

Differences Between High School Accommodations and College Accommodations

Legal framework

- **High school:** Accommodations are provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. These laws mandate that public schools provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for students with qualifying disabilities, often through an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or a 504 Plan.
- **College:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act protect students from discrimination. However, the rules are different. An IEP or high school 504 Plan does not transfer to college, and there is no legal requirement for the college to provide the same services.

Student responsibility and advocacy

- **High school:** School staff, including teachers, counselors, and special education staff, take the lead in identifying students who need help and providing support. Parents are also heavily involved in the process.
- **College:** The burden of advocacy falls on the student. Students must self-identify to the university's disability services office and request accommodations. They are responsible for understanding their disability and articulating their own needs.

Documentation and evaluation

- **High school:** The school district is responsible for identifying a disability, determining eligibility for services, and providing evaluations at no cost.
- **College:** Students must provide current, relevant documentation of their disability from an outside professional, and they are responsible for the cost of any necessary evaluations. The documentation must explain the functional limitations caused by the disability and the need for specific accommodations.

Academic and course modifications

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- **High school:** Curriculum and assignments may be modified to ensure a student's success, and teachers and parents may regularly remind students about assignments and deadlines.
- **College:** Professors are not required to fundamentally alter the content or standards of a course. Accommodations are designed to provide equal access, such as extended time on tests or access to assistive technology, not to change the learning objectives.

Parental involvement

- **High school:** Parents often have frequent contact with teachers and staff and are involved in planning meetings.
- **College:** Due to federal privacy laws (FERPA), college faculty and staff cannot share student information with parents without the student's written consent. Parents generally have no direct contact with instructors.

Personal care and scheduling

- **High school:** School districts may provide personal aides or other services based on a student's demonstrated need. Schedules are highly structured and monitored.
- **College:** The university is not responsible for providing personal aides or services. Students have much more unstructured time and must manage their own schedules, studying, and homework.