

Disability Office for Support Services

Disability Services for Students

A Point-by-Point Comparison of the Ways Services Differ Between High School and College

High School	College
The K-12 educational system is governed by two laws that deal with students with disabilities – the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504.	Institutions of Higher Education are governed by two laws that deal with students with disabilities – the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.
Under IDEA, children with disabilities are entitled to a “Free and Appropriate Public Education.”	Equal access to education is the governing principle – no one is entitled to anything, but rather students have civil rights and they must advocate for themselves in order to enjoy those rights.
Section 504 in the public schools includes “Free and Appropriate Public Education” language, and accommodations include services to assure a student’s success.	Section 504 upholds the institution’s right to maintain academic standards, and no accommodations may be permitted to reduce that standard for any student. Thus, there is no “free” education, and accommodations must be reasonable and assure a student’s access, not success.
Public schools receive federal funding to provide remedial and special education services.	Colleges are required to provide reasonable accommodations, but receive no additional financial support to provide support services or auxiliary aids.
Plans, either the Individual Education Plan or a 504 Plan, drive all services and accommodations. These plans involve all teachers, counselors, and absolutely require a parent’s signature. The student’s participation in the planning is optional.	There is an Accommodation Plan, but instructors are only contacted with student’s permission. Parents are not involved without the student’s permission. The student is responsible for advocating for the accommodations needed.
“Placement” is determined by the student’s “team” and outlined in the plan. It must, by law, be in the least restrictive environment.	Placement integration is assumed. Colleges adjust the environment through accommodations but don’t provide alternative environments (e.g. a resource room) for students.
Students are qualified for public education simply by being of the appropriate age and because they have a disability.	“Otherwise qualified” in the legislation that governs colleges, means that the student must meet all entrance and academic requirements with or without reasonable accommodations.
Everybody knew about a student’s placement and practically everyone signed the plan. Each teacher would know about a student even before he or she entered the classroom and had a good idea what the student’s needs were.	Disability Services never contacts a professor without express permission from the student. Thus, the student must initiate all actions regarding accommodations with each professor, for each course, every semester. In addition, students have the civil right to refuse accommodations they don’t need or want; and if they do not request an accommodation, it is assumed they do not want it.
Public schools, for the most part, are responsible for appropriate assessment of a student’s disability.	Colleges do not have to provide assessment for disabilities, but can expect that the student will provide documentation of their disability that meets accepted guidelines.
The school, while the student is in school, provides assessment, physical or other therapy, or personal care.	The student is responsible for personal services (arranging and paying for) – personal care, medical and related requirements, just as would if they were living independently and not attending school.
Teachers may be expected to learn all they can about the disability of a student in one of their classes.	Professors need know only that which applies to the accommodations the student requests.