

# Differences Between High School and College

For many students and their families, it can be difficult to make the transition from the laws and procedures in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to the approaches and legal protections that apply to college students. In K-12 education, special education and IDEA outline how educational supports are provided. Colleges and universities are not subject to those laws and practices. In the postsecondary world, the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 form the legal foundation for protections to individuals with disabilities. These regulations are civil rights protections, not entitlement programs, and so are very different in approach. This distinction forms the basis for the legal and procedural differences that every college student and their parents need to understand.

Beyond the legal differences are the developmental and philosophical differences that are just as important to understand. College students are adults and the expectations of them differ dramatically from what was asked in high school. Parents not only are not expected to advocate directly for the student, they may be actively discouraged from doing so. That is a big adjustment for the family, and an empathetic professional can assist them to maneuver these difficult changes to their role in their adult child's life.

As a professional working with families and students who are pursuing a college education, it is important to be able to clearly articulate the significant differences that exist in college and be able to support students and families to negotiate effectively in the new world of postsecondary education.

This chart highlights some of the important differences between high school and college. It may help you to identify areas of needed growth for the student as well as to support a change in approach for the parents.

<b>Differences in LEGAL PROTECTIONS</b>	
<b>High School:</b>	<b>College:</b>
The law is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	Laws are Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
IDEA is about success.	ADA is about access.
Education is a RIGHT and must be accessible to you.	Education is NOT a right. Students must apply to attend.
Core modifications of classes and materials are required.	NO modifications are required- only accommodations.
School district develops Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and must follow this legal document in the provision of educational services.	Student must identify needs and ask for services. NO IEP exists and is not considered legal documentation.

<b>Differences in ADVOCACY AND ACCESS</b>	
<b>High School:</b>	<b>College:</b>
Student is helped by parents and teachers, even without asking directly.	Student must request accommodations from Disability Services Office.
School is responsible for arranging for accommodations and modifications	Student must self-advocate and arrange for accommodations.
Parent has access to student records.	Parent has no access to student records without student's written consent.
Parent advocates for student.	Student advocates for self.
Teachers meet regularly with parents to discuss their child's educational progress.	College faculty members seldom, if ever, interact with parents and expect the students to address issues with them directly.
Students need parent's permission to participate in most activities.	Student is adult and gives own permission.

<b>Differences in COSTS</b>	
<b>High School:</b>	<b>College:</b>
High school is free.	Student must pay for college through financial aid and other arrangements.