [intersectionality](#). It is only then that we can re-make the system in a way that allows us to fully appreciate the complexities of our challenge and, in a serious way, finally address the systemic inequities that have undermined our efforts to advance social justice for ALL people who are neurodiverse. As mentioned earlier, understanding the lived experiences of marginalized people is an important step in advancing social justice and equity. The college planning and transition journey is already fraught for most students who are neurodiverse.

The College Planning and Transition Conference is appropriate for K-12 and postsecondary administrators, faculty, admissions professionals, disability support services professionals, student affairs, and residential life professionals. Additionally, our conference attendees have included clinical, therapeutic, college transition, and other education professionals, in addition to most importantly, students and caregivers. Our conference program is rich and is designed to offer content for a variety of constituents. This year, the fee for attending the conference has been waived. It is our sincere hope that the rich and thoughtful content offered by our noted presenters will be enjoyed by many and will serve as a catalyst for the social action that is so desperately needed.

On Saturday, September 26th, the day will begin with an energetic and awe-inspiring Keynote Address by Lydia X.Z. Brown, J.D., Public Counsel for the *Center for Democracy & Technology* and Director of Policy, Advocacy, and External Affairs of the *Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network*. Lydia is an incredibly talented disability-rights activist whose groundbreaking advocacy work is multi-faceted. Lydia's writing, organizing work, and public speaking are a reflection of their extraordinary intellect, warmth, humor, and generous spirit.

The day will be steeped in a content-rich offering of over two dozen lectures, workshops, demonstrations, and panel discussions by our noted thought leaders whose expertise includes fields to include but not limited to cognitive behavior science, gifted and creative education, biomedical engineering, civil rights advocacy. While a full list of conference sessions can be found [here](#), our thought leaders will be exploring a dizzying selection of issues, to include *Transition Planning and Community Colleges*; *Neurodiversity and Mental Health in College*; *Preparing 2e Students for College Transition and College Success*; *Achieving Your Academic Goals in an Online Learning Environment*; *Treating Neurodevelopmental Disorder-Related Trauma*, and; *Ensuring Digital Access for Disabled Students: Policy and Practice for Advocates in the Pandemic*. Additionally, we have designed a Students-only Strand with interactive programming designed specifically for learners in Grades 8 through Grade 10.

On Sunday, September 27th, we are extremely excited to present an incredibly special day of programming. The day will begin with an impassioned and thought-provoking Keynote Address on equity in gifted education programs and services by Dr. Erinn Fears Floyd, former Director of the *National Association for Gifted Children* and the current Director of Training and Partnership Development in Gifted Education of the Consortium for *Inclusion of Underrepresented Racial Groups in Gifted Education* (I-URGGE).

The Keynote will be followed by a screening of our featured film, *Autism Goes to College*. This groundbreaking and touching film is so important as it deepens our understanding of the realities of college life for scholars who are neurodiverse. While the subjects of the film are scholars who are on the Autism Spectrum, many of the experiences chronicled in the film will be familiar experiences for other scholars who are neurodiverse. The screening will be followed by an insightful discussion featuring Dr. Jan Blacher, Distinguished Professor of Education and UC Presidential Chair in the Graduate School of Education, *University of California Riverside* and the Director of the *SEARCH Family Autism Resource Center*, in conversation with Dr. Eric Endlich, Psychologist and Founder of *Top College Consultants*.

The remainder of the day you will be able to put everything you have learned at the conference to work. We are privileged to have Dr. Nicole Ofiesh formerly of Stanford University's *Schwab Learning Center* and currently the Founder of *Potentia Institute 21*, offer a session entitled *Voices of Learners who are Neurodiverse and BIPOC: The Active Design of Transition to College*. As Dr. Ofiesh states, *[e]very voice and every action matter when we truly seek to change society. Design Thinking has*



become a useful tool to engage change in all areas of life. One of the reasons for its popularity and utility is that it begins with conversations designed to gain greater insight into a person's needs, wants, and personal experiences. When applied to issues that require social change, Design Thinking is a powerful tool because it brings together the lived experiences of individuals' pain with those who hold the potential to drive solutions. Universal Design for Learning is a paradigm steeped in brain science that encourages educators to question the inclusivity of their practices and generate new ways of meeting the academic, social, and psychological needs of the broadest population of learners. In this workshop, we will employ the initial stages of Design Thinking to provide a forum for individuals who are neurodiverse and BIPOC to discuss both the positive and painful experiences they've had in school and how that impacted their transition to college. This session is a must for every conference participant and will provide a rare insight into classroom planning and create a unique opportunity for students, caregivers and other allies to partner with educators to "generate new ways of meeting the academic, social, and psychological needs of the broadest population of learners." The design of this session is very interactive.

Our 2020 College Planning and Transition Conference for Learners who are Neurodiverse will be livestreamed on Saturday, September 26, 2020 and Sunday, September 27, 2020 between 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. Pacific. We hope that you will join us and please spread the word!

- Learn more: <https://bit.ly/LTLDCC20>
- Register: <https://bit.ly/LTLDCC20EventbriteRegister>
- Stay connected: <https://www.letstalkld.org/conference-news>
- Past conferences: <https://bit.ly/LTLDCollegeConferenceCatalogue>

All my best,

KD Harris, M.A., Co-Founder & Executive Director

*Associate Member, American Psychological Association (APA) (Division 46)

*Affiliate Member, Los Angeles County Psychological Association (LACPA)

*Professional Member, The Association of Black Psychologists (ABPsi)

*Regular Member, American Educational Research Association (AERA)

*Principal Representative Member, National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)

*Member, Western Association for College Admission Counseling (WACAC)

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