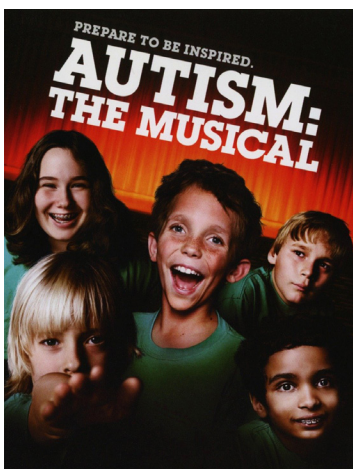


# MEET **ADAM MANDELLA WALDEN**

## Gifted Cello Player Succeeds with his College Navigator

In late 2017, Easterseals Massachusetts was just about to launch a brand new innovative program called “College Navigator” when they received a call from Easterseals California and Roseanne Walden, Adam’s mother. Roseanne was in great need of an agency providing services specifically for students in higher education—a growing and critical unmet need especially for a state famous for higher education.

Adam is a California resident currently in his sophomore year at esteemed Berklee College of Music in Boston studying the cello. Adam is not only a wonderful cellist; he is also one of the actors who is featured in the HBO documentary, *Autism: The Musical!*



Adam was receiving services from Easterseals California through high school as an adolescent with moderate/severe autism, but Adam’s mother knew these types of guaranteed supports didn’t exist in the college setting. The timing of the request was truly serendipitous as Easterseals

Massachusetts was ambitiously rolling out a program for what they knew was a critical unmet need.

After all, **1 in 59 children** are diagnosed with **ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)**. And, it’s estimated that people with ASD comprise less than 1% of college enrollment with an 80% incompleteness rate.

Easterseals MA staff met Adam his freshman year as spring semester was about to start. Adam was quickly introduced to his “College Navigator,” a specialized aide, to not only develop a trusting relationship with Adam, but to develop a personalized action plan to highlight Adam’s goals.

Adam’s College Navigator assists him in different areas such as preparing for class, in-class redirection and refocusing, self-advocacy, public transit and spatial awareness in the community, and gentle guidance through social conversations with peers and professors. It’s important to remember how overwhelming the transition to a large campus environment in a major city can be for any teenager, let alone someone with severe autism who is trying to mitigate perpetual communication deficits. *“I was scared to death and did not know if Adam would be able to stay in college. Easterseals staff kept me focused on improving the process for Adam and told me to trust that*

**Easterseals College Navigator program identifies barriers, advocates for needs, and creates a supportive environment that will improve outcomes for students with disabilities completing their secondary education.**