

NDRN
CCD-ADA 30 Briefing Webinar
Thursday, August 6, 2020
12:00 P.M. ET
Remote CART

Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) captioning is provided to facilitate communication accessibility. CART captioning and this realtime file may not be a totally verbatim record of the proceedings.



Redefining Communication Access

www.acscaptions.com

>> AMANDA LOWE: Hello and welcome, everyone, on behalf of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Education Task Force we are so happy you're able to join us for today's "The ADA at 30: Voices from Students". My name is Amanda Lowe and I am a senior public policy analyst with the National Disability Rights Network and a Co-Chair of the CCD Education Task Force.

And could we have Slide 1? On July -- July 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the passage of the Americans With Disabilities Act the ADA the sweeping landmark civil rights law has made things more accessible for and inclusive of people with disabilities.

This briefing is the last in a series by hosted by the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities, the CCD.

Each week CCD has focused on how the ADA supports people with disabilities in different aspects of life.

This week we'll focus on how the ADA supports students with disabilities and the implications it has for education.

With that, I'll jump right into the program and let you hear from my brilliant colleague, Meghan Whittaker, Co-Chair of the CCD Education Task Force.

>> MEGHAN WHITTAKER: Thank you so much, Amanda, it's great to be with you all today I'm Meghan Whittaker I'm the director of policy and advocacy at the National Center for Learning Disabilities and as you all know the ADA protects individuals with disabilities from discrimination in many settings the ADA was originally passed in 1990 and was the first major Federal civil rights law protecting individuals with disabilities.

And it defines a disability as an impairment that limits one or more major life activities.

These activities can include learning, which makes the ADA very relevant to educational settings and in 2008 Congress updated the ADA by passing the Americans with Disabilities Amendments Act and that actually provided more inclusive clanks when describing things that are covered it added terms like reading, concentrating, thinking and communication as major life activities. And importantly the ADA applies to all public schools and non-religiously controlled colleges and universities as well as to test agencies like those who administer the SAT or ACT but people sometimes wonder how the ADA applies to students with disabilities in educational settings we'll start with how it operates in the K12 space where we often think about the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act being the major law.

And it is. But the importance of the ADA cannot be overstated in this context.

In K12 schools, the ADA works alongside other disability laws, like IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

We often just call it Section 504.

And while there is some similarities, there are important differences between these laws. I often think of the laws as layering onto each other like the pyramid like you see on this slide. The ADA is the broadest law. It requires that reasonable accommodations be provided to students with disabilities who meet its very simple requirements. Even if those students are not eligible for the services under IDEA, which is at the top of that pyramid. The school is required to provide any student with a disability the accommodations that allow them to have equal access to education under the ADA.

Then on top of that, both IDEA and Section 504 holds people responsible for providing a Free Appropriate Public Education and customized supports and services to children who qualify but the ADA does not. The ADA offers fewer protections than IDEA but is available to many more students which is why it's a wider part of that pyramid. In fact students who are not eligible for IDEA may still be eligible for Section 504 or for protection under the ADA.

So even if the bar to receive services under IDEA is too high for some students, the ADA will still support them by giving them accommodations in school. IDEA has many more requirements to become eligible so there's a limit to the number of students who might benefit from it and while it does provide more comprehensive protections and services, it is more narrow in terms of who it protects. So the ADA really serves as a foundational law that not only protects students with disabilities from discrimination but ensures them accommodations and equal access.

On Slide 4 we'll talk a little bit about higher education. Because the ADA is one of the few laws that students can rely on in higher education. IDEA does not extend its protections to students after Grade 12. So the way that you get accommodations in a

postsecondary setting is through the ADA, making it absolutely essential to the success of millions of people with disabilities in colleges and universities.

And today where everything is changing in our world, including classes, they have all become virtual, the ADA has important implications. The way that classes are delivered online, whether you're in a college or university or in K12 education, those classes must also be accessible to students with disabilities. And the ADA allows students at any level to receive their schooling in a way that is accessible to them. Websites, video classes and other formats that are used in virtual learning need to meet accessible standards and students with disabilities can ask for accommodations to enable their learning so you'll hear more directly from students themselves who have been grappling with the virtual learning experience and students who beneficiaries of the ADA in their college careers.

So with that, I will hand it back to Amanda to start our panel.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Great, thanks so much, Meghan and I'm momentarily offcamera but I expect I'll return. Internet issues on my end. Sorry about that.

Meghan thanks so much for helping us understand how the ADA applies to education.

So now I would like to turn to the exciting and important part of today's briefing where we hear from students themselves. About their experiences in higher education and how the ADA has allowed them to access accommodations.

Our first panelist is Mia Brenneman, who is a -- who is in a school Psychology Program at Temple for her EDS. She holds an Undergraduate Degree also from Dickinson College her disability is dyslexia and her brother's disability autism has made her want to pursue a field to better support kids with learning differences in schools. Mia thanks so much for joining us and you are joining us by phone as well, I believe due to loss of power from the hurricane so we really appreciate you being here today.

Mia, you're in a Graduate Program right now. And everything has been switched to virtual learning. I was just wondering if you could talk about how that has gone for you and how accommodations have helped.

>> MIA BRENNEMAN: Yeah, so it's definitely been a challenge for me to adapt to virtual learning. One of the accommodations that I've always used that has really become helpful during virtual learning is getting lecture slides ahead of time. I take notes by hand. Because it helps with my memory to organize them in a specific way. And I also struggle with spelling. So if there are a lot of new terms like there usually is in grad school I tend to fall behind when I'm copying them down. So getting the lecture slides ahead of time let's me go at my own pace which is especially helpful when I don't have my classmates around me to ask how to spell a word I miss. Otherwise I tend to end up with a lot of unfinished words. And it's very difficult to recall what I was writing when I look back at my notes.

And my professors have been really supportive in grad school. They all told me at

my first accommodation meeting that this was just the beginning of working together. And that the conversation about my accommodations didn't end there.

They've been really supportive and helped me come up and problem solve, especially when my accommodations don't always apply to things like practicum and labs. They help me problem solve and are there with me every step of the way.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Great, thanks so much. So it sounds like your professors have been really supportive of you. In your mind, what do you think every educator who works with individuals with disabilities should know about how they can better support their students?

>> MIA BRENNEMAN: I think it's really important for educators to be aware about what it means to have a disability and also know that it's so different for each student who enters your classroom, including what kind of challenges they may face.

One of the hardest things for me is going to my professors when I feel like I wasn't supported and that takes a lot of bravery. An example is one of my accommodations is leaning on -- for spelling and grammar because I'm not always able to pick up on those mistakes when I read it by myself so in my undergraduate I took a health psychology course and I met with the professor at the beginning of the year. But towards the end of the semester I got a paper back with points off for spelling and grammar and I spent the next 24 hours really worrying about it, asking my friends and my parents for advice because it was scary thinking about going and talking to her about reconsidering my grade it was scary thinking about that. It ended up she was very understanding. But I just think educators should know that the worry that sometimes understanding isn't always there and it takes a lot of bravery if a student doesn't feel like they are being supported or doesn't feel like you have graded them fairly based on their disability even coming up to you having that conversation, it takes a lot of bravery to do.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Wow, thanks so much, Mia, for sharing that. That's a really powerful example of not only your courage but also knowing that you have the right to those accommodations. So I really appreciate you sharing that. Thank you.

Our next panelist is Olivia Murry. Olivia is a rising senior in the Next Steps program at Vanderbilt University. She is a leader among her peers, an active member of the Vanderbilt and Nashville community and a dedicated hard-working student and intern. In addition to her career goals and aspirations, which she will share more about, she leads dance studio classes in gnash Will, participates in Special Olympics and Best Buddies. And performs on stage with an inclusive music group in the community.

Olivia serves as a wonderful advocate for inclusion in her community. And we are so happy to be -- that you are able to join us today, Olivia, and to hear a little bit more from you.

So Olivia, I was wondering if you could tell us about your college experience. And then also how the accommodations and supports you get through the Next Steps program are helping you to achieve your goals.

>> OLIVIA MURRY: I'm a rising senior at Next Steps program at Vanderbilt. It's a four-year program for individuals with intellectual disabilities.

It allows me to attend college and have a full college experience. While at Vanderbilt, I attend Vanderbilt classes to learn new things and get to know my classmates and my professors.

For each of my classes, I have an Independent Learning Agreement. That my advisors developed with my professor. This ILA is a revised syllabus that outlines the assignments and projects that I will complete. And having an Individualized Learning Plan that allows me to access unique classes at Vanderbilt. Including public speaking, songwriting, history of fashion, introduction to archeology, Southeast Asia studies, and many others.

I also weekly with Peer Mentors known as ambassadors. And that has helped me with my classes, stay organized and get involved on the campus with opportunities.

Another important part of the program is the career development. We explore different career options and have internships each semester to develop our professionalism and build our resumes. During my time at Vanderbilt, I have interned with the School of Business, the HR office at the Vanderbilt medical center and the Vanderbilt Admissions Office the schedule and archiving. And the National District Attorney's Association. These internships have helped me to stay motivated and explore different career options and build my office administration skills and gain workplace independence during my internships, I receive support from my job coaches. My job coaches support me to gain my -- to gain greater workplace independence and career goals. And develop needed workplace supports. When I graduate from Vanderbilt I am interested in working in a Government office in Human Resources or as an Administrative Assistant for the Nashville Predators hockey team.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Olivia, thank you so much for sharing all of that. That was wonderful.

I really love how you described the ADA in action. So by that I mean through working with your advisor, you're able to craft the individual learning agreements and plans that you mentioned. And by the way, your classes sound super interesting.

And then also to describe the meaningful internships that you talked through. They all sound wonderful.

And really all of those accommodations are due to the power of the ADA. So thanks so much for sharing that really powerful segment with us.

I really --

>> OLIVIA MURRY: Thank you.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Thank you. I'm really pleased now to introduce our final panelist, Atira Roberson, Atira is a graduate student at the University of Texas she is working to maintain her Master's of Public Administration degree at the University of Texas at San Antonio she is a member of the young adult Leadership Council at the

National Center for Learning Disabilities. As a young person with dyslexia and dyscalculia she wants to be an example to other people who have learning disabilities. Atira believes that no matter how hard things get you can make it through anything and be anything you want to be. Atira I love that last line there.

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Thank you.

>> AMANDA LOWE: So Atira you've always had to be a self-advocate. I would like you to tell us a little bit about how the ADA supported you in that sense. And then also has helped you to speak up for what you need.

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Can you guys hear me okay?

>> AMANDA LOWE: Yes, hello.

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Okay. Cool.

ADA has definitely helped me. Because once you get into college, you pretty much have to handle your own accommodations and paperwork, whether you have disabilities or not, you know, your parents aren't allowed to have access.

So once I got into college, I had no choice but to learn how to be you know my own advocate. And there's no perfect way to do it. Let me just say.

You have to do it in a way, you know, that works for you. And by having ADA regardless of what happens, I don't have to worry about whether or not the teacher or professor, whoever it is that I'm having a problem with, is going to abide by it. Because at that point I've done the part that I need to do by speaking up for myself. And it's up to you to follow through. Because this is the law. This isn't just me talking here. You know, I used to always be shy. But knowing that you have that confidence and protection that many people need, I know that I can get my accommodations readily available to me. Like one of the things that I get right now is extended time. And when we had evacuated school and everything, I was concerned that I wouldn't get it or it would just be difficult to try to get that situated because everything had moved online. But thankfully, I called or texted each of my professors individually. And asked, is this going to be a problem? If so, you know, what am I going to do?

So I always try to take care of things myself. Because I do have access to a Campus Disability Center. But you know, sometimes they may not always know what's going on. And nobody knows your situation better than you do.

So you really need to do whatever you can to like speak up and use your voice. And having ADA as that cushion for me, like I said, I know regardless of what happens, I'm going to get what I need.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Thanks so much, Atira, that was really interesting. And I was reflecting while you were talking that I feel like I heard from both in particular you and Mia that the ADA has really provided almost that kind of backbone to allow -- sort of that backstop to enable you both to really become self-advocates for the accommodations you need.

So I think that's a really powerful message of the ADA.

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Yes.

>> AMANDA LOWE: So thanks very much for that. And I'm glad, also, that you felt like you could really use the power of the ADA particularly during the switch to virtual learning. That's great to hear.

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Thank you.

>> AMANDA LOWE: So we were thinking about -- so we to finish out the panel part of this briefing by asking each of our participants if they could say in just one word, which I know is really hard. But if they could say in just one word what the ADA means to them. So Atira, I'll start with you. In one word, what does the ADA mean to you?

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Hope.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Hope. That's a great word. Thank you. Olivia, and what would be your answer for in one word what the ADA means to you?

>> OLIVIA MURRY: Inclusion.

>> AMANDA LOWE: That's really powerful, as well. Thank you. And Mia, what would your response be for what the ADA means to you in one word?

>> MIA BRENNEMAN: Empowerment.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Empowerment. Wow, so those three words together, hope, inclusion, empowerment, I can't think of a better sort of synopsis of what the ADA really brings to education. So thank you all.

And turning now to our attendees, Meghan has noted here that there's a chat box where people can go ahead and type in any questions they might have for our panelists who have all shared really wonderful personal stories about the ADA. But while we're waiting for folks to go ahead and type in some chat questions, I'm wondering if -- I'm going to sort of throw this out to all three of you, whoever would like to answer, feel free. And it was touched on just a little bit. But could you all sort of elaborate a little bit about what the process has been for getting accommodations in college. Like has it been a smooth process? Has it been difficult? Have you had to talk explicitly about the ADA? And if anyone collaborate on that, that would be great.

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Well, for me, I can say when I graduated from high school when I got my undergrad at Henderson state they were very flexible and easy to work with basically everything I had on my IEP in high school I was able to transition when I went to undergrad I had extended time and reduction in distracting environments and was able to get a note taker. Unfortunately now that I'm in grad school, the only thing I'm able to get is extended time I don't have access to reduced distraction environments even though my paperwork indicates I have ADHD they have said it's only mentioned one time in the paperwork and I need to actually prove I have ADHD which means I would have to spend \$300 or so to test me to prove it again.

So that is definitely frustrating of course with me if I want something I'm going to get it, you know.

So I was able to make it work. But it was a little annoying that you are not able to

just transition what I got there here, you know, regardless of whether it's a big school or small school. I have a learning disability. I have learning and attention issues. We know that's not going to change. So why would you make it any more difficult than what it needs to be.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Great, thanks so much. Mia or Olivia, do you have anything to add to that? It's okay if you don't.

>> MIA BRENNEMAN: I think I had a similar experience when in my undergrad it was fairly smooth process. But one of the things that at the Learning Center at my school they told me was like if professors aren't being responsive, they did bring up the ADA and how, you know, it really is important and that they should be responsive and open to meeting and making sure that they understand your accommodations is really important. And that can vary depending on what professor you have. So it was mostly a process. There's -- there always can be -- the ADA is definitely a support that can -- that is always there to fall back on. Yeah.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Great, thanks, Mia. And I see here a really great question from Annie Acosta. And she's asking, have your accommodation needs changed since you have switched to distance or virtual education as colleges and universities move to that platform?

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Yes. Definitely. Oh, my gosh. Oh. Yes. Aside from having to be way more disciplined than what I normally am just because I am back at home, the way I read and the way I do my homework like before I was there I was able to get access to like this text-to-speech software and now I mean I have it on my laptop and unless I pay \$100 to get access to the different voices the only one I can get is this really annoying and dry monotone voice which is better than nothing because I do read extremely slow and I have problems with tracking so it will take me forever to read like 50 or 60 pages. So that has been a pain. And definitely a concern. And then of course making sure that my professors this semester know what is going on with my learning disability because this is different for me I have never gone fully online before I have done some classes online but I was still on-campus so I could still go talk to my professor during office hours and whatnot which is something I would never have done before. So that is definitely a little concerning but I think it's a learning experience for everyone involved including the students their selves. So I think as long as we can maintain an open line of communication, then it should be fine. So as long as I have a professor who is willing to communicate with me, that will make me feel a lot more comfortable because I have had professors who really care less about what I have going on which is really unfortunate because you shouldn't act like that and you technically can't act like that. But you can't make people change or see the way you do.

But I think as long as we have that consistent line of communication, then it should work out.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Thanks, and I feel like I heard you sort of talk a little bit about

that too before when you were presenting before, that the communication for professors and having professors who are willing to have that dialogue is really fundamental to making the accommodations work.

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Yes, it actually is. Because they make you feel more comfortable.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Yeah, so maybe the -- you know how education looks right now is different and the accommodations might be different but the communication, sort of the open dialogue is really key.

>> ATIRA ROBERSON: Yeah, it should be stronger now than ever before.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Yeah; yeah. For sure.

Well, we just have one minute left. I was wondering Mia or Olivia, if you had anything you would like to add?

>> MIA BRENNEMAN: Again my accommodations are the same but have played different roles. With so many more discussion boards type assignments that are supposed to be kind of like very casual, more like you would have discussions in class, it definitely is a challenge with my spelling and grammar issues to make sure my posts are clear enough for my professors to read so definitely I've had to have a lot of discussions with them over email about how to best do that to make sure that I'm still showing that I know the material but also not having it be a burden to have to find people to read over them and spell check them for me. Yeah.

>> AMANDA LOWE: Great. Well, thank you, all so much. I think we are at time. But I would really like to end this panel not only by thanking very sincerely all the young -- the students who joined us today to really share your experiences, expertise, and passion around this topic, we really appreciate it. But I did definitely want to close out just by sort of reiterating the three words that you each chose to describe the ADA or say what the ADA means to you all in one word. I think those are really powerful. And those are hope, inclusion and empowerment.

So thank you, all, so much to the panelists, thank you to the attendees for joining us for this celebration for the 30th anniversary of the ADA.

Thanks, everyone.