

College and the Student with Disabilities

Understanding Your Student's Rights in Higher Education

Now that you have finally mastered the ins and outs of your student's rights as promised by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), if your high school student is planning for college, then it is time to begin schooling yourself on the upcoming changes that higher education offers.

Until your student is 21 years of age or earns a high school diploma, he is protected under IDEA. Once he enters college and adulthood, it all changes. There are still protections guaranteeing his rights, of course, but the emphasis is very different. College students with disabilities are protected under the American Disabilities Act (ADA), and there are some key differences that parents should understand:

- The primary advocate in high school is the parent; under ADA the parent has limited access to information, and the student is the primary advocate. In addition, the Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) prohibits colleges from discussing a student's grades and anything related to a disability with a parent without written permission from the student.
- Students are typically referred for special services in elementary and high school, but students themselves must request accommodations in higher education.
- High schools are responsible for providing funding for special services under the ADA; in college, the student is responsible for all required fees.
- An Independent Education Plan (IEP) in high school will include a plan and a means of monitoring the success of accommodations. In contrast, during college, there is no IEP – students will be selecting their own courses and are responsible for monitoring their own success.
- The counseling department at your student's high school likely managed the accommodations of your student's disability. In college, however, your student will be provided services through the disabilities office.

As you and your student begin to explore colleges, be sure to talk with the disabilities office at each school and research the services offered. You will find that they can vary widely from one school to the next. Some will adhere to the strict requirements set forth in the ADA and others go far beyond and really embrace the student with disabilities. Assist your student in preparing a statement of need and becoming comfortable discussing what has been successful in the past in order to plan for success in the future!

The author, Lynette Mathews, is a freelance writer and member of the Education Writers Association. She is the director of The College Planning Center, a resource for students and parents. © 2019

Notes:

