



High School vs. College – Accommodations and Accessibility

As you make the transition from high school to college, you will find the world of services and accommodations for students with disabilities are different due to the governing laws pertaining to education. The assurance of equal access in college is very different from the goal of promoting a student's success in elementary and secondary education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) governs special education services in elementary and secondary education. Students with disabilities in elementary, middle, and high schools may have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a Section 504 Plan. Federal funds are provided to schools to implement a student's IEP. The purpose of an IEP or a 504 Plan is to provide whatever supports are deemed necessary to help a student succeed in the least restrictive environment. Students have varying degrees of involvement in their own special education services because schools (not students) are responsible for identifying and addressing the needs of students with disabilities under IDEA.

At the college level, a new combination of laws applies to students with disabilities: the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and portions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (504). Under these laws, otherwise qualified students with disabilities are protected from discrimination by guarantees of equal access to educational environments and learning situations.

The main differences that the student will see is that student go from an environment that is structured to “ensure student success” (high school) to one that is designed to “allow equal access” (college). **The success of the student is up to the student in the college setting. The college must ensure access, NOT success.**

Postsecondary institutions are required to:

- Make all programs and services physically accessible to all students
- Provide auxiliary aids, note takers, and appropriate equipment to ensure the participation of students with disabilities in college classes and activities
- Accommodate the academic participation of qualified students with disabilities in college classes and activities

Postsecondary institutions are not required to:

- Provide specific auxiliary aids as long as the college provides a method of assistance that allows equal opportunity
- Provide academic modifications if these modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of the course or program or place undue burden on the institution
- Lower admission criteria for applicants with disabilities
- Diagnose a disability or conduct testing and assessment of learning difficulties, physical, or mental impairments
- Provide personal attendants
- Provide personal or private tutors
- Prepare “Individualized Education Programs” (IEP’s)



	High School	College
Applicable Laws	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDEA • Section 504 (D) • Rehabilitation Act 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADA (ADAAA) • Section 504 (E) • Rehabilitation Act
Required Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual Education Plan (IEP) created by the school • School provides evaluation at no cost to the student • School conducts evaluations at prescribed intervals • The school must coordinate the provision of all services, monitor progress, and evaluate results • The school must provide a free and appropriate education including modified program and appropriate related services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Varies depending on the disability • IEP and 504 Plans are not sufficient; must include the testing on which the requested accommodations are based • Student responsible for obtaining evaluation. • Student generally is not required to be re-tested after initial documentation approval unless additional accommodations warrant more documentation • The student must request specific accommodations and provide supporting evidence through documentation
Student Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student is identified and supported by parents and teachers • Primary responsibility for accommodations belongs to the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student must self-identify with the disability office • Primary responsibility for accommodations belongs to the student • The student must act as independent adults to activate and obtain accommodations and structure weekly schedules
Parent Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent has access to student's records and participates in accommodation process • Parent advocates for the student • Parents must ensure that their child attends school until the age of 16 • Periodic progress reports are given to parents • Teachers are free to approach parents without consent from student to discuss student's progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents are not required to send child to college • No progress reports will be given to parents • Parent does not have access to disability-related records unless student provides written consent • Student advocates for self • The student is considered an adult with privacy and confidentiality protections. Staff cannot talk with parents or legal guardians about the student's academic records



	High School	College
Curriculum and Instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many schools modify curriculum and/or alter the pace of assignments • Use multi-sensory approach • Weekly testing, mid-term, final, and graded assignments • Class attendance is mandatory and monitored carefully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faculty are not required to modify the curriculum in their course. • The college is not required to lower or place in effect substantial modifications to essential requirements • Reasonable accommodations may be made to provide equal access and participation • Student tends to rely on lecture. May or may not use multi-sensory approach • Student is responsible for attending class
Assignments and Grades	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some schools modify tests • Grades may be modified based on the quality of the curriculum • Teachers remind students of assignment due dates • Teachers many times will provide extra credit assignments to help students raise their grades • Teachers will provide students with missed information when they are absent • Teachers present information to help the student understand the textbook 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grades reflect the work submitted • Students are expected to follow the instructors attendance policy as stated in the syllabus • Students are responsible to ask the instructor for help • Students are responsible for keeping track of their projects, assignments, and tests dates • Students must approach their instructors for information they missed when absent • Extra credit assignments are not usually given • Make up tests may not be an option • Instructors may not follow the textbook, but lectures enhance the topic
Accommodations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services include individually designed instruction, modifications, and accommodations based on the IEP • Modifications that change course outcomes may be offered based on the IEP • Appropriate accommodations are determined by the student's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable accommodations may be made to provide equal access and participation • The college is not required to lower or effect substantial modifications to essential requirements • Appropriate accommodations must be determined based on the student's disability documentation, and individual need



Significant Federal Legislation	
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	IDEA is a federal law that governs special education delivery for children ages 3-21 (or until high school graduation). An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is developed by the educational team for each child and indicates how a child's education will be individualized to best serve him or her. The focus of IDEA is to ensure that students are successful in the K-12 system.
Section 504	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a law that protects students from discrimination based on their disabilities. Subpart D of the act applies to grades K-12, and Subpart E applies to postsecondary institutions. A 504 Plan is developed when a K-12 student needs certain accommodations and modifications to either the physical space in the school or the learning environment. However, a 504 Plan indicates that there is no need for special education (if there were a need for special education, the student would have been given an IEP as discussed above in the IDEA section). It is very important to understand that IEPs and 504 Plans do not suffice as adequate documentation to accompany a student to a postsecondary institution as they are insufficient as the sole forms of documentation of a disability since both are required under laws that do not apply once the student attends college. Although students are covered under Section 504 once they get to college, it is a different subpart, as noted above. IEPs and 504 Plans are sometimes helpful to colleges in determining appropriate reasonable accommodations to provide a history for the student.
Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)	The ADA is a federal civil rights law designed to provide equal opportunity for people with disabilities. While legislation for K-12 persons with disabilities is focused on student success , the ADA, as it applies to the college environment, is focused on making sure that students with disabilities have access to the various programs, services and activities of the university. That is not to say that colleges are not interested in student success, and most provide a wide array of academic support services that are designed to help all students perform at their highest level. It does mean that the federal laws that may have required certain accommodations in K-12 are different than those for colleges and universities. The ADA ensures equal access and opportunity and also protects persons with disabilities from discrimination. While the ADA does require colleges to make reasonable accommodations to allow a student to fully demonstrate his or her level of learning and to fully participate in the college experience both in and outside of the classroom, the ADA does not require colleges to provide special educational services, therapies or curriculum modifications that fundamentally alter the nature of the academic course or the major program of study.
Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA)	The ADAAA retains the ADA's basic definition of "disability" as an impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, having a record of such an impairment or being regarded as having such an impairment. However, the ADAAA expands the definition of "major life activities" by including two non-exhaustive lists: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Activities that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has recognized (such as caring for oneself, performing manual tasks, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning and working) – plus other activities that include eating, sleeping, lifting, bending, reading, concentrating, thinking and communicating • Major bodily functions, such as the immune system and normal growth, and digestive, bowel, bladder, neurological, brain, respiratory, circulatory, endocrine and reproductive function