

Transitioning from High School to College for Students with Disabilities

There are many differences between high school and college. In college, the student is responsible for their own self-management and advocacy. Additionally, the laws that affect students with disabilities are different. Below is a chart that highlights the differences in services for students with disabilities between high school and college.

Secondary Education (High School)	Postsecondary Education (College)
What is the law?	
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, particular references in Subpart E (504)
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IDEA: To provide a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment to eligible students with disabilities, including special education and relative services.	504/ADA: To ensure that no otherwise qualified person with a disability will be denied access to, or the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination by any program or activity provided by any public institution or entity.
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Who is covered under the law?	
All infants, children and youth requiring special education services, until age 21 or graduation from high school.	All qualified persons with disabilities who meet the entry criteria of the college or program and who can document the existence of a disability as defined by the ADA.
What is a disability?	
A list of disabilities is provided in IDEA, and includes specific learning disabilities. 504/ADA has no such list, but considers a disability to be any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, has a record of such impairment, or is regarded as having an impairment.	Any physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, having a record of such an impairment, or being regarded as having an impairment (504/ADA); ADA also includes HIV status and contagious and non-contagious diseases.
Who is responsible for identifying and documenting need?	
School districts are responsible for identifying, evaluating, and planning educational services at no expense to parent or individual.	Students are responsible for self-identification and for obtaining disability documentation from a professional who is qualified to assess their particular disability; the student, not the institution, must assume the cost of evaluation.
Who is responsible for enforcing the law?	
IDEA is basically a funding statute, enforced by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services in the U.S. Department of Education.	ADA/504 are civil rights statutes, enforced by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), U.S. Department of Justice, and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).
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Who is responsible for initiating service delivery?	
School districts are responsible for identifying students with disabilities and providing special instruction, individualized educational plans, and/or accommodations.	Students are responsible for notifying Access Center staff of their disability and of their need for accommodations. Accommodations are provided on a per semester basis in order to ensure that the institution's programs and activities are accessible to all students.