Transition is a student-led journey

What will life be like after Perkins? Students of all ages work to develop important skills and define for themselves what they want from life after Perkins.

For Perkins’ youngest, every moment is a learning opportunity, pg. 4

Brightening futures for young adults, pg. 5
At Perkins, we empower students to take charge of their lives. Whether our students aim to pursue a college degree, enter the workforce or engage with their community, we support them in every step of their journey.

This issue focuses on some of the ways we do this: from helping students develop self-advocacy, communication and the life skills they need to lead fulfilling lives, to the post-secondary programs we have created to ensure they successfully transition into the future.

The cover story (p. 2) focuses on transition — programming at Perkins designed to get students ready for life after school. The moment students arrive on campus, they begin building the skills they’ll need to succeed in life, college or on the job.

Also in this issue, you’ll learn how Perkins’ Early Learning Center and Lower School are designed to deliver the best outcomes for every child (p. 4). Across campus, our small class sizes ensure all students learn at their own pace and in their preferred learning styles, aided by technology, individualized lesson plans and creative teaching methods.

You’ll also read perspectives from Leslie Thatcher and Nicole Gardener, two leaders spearheading our work to prepare students who are blind or visually impaired for life following secondary education (p. 5).

With your continued support, we prepare not only our students for the world but the world for our students, wherever life may take them.

Warmly,

W. David Power
President and CEO

Established in 1829 as the nation’s first school for the blind, Perkins today impacts the lives of children and young adults who are blind, deafblind or visually impaired with additional disabilities, as well as educators, professionals and caregivers. Our reach extends across the nation and throughout the world. The school is an accredited member of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. It is licensed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and by the Department of Early Education and Care. Perkins does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national or ethnic origin, disability, age or sexual orientation.
News briefs

KIM CHARLSON HONORED FOR EXCELLENCE IN LIBRARY SERVICES

Kim Charlson, executive director of the Perkins Library and among the first Master’s level librarians in the U.S., has been named the 2019 recipient of the prestigious Francis Joseph Campbell Award for excellence in library services. A longtime Perkins leader, Charlson was chosen for her “passion of bringing the joy of reading to all,” largely through advocating for literacy-centric legislation. “Kim is truly a leader,” the organization said. “[She’s] being honored for her strong commitment to inclusion and empowerment.”

PERKINS DEAFBLIND STUDENT BEGINS MUSICAL RESIDENCY

Colby Randall, a student in the Deafblind Program, is a familiar musical presence at Perkins, regularly playing keyboard around campus. Now, he’s ready for a new stage. This fall, Colby will begin a pair of concert series at Franciscan Children’s and Maplewood at Weston, a nearby senior living community, giving him a new way to entertain and also sharpen different life skills. Aligning with his future musical aspirations, the partnership is also expected to continue after graduation next year. Says teacher Wendy Bridgeo, “He’s a very determined young man and musician.”

100 YEARS OF TEACHERS TRAINING TEACHERS

For the last century, Perkins has opened its campus to special educators from all around the world, equipping hundreds of teachers with the skill set they need to teach the most vulnerable children in their home countries. Today, alumni of our Educational Leadership Program work in more than 60 countries, reaching tens of thousands of children and families every day. Now, we’re gearing up for another 100 years of sharing our unparalleled expertise with all the world’s teachers.

PERKINS WELCOMES NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PERKINS INTERNATIONAL

After a nationwide search, Perkins has hired Katherine Holland as its new Executive Director for Perkins International. Katie comes to Perkins from Women Deliver, a global advocacy organization that champions gender equality and the health and rights of girls and women. She brings with her over 15 years of experience in designing sustainable programs and motivating teams to achieve ambitious goals.
TRANSITION is a student-led journey

What will life be like after Perkins?
Students of all ages work to develop important skills and define for themselves what they want from life after Perkins.

BY DAVID EISENBERG

For the last two years, Maggie, 18, has been volunteering at a nearby pet shelter, work befitting her love of animals.

While on the clock, she tends to general housekeeping needs, provides basic pet care and helps out wherever else she might be needed.

This isn’t just any volunteer job, though.

For Maggie, a student in the Secondary Program who has cortical/cerebral visual impairment and communicates both verbally and with the aid of an iPad, working at the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA) is a critical part of building her future. In a way that is uniquely Perkins, Maggie’s volunteer work is used to prepare her—and similarly her peers—for life after school.

“Through transitional programming, students gain competence; they become self-assured. They learn independent living skills and how they can be productive and maximize their potential,” says Denise Fitzgerald, director of transition services. “We’re not just preparing them to leave school. We want to send them off on an adventure they helped create for themselves.”

Every individual destination is different, too — informed by both the student’s needs and their own wishes, outlined in “vision statements” they revisit and update periodically. Johnny, for instance, is a former student who now operates a hot dog cart at Pawtucket Red Sox games, a path he and his parents forged together. Iris works at a tea shop in Great Barrington at the Cadmus Lifeshare Community, an association that supports independent living for people with disabilities. And Colby, featured on p.1, is pursuing his musical passions with a pair of performance residencies at a nearby hospital and senior living community.

As a Perkins student, Maggie’s educational curriculum has been bolstered with a focus on transitional skill building.

Equipping students with technology skills is a critical part of the transition curriculum.
Indeed, no matter the student and no matter their needs, there is ample opportunity to pursue the right track for life after Perkins.

Some students aim to go off to college, and while at Perkins visit different campuses, learn how to navigate disability service offices and procure books and other accessible learning materials. Still others with more medically complex needs might become involved programs that give them the chance to engage with their community recreationally in ways that match their interests.

Regardless of the destination, the goal is to ensure the work done on campus supports every individual student’s aspirations. With your generosity and support, Perkins is able to prepare every student for adult life, equipping them with the skills they need to pursue both their vocational and recreational passions.

That much is clear back at the MSPCA, where Maggie volunteers. She worked for years with staff in the Lower School and Secondary Program to bolster her educational curriculum with a specialized transitional focus.

"Working at Perkins over the years, particularly in the cafe, learning her routes around campus to get there, that really helped prime her for an off-campus position," says Matt Carey, her job coach. "She loves to work and she loves to help people and animals."

As for where Maggie’s headed after she graduates, she’s still thinking about it, as she finds her personal passions while developing new skills. Wherever it is, though, she’ll be more than ready for it.

Students work on transition skills on campus and out in the community.

PROFILE

Mona and AJ Jomaa

Mona and AJ are the parents of a former student and members of the Corporation. They have been involved with Perkins for nearly 20 years.

Why do you support the organization?

Perkins has been a life-changing experience for our family, both academically and personally. We’ve seen the impact of our support firsthand. Our son Omar attended Perkins, starting in 2000 when he was five years old. He graduated in 2017. He flourished at all levels on campus, in equal parts due to his willingness, his abilities and the support he received from Perkins’ staff. We love that Perkins is not just one thing. It’s a combination of so many programs, people and experiences that all together unlock every student’s potential.

Why do you think transitional programs like College Success and Career Launch are so important?

We’re very excited about these new transitional programs that prepare students for life after school. There is much to be done because the unemployment rate in the visually impaired community is roughly 70 percent right now. That is unacceptable. Young adults need transitional programs to practice applying the skills they learned in school to higher education, the workplace or independent living to start a meaningful and full life.

What excites you most about the future of Perkins?

Perkins is a very fluid and adaptive organization, implementing new technologies and exposing their students to new possibilities. Perkins has expanded, sharing their knowledge and experience locally, nationally and internationally. We hope the organization keeps progressing that way.
For Perkins’ youngest, every moment is a learning opportunity

Individualized support empowers students in the Early Learning Center and Lower School.

BY DAVID EISENBERG

On the surface, the Early Learning Center (ELC) and Lower School can be described as the place where Perkins educates preschool, elementary and middle school-aged students.

But what does that mean for a student body largely comprised of learners with different combinations of visual and other disabilities? Thanks to your support, it means every student’s education is both highly intentional and specifically tailored to most effectively benefit each child.

“Perkins’ approach to learning looks different for everyone,” says Alexandra LaVoie, assistant education director. “The commonality is that we take each moment with every student as a learning opportunity.”

Take Gareth for instance. In addition to visual impairment, he has cerebral palsy, which limits him to using only one hand.

Prior to arriving at Perkins, Gareth’s physical limitations stood in the way of him reaching his full potential, as he couldn’t take notes or do written homework on his own. At Perkins, though, he was equipped with a BrailleNote computer, a portable, easy-to-use device that enables him to read, write, take notes and do his homework independently.

This was transformational, according to his father, Chris.

“I wish Gareth had access to this kind of technology earlier in his schooling,” he says.

Meanwhile, teachers are also helping him develop daily living skills. Gareth has a paid job on campus collecting attendance sheets, helping him learn personal responsibility and money management skills, while lessons in things like weekly outfit planning encourage the development of day-to-day independence.

Gareth is just one of the many students in the ELC and Lower School who benefit from the inclusion of life skills within their academic program. With your generous support we’ll continue to empower and prepare the youngest on campus to be as independent as they can possibly be.

GIVE MONTHLY AND RECEIVE YOUR FREE MUG

Join a community dedicated to educating and empowering people who are blind, deafblind or visually impaired. By giving monthly, you help make it possible for us to serve children and young adults, both locally and globally. Make a difference year-round: Start your monthly gift of $10 a month today, and receive a Perkins stainless steel travel mug! Visit Perkins.org/Monthly to learn more.
Brightening futures for young adults

Life after graduation can be daunting when blind, but it doesn’t have to be.

BY NICOLE GARDNER AND LESLIE THATCHER

An estimated six of every 10 enrolled college students with visual impairment never obtain a college degree. Studies show only one-third of working-age adults who are blind or visually impaired are employed. Clearly more needs to be done to ensure Perkins’ students — and their peers from other learning environments — go on to lead productive and fulfilling lives.

As educators, we know the roots of the problem are significant and widespread, and require ongoing thought leadership from Perkins and other organizations to resolve. While we work towards that larger goal, Perkins is helping students reach their personal goals, be those college or career.

Smart, ambitious students who are blind or visually impaired are going to college without having been taught the technological literacy, resilience, self-advocacy, academic skills and self-awareness they need to successfully navigate the demands of college life.

Young adults who are blind or visually impaired may go into job interviews without knowing what to wear, or even the essential skills required for a job, such as how to take notes on a phone call, what is meant by a qualified sales lead or how to defuse a tense situation with a customer. If they do get hired, they’re often unable to self-advocate for the accommodations they need to be successful.

Our College Success and Career Launch programs work to address these challenges. They support young adults transitioning to the next phase of their lives through targeted instruction, peer interaction, exposure to college and work environments and the chance to develop additional skills and self-awareness.

College Success is a nine-month residential program where young adults who are blind or visually impaired learn skills necessary for independence in college and beyond, including technology skills, orientation and mobility, independent living, and essential academic skills such as time management, critical reading and note taking, while living with peers working on the same skills. Students take college classes and job shadow as they employ these skills.

Career Launch trains high school or college graduates who are visually-impaired or blind in the skills necessary to land their first career-oriented job. The program focuses on customer engagement roles, which are in demand across all sectors of the economy in both rural and urban locales. Participants learn business skills such as problem-solving, end-to-end ownership of tasks and making personal connections with customers, as well as essential technical skills: Microsoft Office, customer relationship management software and assistive technology. The two-month training program is followed by a two month internship, and 12 months of career services support.

Throughout its history, Perkins has prided itself on anticipating the needs of the students we serve. Our ultimate objective is to enable our graduates and other young adults who are blind or visually impaired to live fulfilled lives on whatever path they choose.
LET US KNOW YOUR PREFERENCES

Thank you for supporting Perkins School for the Blind. Did you know this publication is also available by email? Let us know your contact preferences at Perkins.org/Preferences or call us at 617-972-7328.

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