

# COMMITMENT COMMUNICATION LEADERSHIP



# e-college

COMMITMENT  
MENTOR PROFESSIONAL  
ACKNOWLEDGE POSITIVE  
COMMUNICATION SHARING  
SUPPORT  
ENCOURAGE

Mentors  
Helping  
Students

# Acknowledgements

We are fortunate, within our region of the state, to have several collaborative partnerships. These groups have several ongoing initiatives designed to better prepare students with disabilities for success in college. The E-College curriculum is the result of casual conversation about “what more might we do?”

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Though this curriculum can be used without the mentoring component, we do not feel that it will be as effective or have the impact that it can by connecting high school students directly with college students. The connection process, however, will require the collaborative effort of a college disability coordinator.

# Suggested agenda for the college student mentor training session

**Preface**

Experience has taught us that there are far fewer problems or complications with the mentorship portion of this program if you can meet personally with the college student mentors prior to the start of the program. Not surprisingly, we also discovered that short meetings, over lunch time, with an offering of pizza generated the best attendance. The trainings were brief, 30 to 45 minutes, and informal, and provided ample opportunity for questions. We arranged them on two consecutive days to best accommodate student class schedules. To those students unable to attend, we provided handouts, a video, and the offer to meet individually.

The manner of presentation is completely up to the presenter’s style and comfort. We recommend that both the college disabilities staff and high school program lead person co-facilitate these meetings.

**What is E-College?**

Review the program purpose and intent: college students helping to prepare high school students for college success

- Explain that high school students will be working on an 8 week curriculum within their classrooms related to the topics on which the mentors will receive emails.
- Emphasize that their responses will carry much importance, to try to be informative, positive, and encouraging but truthful. Mentors should be personable in their responses but focus on skills needed for college success.

**How it works.**

- All emails go to and come from the high school special

education teacher. Mentors and mentees will not exchange contact information. Only the high school teacher and the college disability coordinator will have the college mentors’ email addresses.

- High school teachers will have been provided with the mentor/mentee matches by the college disability coordinator.
- The high school student will write you a letter which will be sent to you via email by the teacher.
- Mentors have a “Tip” sheet and mentor toolkit to help create their response. It contains information on the topic of discussion, as well as suggestions and resources for creating a response. There are also sample letters for them to review if they wish.
- Emails will arrive the same day each week. The specific day will be determined by the high school teacher.
- Ideally, Mentors will respond within 36 hours.
- If the Mentors stop getting emails from a student or for some reason cannot respond themselves, the mentor should notify both the college disability coordinator who will contact the high school teacher.
- You will be asked to respond to 8 emails over 8 weeks.
- It can be difficult to arrange, but because it makes the experience so much better and more powerful, we strongly encourage a face-to-face meeting between mentors and mentees at some point during or after the program.

**What should Mentors’ responses look like.**

- Samples are provided in the Mentor Tips section.

- Acknowledge the things high school students share with you. Share only things about yourself with which you are comfortable.
- Find ways to personally relate to what the students are saying. Tell them about the obstacles you have encountered and what skills you needed to overcome them.
- Share your advice on any topics they discuss and try to answer all questions they ask. You may contact the college disability coordinator if you are unsure of how to answer a question or need additional resources.
- Teach by example. Use your best writing skills to demonstrate the importance of quality writing in college.
- Responses should be in the 2 to 4 paragraph range but write as much as you need. Some topics will be much easier and more personal than others.

**Criteria for choosing Mentors.**

- Have disclosed that they have a disability.
- Access Disability Services.
- Have a proven record of success.
- Have demonstrated reliability and responsibility.
- Are considered excellent role models.
- Have a great deal to offer and be willing to do so.

**Conclusion**

Answer any remaining questions and thank them all profusely for volunteering their time, energy, and expertise. Remind them that their participation looks excellent on any resume!!



Purpose

E-College is a high school transition curriculum which incorporates email mentoring in order to connect high school students with disabilities with college students with disabilities. The goal is to better prepare these high school students for college success through classroom activities as well as with advice from students who have successfully negotiated the complexities of college life.

Time Commitment and Meeting Face-to-Face

The program is designed to take approximately 8 weeks, with the students sending one email per week, and the mentors responding within a day or two. The time period can be extended or decreased depending upon the curriculum activities the special education teacher elects to utilize.

The primary method of communication between mentor and mentee is through email and the hope that there will be at least one face-to-face meeting. If at all possible, it is important for the students to meet their mentors to strengthen the mentoring experience. The setting seems to be inconsequential. In our pilot project, the curriculum was used with equal success in a one-on-one setting; with a homebound student; in small groups; and as a large class curriculum.

Making the connection while remaining safe and anonymous

Because we do not have the time or finances to conduct background checks on the mentors and because high school students are potentially vulnerable, all meetings between mentor and mentee are directly supervised by the special

education teacher as well as by other program staff. All emails are to be filtered by the high school classroom teacher. College mentors will receive only the special education teacher’s email address and all of their correspondence will go directly to that teacher. Before sharing with the high school students, the teacher should transfer the mentor’s message to hardcopy and eliminate the mentor’s email address. Similarly, the high school student’s message should be transferred to email and sent to the college mentors by the teacher. In this manner, the special education teacher can monitor both in coming and out going correspondence and students never learn of each others’ email addresses.

Focus of Email Discussions and Classroom Discussions

The weekly themes are primarily driven by the classroom teacher and the curriculum. The curriculum is provided to each teacher and a parallel guide is provided to each mentor. The curriculum consists of a variety of activities based upon the focus of the week and with accompanying web base resources. The hard copy “texts” *Education Beyond High School Tools for College, and MnCareers*, which compliment the curriculum activities, can be downloaded from the NLSEC website ([www.nlsec.k12.mn.us](http://www.nlsec.k12.mn.us)). The teacher is free to use any combination of activities or to create his/her own to facilitate classroom discussion and student engagement. Each week, students will send an email to their mentor for the sharing of experiences and information. Guided questions are provided to assist students who are unsure of what to ask or write. It is recommended that students spend some time each week sharing the responses of their mentors.

Participants: How college mentors were chosen and what was the matching process.

A pool of possible mentors was identified by the college Disability Services Coordinator. They were identified because they had a declared disability, were successful in their college coursework and were considered to be good self-advocates. The Coordinator sent them a personal invite asking if they would be interested in participating in the program and sharing their experiences with the high school students. In the pilot program, twenty-seven college students volunteered. The college mentors went through an orientation and training session which lasted about 20 minutes. It was conducted on campus at a variety of times to accommodate student schedules. It was also taped and is available for viewing on the NLSEC website. High school students were then matched with college students primarily by career interest areas. If the high school student was unsure of their prospective major, they were paired with a college student in the Associative Arts Degree program. Typically, students were not matched by disability unless that disability, such as a visual or physical impairment, created unique obstacles.

Lead Personnel

We are very much aware that many districts may not have the luxury of positions that can take on the responsibility of a project lead person. It should also be noted that this responsibility cannot and should not fall upon the college disability services person. This is a high school program and their assistance is strictly voluntary and above their job description. The lead person is responsible for providing the connection between the high school special education teacher and the college disability coordinator and is the conduit through which information flows. By working closely with the college coordinator, the lead person can provide names, interests and disabilities of students requiring mentors, assist with matching mentors

and mentees, conduct the mentor trainings, assist in arranging face-to-face meetings, answer questions from any individuals involved, intervening if emails are not being sent or received, and in general, do whatever is necessary for the program to flow smoothly within the Northern Lights Districts, this position will be the responsibility of the Transition Coordinator. If you do not have a similar position on staff, then the high school teacher and the college disability coordinator will need to meet within the Northern Lights Districts and determine what responsibilities each of them will accept to make the program function well.

Email Courtesy and Expectations

High School Special Education Teacher: Respect the privacy of all the students by not sharing any individual mentor or mentee email address. Determine a specific day of the week on which your students will be sending their emails and stick to that schedule throughout the course. This will allow the mentors to know when to expect a message and to insure that they set aside time to respond.

High School Student: Though personal, these are formal emails similar to a business letter. Do NOT use text writing. Write in complete and well thought out sentences. Edit them for spelling and grammar. In college, most communication is conducted via email and messages are expected to be well written.

College Coordinator: If you choose to do so, you may be the contact person for the college mentors and communicate any issues they might have to the high school teacher or encourage them if they are not fully participating.

College Mentor: Respond within 24 hours of receiving an email. Make your responses personal and as positive as you can, but always be very honest. If your mentee asks questions you prefer not to answer, tell them so. If your mentee writes very little, encourage them with questions or suggestions. Your weekly Mentor Tips will help to guide you.

## Mentor Tips



**“Introduce yourself  
not your position.”**

### Mentor Tips

Welcome to e-College! Being a mentor for a high school student is an important undertaking and we are very grateful for your time and commitment to the support of a high school student with a disability. By giving a small amount of your time, you are providing a high school student with priceless information, encouragement and resources. Hopefully, you will find the process to be rewarding. It may even provide you with an opportunity to reflect on your current skills, knowledge and goals, and to learn something new about yourself or the world from your mentee.

*“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.” ~ Maya Angelou*

- Respond to the questions asked by the high school student.
- Always stay positive and encouraging. Acknowledge their willingness to reach out and communicate with someone new!
- Be sure to respond by asking questions that will help them start thinking about their future as a college student. Keep the conversation going by asking questions that get the student thinking about the future and by sharing your experiences.
- Use business etiquette in responding, as if you are writing professional letters back and forth. Use proper grammar and always use appropriate language. Remember, you are setting an example for these students by supporting them in being prepared for college life.
- All messages written by the high school student are given to their teacher who will email them to your college email. You will reply to the teacher and they will give your message to the student.
- Each week has a specific focus and your mentee’s questions will reflect that week’s focus.
- Students are matched by the college Disability Coordinator.

**The focus is about getting to know each other and finding common ground.**  
Reply to any questions asked by the student and be sure to ask questions in return. Share positive things about yourself including interests and goals you may have for your life. Talk about making new friends and having new experiences.

**Possible questions to ask your student (mentee):**  
What subjects do you enjoy in school? How long before you graduate? What things are you good at? What do you enjoy outside of school?

- Online resources to give to your mentee:**
- **Tool to showcase your achievements/skills**  
[www.efoliomn.com](http://www.efoliomn.com)
  - **Careers in Northeast Minnesota**  
[www.iseek.org/northeast/index.html](http://www.iseek.org/northeast/index.html)
  - **Minnesota Office of Higher Education-Interest Inventory**  
[www.getreadyforcollege.org/sPagesGR/interestAssessment.cfm](http://www.getreadyforcollege.org/sPagesGR/interestAssessment.cfm)



**“Reply to any questions  
asked by the student and  
be sure to ask  
questions in return.”**



**The focus this week is about self discovery:**

Students will explore and learn about their disability, their learning style, their strengths and their weaknesses. They will talk about when, how or if to disclose their disability and how to properly to request for accommodations, if necessary. Take this opportunity to share with the student how you succeed, or if you have faced obstacles, how you have overcome them. Share examples of when people have supported you, who it was and why. Or share a time when you asked for an accommodation from the Disability Coordinator or a professor. Share your early college experiences. What were your fears? What surprised you? What do you wish you had known about college disability services before leaving high school? What would you have done differently? Talk openly about having a disability.

**Possible questions to ask your student (mentee):**

Have you ever personally asked for an accommodation? How do you prefer to learn new information (reading, listening, hands on or visually)? Do you know what accommodations you are using in high school? Who is your biggest supporter? Who do you go to for help with school? Do you have to ask them or do they come to you?

**Online resources to give to your mentee:**

- **Why, When, What & How - Academic settings after high school**  
[www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/wwwwh.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/wwwwh.htm)
- **A-Z of Disabilities How to make your workplace setting meet your needs**  
[www.askjan.org](http://www.askjan.org)



The focus this week is about career exploration and choosing a career path. Share with your mentee what made you decide to go to college and how you chose the program you did. Share with them how long you expect it will take to complete the program and how you found out about it originally. Feel free to share with them the types of classes, instructors expectations, type of coursework, and amount and type of work required.

**Possible questions to ask your mentee:**

What is your passion? What is your dream job? What do you do in your free time that you feel you are good at and would like to turn into a career? Do you know which colleges offer the programs you are interested in?

**Online resources to give your mentee:**

- **Discovering what career/college to choose**  
[www.iseek.org](http://www.iseek.org)
- **National information on colleges, study skills, and tools for success**  
[www.collegeatlas.org](http://www.collegeatlas.org)
- **State resource for jobs/employment available in Minnesota**  
[www.minnesotaworks.net](http://www.minnesotaworks.net)
- **Information about green jobs, salaries, and training from the State of MN**  
[www.positivelyminnesota.com/JobSeekers/Explore\\_Careers/index.aspx](http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/JobSeekers/Explore_Careers/index.aspx)
- **Life Plan-Holistic program designed to help students plan for their futures. The program focuses on five areas of development: Career, Education, Finance, Leadership and Personal**  
[www.gpslifeplan.org/lakesuperior/utility/index.php?link=getting-started-guest](http://www.gpslifeplan.org/lakesuperior/utility/index.php?link=getting-started-guest)
- **A guide to all Minnesota State Colleges and Universities**  
[www.mnscu.edu/media/publications/pdf/2012-2013goplaces.pdf](http://www.mnscu.edu/media/publications/pdf/2012-2013goplaces.pdf)

“Take this opportunity to share with the student how you succeed,”





“ Help them focus on getting into College.”

The focus is about getting into college, specifically getting through the admissions process and figuring out financial aid. When your mentee asks questions about these topics, respond with your experience about how college is paid for, if you work while you go to college, and what expenses you have including those other than books and tuition. You may also give them resources about where to apply for financial aid and tips on submitting an application. Be encouraging and realistic. Let them know there are resources available but that college is a large expense and planning ahead is very important. Discuss entrance requirements such as Acuplacer or ACT tests, and accessing accommodations for the test.

**Possible questions to ask your mentee:**

Have they started the application process yet? Have they considered saving money for college and life expenses? Have they looked at financial aid options like FAFSA, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, scholarships or grants? What classes are you taking in high school to help prepare you for college and your college program? Are their classes modified or are they expected to do the same work as their peers?

**Online Resources to give to your mentee:**

- **Shows high school students how to prepare for college.**  
[www.studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALWebApp/students/english/preparing.jsp](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALWebApp/students/english/preparing.jsp)
- **Vocational Rehabilitation Services-Resource to assist in paying for college.**  
[www.positivelyminnesota.com/JobSeekers/People\\_with\\_Disabilities/index.aspx](http://www.positivelyminnesota.com/JobSeekers/People_with_Disabilities/index.aspx)
- **Where to apply for federal aid/grants and student loans.**  
[www.fafsa.ed.gov/](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/)
- **Reality Check- How much money do I need to make?**  
[www.iseek.org/careers/realitycheck.html](http://www.iseek.org/careers/realitycheck.html)
- **Information on Accuplacer Placement Test**  
[www.lsc.edu/Admission/Accuplacer/](http://www.lsc.edu/Admission/Accuplacer/)

**College is Different**



The focus this week is about how college is different from high school and the importance of independence and responsibility. Respond by sharing with them the freedom you feel in college and what you have to do that is different now that you are in college. Share with them how much you study compared to when you were in high school. Share your experience in having fun (or not) at college. Share how you have been personally responsible for yourself and your course work and how it is different or the same as in high school. Share how accommodations differ in college and how you need to seek out the support resources such as tutoring, a Disability Coordinator, counselors, and advisors. Explain how it is up to you in college to go to class and do the work; that there are no reminders and that late work and make ups are usually not allowed. Share many positive aspects of college so high school students don't get scared. Share some of the good things as well as the challenges. What comes with all that freedom?

**Possible questions to ask your mentee:**

Have you thought about learning how to balance a check book; manage a debit card and budget your money? Are there areas in life where you think you need to be more responsible? How well do you manage your time outside of school? Have you ever used a daily planner? What areas do you think you will need support with when you are in college and what is your plan to get that support? When you have work to do, do you plan it out? Do you do it yourself? Does someone explain it to you? Discuss how tutors are available and

instructors have office hours, but you have to be responsible to do the work and seek out additional guidance. Suggest they make a list of people in their life, to whom (family, friends, teachers, co-workers, counselor), they can go to for guidance or support in certain areas.

**Online resources to give your mentee:**

- **Succeeding at College and Work: Students with Disabilities tell their stories.**  
[www.humancentereddesign.org/neada/site/](http://www.humancentereddesign.org/neada/site/)
- **A guide for students with ADHD.**  
[www.help4adhd.org/documents/WWK13.pdf](http://www.help4adhd.org/documents/WWK13.pdf)
- **Succeeding in College with a Learning Disability.**  
[www.ecampustours.com/campuslife/studyhabitsandtimemanagement/succeedingincollegewithalearningdisability](http://www.ecampustours.com/campuslife/studyhabitsandtimemanagement/succeedingincollegewithalearningdisability)
- **Duluth Area supports people with disabilities in living as independently as possible.**  
[www.accessnorth.net](http://www.accessnorth.net)
- **Differences between high school and college.**  
[www.d.umn.edu/access/prospective/#differences](http://www.d.umn.edu/access/prospective/#differences)



This week's focus is about self advocacy and becoming an adult. Reply to the mentee's questions about these subjects by sharing some of your struggles and how you have overcome them, or a current struggle and how you plan to take on the challenge. Encourage your mentee to prepare for being a college student by practicing networking with other adults, by presenting ideas at their IEP meetings and by staying organized in school and life. Encourage them to think about leadership skills they may have or want to learn. Share what you would do differently if you were back in high school.

**Possible questions to ask your mentee:**

Have you read Bill Gates' article "Eleven Things they Never Taught you in High School?" Are there areas in your life where you get the chance to show leadership skills (if not, can you create those opportunities at school, work or home?)

**Online resources to give your mentee:**

- **SoftSkills, The Competitive Edge**  
[www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/softskills.htm](http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/softskills.htm)



"Share some of your struggles and how you have overcome them, or a current struggle and how you plan to take on the challenge."

**The focus this week is about the study skills necessary to succeed in college.**

Be honest with your mentee about what the expectations of college are and what success is to you. Share with them any tricks, techniques or things you have learned that make being successful easier. Encourage your mentee to seek out and develop study skills and attendance habits that will help them succeed at college. Encourage your mentee to think about a time when they have succeeded. Talk about how it feels to want to do well, not because you are supposed to, but because you are doing what you want to do. Help them build their confidence. Encourage them to interact with other students, for example, by joining a study group or student organization.

**Possible questions to ask your mentee:**

How do you plan to prepare yourself to meet academic challenges? What is a moment in high school you are proud of? What are your goals for college such as grade point average, courses to complete, certificates or degrees to earn, etc.? How long do you plan to be at college? Have you ever attended a College for a Day Event? Have you toured a college? Have you attended a college's open house?

**Online resources to give your mentee:**

- **Study tips to gain academic skills**  
[www.academictips.org/index.html](http://www.academictips.org/index.html)
- **Study skills guides for college students**  
[www.collegeatlas.org/college-study-guides.html](http://www.collegeatlas.org/college-study-guides.html)
- **Schedule a tour and open house information**  
[www.lsc.edu/Admission/VisitUs/](http://www.lsc.edu/Admission/VisitUs/)



"What is a moment in high school you are proud of?"



“ Always end on an encouraging note!”

The focus is to summarize what you learned and talked about. Thank the student for their time and commitment. Reaffirm their achievements. Always end on an encouraging note!

During this time you may be ending the program with a social gathering to mark the end of a successful mentoring adventure! Remember that being invited to attend a thank you gathering is very important to your mentee, so please try hard to be there. Showing up will reinforce the importance of commitment and follow through.

Thank you for providing this opportunity! Thank you for your time, your ideas and your willingness to help others. We wish you the best of luck with your college and career endeavors!

## Comments from Lake Superior College Mentors:

*“I believe that E-College was a very positive experience on both sides of the paper. My mentee was awesome.”*

*“The one thing that I really stressed to my mentee was prioritizing and the responsibility of going to class all the time, taking time to do your homework and studying, and how communication with your professors in college is critical.”*

*“The opportunity to share my past successes and knowledge with the high school student, helped realize where I’ve been and where I am now. More importantly, this gave me encouragement for me to prevail with motivation.”*

*“It’s not only my mentee learning new things I have learned a lot myself. Being a mentor in this program has made both of us grow more, and I am honored I was asked to help out!”*



