

Class of 2023 Spotlight

Andrew

When asked how Andrew feels about graduation, he has one word to say, **"READY!"**

Andrew started going to school full time at 2 years old, attending both ACDS (the Association for Children with Down Syndrome) and St. Joseph's preschools simultaneously! His parents knew that not only was it important that he receive all of the specialized instruction and early intervention services that ACDS had to offer- but also to begin creating a "resume of inclusion" by attending the same private preschool program in their community that his sister attended. When it came time to register for kindergarten, they could then better advocate for Andrew to learn in the general ed setting.

Knowing also that Andrew was eligible to attend school until he turned 22, his parents and IEP team found it appropriate to have him slow it down on the front end, and had him repeat kindergarten and the 4th grade- so Andrew has been going to school full time for 18 years! No wonder he's "ready!" to graduate!

Andrew had an incredibly successful 4 years at Swansboro High School. A student in the general education setting, Andrew was on the Honor Roll or Principal's list every grading period.



He was an active member of 4 clubs, was Vice President of the largest club on campus, played percussion in the school band before he switched over to acoustic and then electric guitar, made it to the state championships with the school robotics team, and was inducted into the National Technical Honor Society. Andrew is a multiple award winning photographer, and also had an internship this semester as a classroom assistant at his old elementary school that he absolutely loved!

He was on the varsity track and swim teams since freshman year, but almost didn't have the opportunity to swim his senior year. The NC High School Athletic Association eligibility rules state that students who are 19 are ineligible to participate in sports- yet students with disabilities are eligible to attend school until they're 22. Many other states in the US have eligibility waivers for student athletes with disabilities who find themselves in this situation- but NC did not, and refused Andrew's request for one. Undeterred, with his parents support, Andrew sued the NCHSSA and the NC Board of Education for violating his civil rights, and **WON**, creating policy change and an eligibility waiver for student athletes with disabilities across all of NC! He was the first to apply, was approved, and indeed swam on the Swansboro HS swim team his senior year!

Andrew has 2 jobs this summer. He's working as a camp assistant at Pogie's Kayak and Adventure Center in Swansboro, and as an assistant coach for the Tidal Waves Swim Club in Cape Carteret. He will continue swimming with his year round team and with the Craven County Special Olympics team, plans to continue electric guitar lessons, and is ready to start powerlifting.

We are so proud of Andrew and all of his hard work. We are certain that his involvement in the school community with his non-disabled peers was a huge factor in all of his success both in school and in accessing meaningful employment, and are excited to see where he goes from here!