



Transition Trove

A Quarterly Newsletter Packed with Resources to Prepare Youth with Disabilities for Life Beyond High School.

NOW ACCEPTING APPLICATIONS for the 2026 Matthew C. Graziadei Achievement Scholarship Award!

ALL North Carolina high school students with disabilities that are graduating in Spring 2026 are eligible for nomination. This includes:

- Students with or without a 504 Plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Students who are homeschooled, enrolled in private schools, public charter schools, or traditional public schools.
- Students who will receive either a diploma or a certificate.

Scan the QR Code for more details and link to the application

Award amount is \$1,500 to be used for any postsecondary experience

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 20, 2026

The Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC) is proud to offer the Matthew C. Graziadei Achievement Scholarship Award to support North Carolina high school seniors with disabilities. The award amount is **\$1,500**, with the potential for a higher amount and/or runner ups depending on funds. This scholarship is awarded directly to the student and can be used for **any** post-secondary experience, including further education, employment related expenses, independent living, pursuing hobbies, or purchasing assistive technology and/or other equipment needs. (Because the amount is over \$600, the student will receive a 1099 form.)

ELIGIBILITY:

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- traditional public schools.
- Students with or without a 504 Plan or Individualized Education Program (IEP).
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SELECTION CRITERIA:

Matthew Carmen Graziadei was a remarkable young man who died in January 1998 at the age of 26. At the age of seven Matt was diagnosed with Muscular Dystrophy. He graduated from Myers Park High School in Charlotte, NC and was elected to Who's Who in American High School Students. Matt was a student intern at the Charlotte Mint Museum and served as a Goodwill Ambassador for the Muscular Dystrophy Association both locally and statewide. He achieved

President's Honors at Central Piedmont Community College and served in Washington, DC with the US Surgeon General's Council on Families and Disabilities. Matt also started his own business and was a contractor in facilities, engineering and computer services.

Scholarship recipients reflect the qualities that defined Matthew C. Graziadei:

- **Determination** – *believing you can go beyond what seems possible*
- **Perseverance** – *staying strong even when things are tough*
- **Persistence** – *trying again and again until you succeed*
- **Dedication** – *putting in steady effort to reach your goals*
- **Confidence** – *trusting yourself to handle challenges*
- **Motivation** – *focusing on opportunities instead of barriers*
- **Accomplishment** – *achieving success while embracing new possibilities*

APPLICATION PROCESS:

Applications will only be accepted through Friday, February 20, 2026. The award will be presented to the winning student during their high school awards ceremony. Based on applications received, additional students may be selected as Runner Up.

APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS:

Applicants must submit the following documents for consideration, NOTE NEW REQUIREMENT:

- Student Information Form – TRANSCRIPTS ARE NOT REQUIRED
- Nominated student must submit a written or dictated paragraph about why they qualify for this award and how they would use the award to help with their future plans.
- Nomination Narrative - A one-page narrative, completed by school counselor, teacher, student or someone who knows the student describing the student and his/her accomplishments in relationship to the attributes listed on the cover page. Include a brief personal history, education or career goals, and reasons why they should be selected for this award.
- 2 Letters of Recommendation
- Administrator from high School: Principal, Assistant Principal, EC Director, Director of Student Services, a Teacher, Coach, Job Coach or School Counselor, Community Member – Student's peer, relative, employer, pastor, neighbor, service provider, etc.

DEADLINE:

One copy of the completed, signed application packet **must be received by Friday, February 20, 2026**. Winner and finalists, if applicable, will be selected by April 10 and the Individual nominating the student or the high school counselor will be notified by May 1st. Incomplete applications will be deemed ineligible and rejected.

[CLICK HERE FOR THE MCG AWARD APPLICATION](#)

CATALYST OPEN HOUSE for 2026-2027

About the Program

The Catalyst Program is a **free**, award winning, year-long STEM initiative for high school students with disabilities. Students must be rising grade 9-12 students for school year 2026-2027, in regular education, honors, AP or college level classes or the occupational course of study program to participate and have a documented disability, IEP or 504 Plan. We accept students in public school, private school, charter school or homeschooled. Student and a parent must register and attend one of the Open Houses to be considered for the program.

Program Features

- Hands-on STEM learning with professors, graduate students, and industry professionals
- Paid STEM internships at NC State, government agencies, and industry partners
- College and workforce readiness training
- Life 101 skills: stress management, campus navigation, independent living
- Field study trips (local and out-of-state)
- Optional certifications in Quality Assurance and Cybersecurity
- Case management and transition planning
- Program Dates: June 2026 – June 2027 & can be a multi-year program

Be Sure to Save the Dates & Attend One of the Sessions!

Virtual Open House

Date: Thursday, January 15, 2026

Time: 7:00 - 8:00 PM (Join between 6:30–6:45 PM)

Location: Virtual Meeting

In-Person Open House

Date: Saturday, January 17, 2026

Time: 10:00 - 11:00 AM (Arrive by 9:45 AM)

Location: NC State University

***Note:** Free parking available in front. Please do not use Apple Maps - it may misdirect you .

To Register for Open House

<https://go.ncsu.edu/catalyst-open-house-2026>

or Scan the QR Code Below



CLICK ON FLYERS BELOW TO DOWNLOAD

Catalyst Open House for 2026-27

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- Hands-on STEM learning with professors, graduate students, and industry professionals
- Paid STEM internships
- College & workforce readiness training
- Life 101 skills
- Field study trips
- Quality Assurance and Cybersecurity certification opportunities
- Case management & transition planning

Eligibility

- Must be a rising 9-12 grade student
- In regular education, honors, AP or college level classes or the occupational course of study program
- Have a documented disability, IEP or 504 Plan

We accept students in public, private, and charter schools as well as homeschooled students!

Be Sure to Save the Dates & Attend One of the Sessions!

Interested students and a parent must register and attend one of the Open Houses to be considered for the program.

Virtual Open House

Date: Thursday, January 15, 2026

Time: 7:00–8:00 PM (Join between 6:30–6:45 PM)

The Google Meet link is in the Registration Form below and an invite will be sent to you after you register.

In-Person Open House

Date: Saturday, January 17, 2026

Time: 10:00–11:00 AM (Arrive by 9:45 AM)

Location: NC State University

**Note: Exact Location is in the Registration Form below. Free parking available in front. Please do not use Apple Maps—it may misdirect you.*

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or

Scan the QR Code



NC STATE UNIVERSITY

The Science House sciencehouse.ncsu.edu/studentprograms/catalyst



Catalyst is a free international, national and local award winning high school program for students with disabilities interested in STEM Careers!

You can participate if you are a rising Grade 9-12 High School Student with any disability who is in Regular Education Classes (Standard, AP, Honors, or College Level), or in the Occupational Course of Study program, whether in public or private or home school

The program includes:

- Hands on STEM Program that includes a wide range of STEM Content, Skills and Fields, taught by Professors, Graduate Students, and Industry Professionals
- Paid STEM Internships in research labs at NC State University, or with government and industry partners
- Workforce and college readiness skills
- Life 101 Skills including, stress management, navigating a college campus, etc.
- Week long summer session, plus Saturday sessions during the school year
- Optional multi-year program
- Field study trips, that are in state, out-of-state, and international
- Case Management, resource support, and transition planning
- Optional certifications in Quality Assurance and AI
- Annual Roach For the Stars! Bo A Star! STEM and Resource Fair for K-12 Students in NC with Disabilities, Family and Friends

Catalyst is an award winning program:

- Excellence in Education Award, Raleigh Mayor's Committee For Persons with Disabilities, October 2024
- Airwards 2023/24 Winner in the Education and Research / Training Category
- Invited by US Airforce Academy and Space Foundation, Colorado Springs, CO for a Field Studies Program, April 2025
- Invited to the International Institute of Tropical Forestry, San Juan, Puerto Rico for a Field Studies Program, April 2024
- Invited to NASA Johnson Space Center, April 2023 for a Field Studies Program
- National Lemelson-MIT InvenTeam Competition Winners and Technical Award, 2017
- Letter of Commendation from President Obama 2017
- Program of Excellence Award, 2021, International Technology and Engineering Education Association
- National Energy Education Development Project: Special Project Award, 2020
- Invited to the US Patent Office, June 2018 for a special program
- Recognized by Time Magazine, 2022
- All graduating Seniors have pursued STEM educational pathways in college

For More Information contact:

Joann Blumenfeld, Catalyst Director

Jessica Yose, Catalyst Program Coordinator

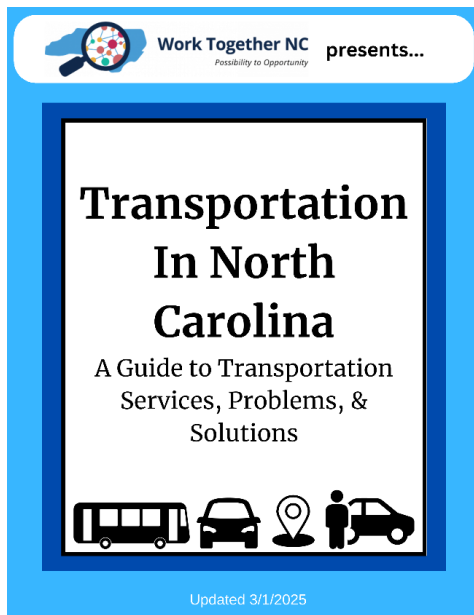
jblumen@ncsu.edu 919-635-3120

jyose@ncsu.edu 919-618-0433

Catalyst is funded through NC Catalyst Rehabilitation and our community partners

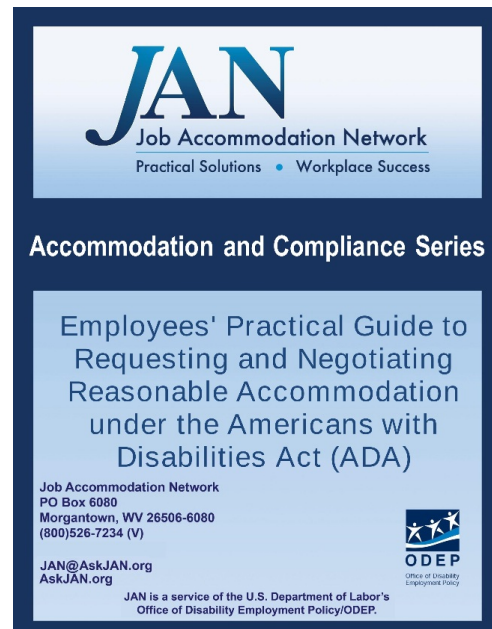
TRANSITION RESOURCES

(CLICK ON DOCUMENT IMAGES BELOW TO DOWNLOAD)



Transportation Guide for People with Disabilities

[Work Together NC](#)'s Transportation Alliance Work Group has developed a [guide](#) on the state of transportation in North Carolina and how individuals with disabilities can get started on their transportation journey. The [guide](#) is called Transportation in North Carolina: A Guide to Transportation Services, Problems, & Solutions.



Employees' Practical Guide to Requesting and Negotiating Reasonable Accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act

The [Job Accommodation Network \(JAN\)](#) has developed practical ideas to help employees understand the ADA and how to request and negotiate reasonable accommodations in the workplace. This [guide](#) is a summary of some of the most frequent issues that employees have regarding accommodations and the ADA and JAN's practical ideas for resolving them.

NC Centers for Independent Living



Centers for Independent Living are non-residential, community-based organizations, governed and staffed by people with disabilities, that offer a wide variety of services to consumers with disabilities and those who support them. What makes a Center for Independent Living unique is the peer-to-peer relationship provided, where people with disabilities act as mentors for other people with disabilities, showing them by example how to help themselves and to live independently.

The 5 core services that CILs provide are:

- Individual Advocacy and Systems Advocacy
- Peer Counseling (Peer Support)
- Information and Referral (I&R)
- Independent Living (IL) Skills Training
- Transition Services
 - Nursing Home/Institutional Setting Prevention
 - Youth (ages 14-29) -Exploring Opportunities Beyond High School

CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE

A PEATC

Do You Know....



Centers for Independent Living (CILs) Fact Sheet for North Carolina's Parents

What is a Center for Independent Living?

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) help people with disabilities of all ages be included in community life. North Carolina has 7 CILs. CILs are non-residential and are run by and for people with disabilities. CILs work with people with disabilities, including students, to help them make their own decisions about their lives and to assist them achieve their independent living goals within their communities. This doesn't mean that people with disabilities are on their own and have to do everything by themselves. We all need help and support in some aspects of our lives. CILs help maximize independence and help people with disabilities gain new skills and advocate for themselves.

How Can a Center for Independent Living Help?

CILs provide services to individuals with all types of disabilities as well as to the local community. All CILs provide the following core services although they may have different names.

- **Advocacy** - Helping people with disabilities speak up for their own needs and those of others, make their own decisions, and exercise their rights.
- **Peer Counseling/Support** - People with disabilities help guide individuals on how they can meet their challenges, goals, and dreams, in part using their own lived experience.
- **Independent Living Skills Training** - Individuals learn the skills needed to live on their own or with others, with needed supports.
- **Information and Referral** - Providing information about various topics and making referrals to other helpful organizations.
- **Nursing Home Diversion** - Helping individuals transitioning from nursing facilities back into the community and/or helping them to avoid entering facilities.
- **Youth Transition Services** - For youth who need transition support to explore post-high school opportunities.

DID YOU KNOW?

CILs are funded under the federal **Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended**.

For more information, you can contact your local CIL, or you can contact:

North Carolina Statewide
Independent Living Council
919-460-6129
www.nc-cilc.org/

Contact your PTI
Exceptional Children's
Assistance Center
704-892-1321
800-962-6817
www.ecac-parentcenter.org/
ecac@ecacmail.org



CLT3

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) Fact Sheet for North Carolina's Parents



Center for Independent Living

What is a Center for Independent Living?

A Center for Independent Living or CIL is run by and for people with disabilities. North Carolina has 7 CILs that are located around the state. CILs can help people learn how to make decisions about their own lives. They also give people with disabilities advice when it is difficult to live, learn, and work in their communities. You don't have to do everything yourself because we all need help and support!

How Can a Center for Independent Living Help You?

- ✓ **Advocacy**: Learn how to speak up for your own needs and others' needs and know that you have the right to make your own decisions and mistakes, just like everyone else.
- ✓ **Peer Counseling**: Talk to someone else with a disability about your goals, dreams, and things that are hard and they can help guide you.
- ✓ **Independent Living Skills Training**: Learn the skills you need to live on your own or with others.
- ✓ **Information and Referral**: Get information about various areas and topics and where to go to get more help.
- ✓ **Transition Services**: Find support to live in the community instead of in a nursing home and for youth who need support exploring post-high school opportunities.

PEATC - 703-623-9050 - www.peatc.org

CLT3

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) Fact Sheet for North Carolina's Youth

Discover ECAC's ACHIEVE Pre-ETS Program!

Discover the ECAC ACHIEVE Pre-ETS Program

EMPOWERING YOUTH THROUGH ESSENTIAL CAREER SKILLS

ACHIEVE is a virtual Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program provided by the Exceptional Children's Assistance Center (ECAC). It supports high school students with disabilities as they prepare for employment, further education, and independent living.

Who We Serve:

- High school students with a documented disability (IEP, 504, or medical diagnosis)
- Ages 14-21
- Public, charter, private, and homeschool settings

Delivery Format:

- Weekly virtual sessions via Zoom (1 hour)
- Group instruction
- Classes offered during the day and evening to accommodate various schedules
- Semester-long courses designed to align with school calendars
- Virtual format designed to feel like a class with structure and expectations

Why ACHIEVE Works:

- Designed by educators and parents who understand disabilities
- Fully virtual with interactive content
- Supports EIPD goals for preparing students for adult life

UNLOCK YOUR POTENTIAL WITH ENGAGING ACTIVITIES

Participants will experience learning opportunities in job exploration, self advocacy and, workplace readiness which includes resume building, and interview preparation, ensuring they are well-prepared for the workforce and **future success.**

Contact and Referrals:

Beth Voll, Pre-ETS Program Manager
Email: bvoll@ecacmail.org
Website: www.ecac-parentcenter.org



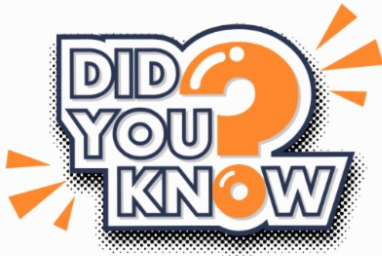
Download the two forms below and email completed forms to:
Beth Voll, bvoll@ecacmail.org

ACHIEVE Pre-ETS
Consent to Participate
Form

ACHIEVE Pre-ETS
School Information
and Verification Form



What does the NC Policies Governing Services for Children with Disabilities state about a child whose eligibility terminates due to graduation from secondary school with a regular diploma, or due to exceeding the age eligibility for a free appropriate public education (FAPE) under State law?



For a child whose eligibility terminates under circumstances described above, a public agency must provide the child with a summary of the child's academic achievement and functional performance, which shall include recommendations on how to assist the child in meeting the child's postsecondary goals.

*(FAPE applies to students ages three **through** 21)*

CLICK HERE TO VIEW NC's SECONDARY TRANSITION - SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE FORM



CLICK HERE FOR A PDF OF THIS NEWSLETTER

Contact Us



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