



**A Quarterly Publication
Produced BY & FOR NC Youth with Disabilities**

Back-to-School Advice from Youth, for Youth



Image provided by Lydia, Youth Advisory Team Member

Real Advice from Students with Disabilities Who Have Been There

A new school year means new teachers, new classes, and new opportunities.

We asked members of your Youth Advisory Team one simple question:

"What advice would you give another student with a disability who is getting ready to go back to school?"

Here's what they want you to know...

Advocate for Yourself

"My biggest tip is to teach your teachers early about your disability and what will help you the most, so school is as least stressful as possible. Before school starts or during the first week, let them know who you are, what your disability is, and the best ways they can help you access learning and receive your accommodations." — Matthew

"Be prepared to explain your disability to people who may not know." — Oliver

Use the Supports That Help You Succeed

"I think students with disabilities should have the tools they need before school starts. Things like visual schedules, headphones, speech-to-text, and extra help from teachers can make school easier." — Kamiya

"Visual aids, my IEP, the right writing tools like grid paper, adaptive pencils and scissors, and fidgets." — Xy'kari

"Don't feel scared to use your accommodations to help yourself in school, and don't be afraid to ask for help from people when you need it!" — Gage

Prepare for Success

"As an autistic student, one of the most important lessons I have learned is that preparing for school starts before the first day. Reach out to upperclassmen for notes or study guides, use your accommodations, stay organized, and don't be afraid to ask for help. Everyone learns differently, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach." — Dhruv

"Going back with a plan or schedule can help. Plan your accommodations so you know what to do and don't get overwhelmed." — MaCailie

Lean on Your Support System

"Make sure you have the support and tools you need to be successful. Being prepared and having a strong support system can help you feel more confident and ready for the school year." — Keniya

"If you feel stressed in a group situation, use a fidget, take breaks when you need them, start assignments early, and don't be afraid to message your teacher for help. Remember, there are more students who feel just like you, you are not alone." — Kasi

Remember to Enjoy the Journey

"Don't stress yourself out. If you haven't already, tell the school what accommodations you need... and HAVE FUN!" — Landon

One Message from All of Us

No two students learn exactly the same way, and that's okay. Whether you use assistive technology, have an IEP or 504 Plan, need sensory supports, or simply learn differently, remember that your voice matters, your accommodations matter, and asking for support is a sign of strength.



Helpful Back to School ECAC Resources

[Student Led IEP Request](#)

[Student IEP Input Form](#)

[Student Snapshot](#)

Tool Time Tuesday with ECAC Youth Advisory Team Members



**Tool Time Tuesday
Recording**

On Tuesday, July 28, Jaxson Eroh and Matthew Markus presented a Tool Time Tuesday session titled, Youth-Led IEPs and 504 Plans: Building Self-Advocacy and Independence. They shared how they've learned to prepare and self-advocate in their IEP and 504 meetings, from simple 'I want / because...' statements in elementary school to co-leading their meetings in high school, with practical steps families and educators can use right away to support students now and into adulthood. If you missed it, click on the link for the recording. They both did a wonderful job with sharing their own personal experiences and offering valuable advice.

ECAC Names 2026 Graziadei Achievement Scholarship Award Winner, and Two Runner-Ups



The Exceptional Children's Assistance Center is pleased to announce the winners of the 2026 Matthew C. Graziadei Achievement Scholarship Award. This year, we recognize three incredible seniors who reflect the qualities that defined Matthew: determination, perseverance, persistence, dedication, and confidence.

Award Winner:

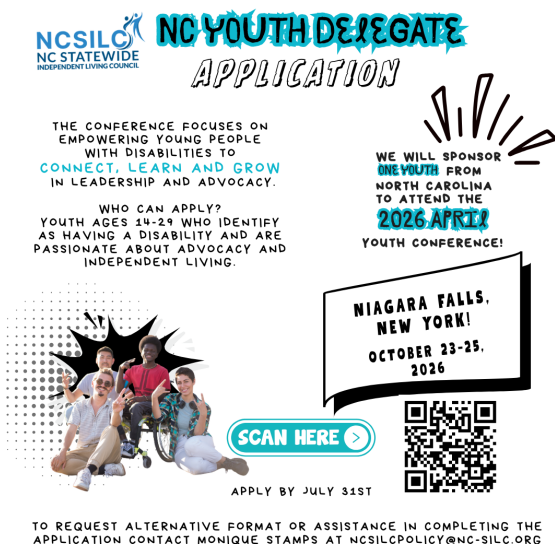
ZhiLei Moyer, Denver Christian Academy, Denver, NC

Runner-up Award Winners:

Caden Karner, Sanderson High School, Raleigh, NC

[Read More About the Award Recipients](#)

Opportunities for Youth and Young Adults!



NCSILC NC STATEWIDE INDEPENDENT LIVING COUNCIL

NC YOUTH DELEGATE APPLICATION

THE CONFERENCE FOCUSES ON EMPOWERING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES TO **CONNECT, LEARN AND GROW** IN LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY.

WHO CAN APPLY?
YOUTH AGES 14-24 WHO IDENTIFY AS HAVING A DISABILITY AND ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT ADVOCACY AND INDEPENDENT LIVING.

WE WILL SPONSOR ONE YOUTH FROM NORTH CAROLINA TO ATTEND THE **2026 APRIL YOUTH CONFERENCE!**

NIAGARA FALLS, NEW YORK!
OCTOBER 23-25, 2026

SCAN HERE

APPLY BY JULY 31ST

TO REQUEST ALTERNATIVE FORMAT OR ASSISTANCE IN COMPLETING THE APPLICATION CONTACT MONIQUE STAMPS AT NCSILCPOLICY@NC-SILC.ORG

NC Youth Delegate Application

The North Carolina Statewide Independent Living Council (NCSILC) is sponsoring an emerging youth leader to attend the 2026 Association of Programs for Rural Independent Living (APRIL) Conference to be held in Niagara Falls, NY on October 23-25, 2026. Applications for NC SILC sponsorship are due by July 31, 2026!

NC SILC will cover the cost of conference registration, airfare, lodging, and meals for the selected participant.

[Link to the NC SILC sponsorship application](#)

[See this link for more information about the APRIL Conference](#)



SAVE THE DATE

North Carolina Museum of Natural Sciences' STEAM Career Showcase for Students with Disabilities

Tuesday, October 13th, 2026 from 9:30am – 12:30pm

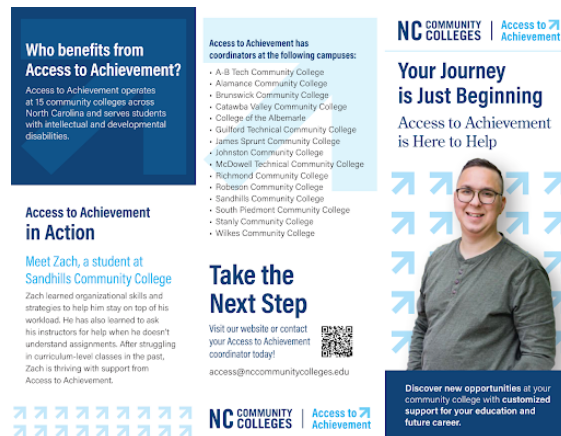
This free event will be held in downtown Raleigh and is an event for learners in grades 6–12 to connect with role models with disabilities who have thriving careers in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math (STEAM). Students learn about these professionals' personal journeys and strategies for success and gain practical knowledge that they can apply to their interests and future career paths. Please visit our [2025 STEAM](#) event page for more information about last year's event.

ASL interpreters and live captions will be provided, and after the event Spanish subtitles will be added to the recording. Part of the event will also be streamed to YouTube if you are unable to attend in person. More information about the schedule and registration will be coming out in the next few weeks; I'll be sending a follow up email once our registration (for participants and exhibitors) and website go live! If you are unable to attend and would not like to receive the follow up email, please let me know.

Access to Achievement

Access to Achievement is a state-funded IDD workforce training program empowering individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to pursue their education and career goals with confidence. [Click here to learn more.](#)

Whether you're considering college for the first time or returning to continue your education, we can provide the support you need to succeed. Our mission is simple: to create accessible educational pathways that promote independence, workforce readiness and community engagement. No documentation of disability is required—you self-identify, and we provide the tools to help you thrive.



The graphic is a collage of four informational cards for 'Access to Achievement'. The top-left card, titled 'Who benefits from Access to Achievement?', lists 15 participating community colleges across North Carolina. The top-right card, 'Access to Achievement has coordinators at the following campuses:', lists the same colleges. The bottom-left card, 'Access to Achievement in Action', features a testimonial from Zach, a student at Sandhills Community College. The bottom-right card, 'Take the Next Step', includes a QR code and contact information. A vertical banner on the right side of the graphic reads 'Your Journey is Just Beginning' and 'Access to Achievement is Here to Help', featuring a photo of a man and several upward-pointing arrows. The NC Community Colleges logo is present in the top right and bottom right corners.

Who benefits from Access to Achievement?
Access to Achievement operates at 15 community colleges across North Carolina and serves students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Access to Achievement has coordinators at the following campuses:

- A-B Tech Community College
- Alamance Community College
- Brunswick Community College
- Catawba Valley Community College
- College of the Albemarle
- Guilford Technical Community College
- James Sprunt Community College
- Johnston Community College
- McDowell Technical Community College
- Richmond Community College
- Robeson Community College
- Sandhills Community College
- South Piedmont Community College
- Stanly Community College
- Wilkes Community College

Access to Achievement in Action
Meet Zach, a student at Sandhills Community College
Zach learned organizational skills and strategies to help him stay on top of his workload. He has also learned to ask his instructors for help when he doesn't understand assignments. After struggling in curriculum-level classes in the past, Zach is thriving with support from Access to Achievement.

Take the Next Step
Visit our website or contact your Access to Achievement coordinator today!
access@ncccommunitycolleges.edu

NC COMMUNITY COLLEGES | Access to Achievement

Your Journey is Just Beginning
Access to Achievement is Here to Help

Discover new opportunities at your community college with customized support for your education and future career.

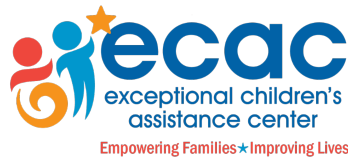
[Click here to download the Access to Achievement brochure](#)

[CLICK HERE FOR A PDF VERSION OF YEP](#)



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