

Differences between High School and College?

Legal Comparisons

Topics	Public School System (K-12)	College or University
What law tells the school system what to do for students?	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures free and appropriate public education for children with disabilities in the K-12 educational system. The ADA and Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act also apply.	Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act protect college students with disabilities from discrimination by providing equal access to programs and services.
Who is this law for?	Students whose disabilities impact their ability to do well in school.	Any student with a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.
Who is responsible for helping students with disabilities?	Parents and teachers identify students needing assistance. Schools pay for needed accommodations and testing.	Students must self-identify as needing assistance due to a disability. Institutions are responsible for providing equal access.
What type of plan is made for a student who has a disability that impacts their performance?	Individual education plans are developed and updated throughout the student's school years.	Reasonable accommodations are determined through an interactive process between the student and the institution. Accommodations generally remain in place while the student is enrolled unless a change is requested.

Accommodation Process

Topic	Public School System (K-12)	College or University
Who starts the modifications or accommodations?	Once a disability is documented, services are provided to the student. The school is ultimately responsible for identifying a student's educational needs.	Once accommodations are approved, students are responsible for requesting the accommodations each time they are needed while following established processes.
Does a student's family know about the accommodations?	Until the child reaches age of majority, families must be invited to attend the IEP meeting to discuss support for their child.	Parents are not notified of services unless the student grants written permission that information may be released.
Who is responsible for helping the student obtain what they need in school?	Teachers, Principals, and other school staff.	Students must advocate for themselves and request what they need. Institutions must provide any approved accommodations thereafter.
Are assignments changed?	Assignments and tests may be changed as a modification. A student may have a different standard of course mastery.	Students have the same assignments and generally take the same exams as their peers unless a make-up is required.

Academic Expectations

Topics	Public School System (K-12)	College or University
How much of a student's time is spent in the classroom?	Approximately 30 hours per week is spent in class. The students' time is monitored and structured.	Approximately 12 to 15 hours per week is spent in class. An additional 2 to 3 times may be spent studying outside of class. Students are responsible for managing their own time.
Can a student make up work and obtain class notes when they miss class?	Teachers are required to provide students with missed assignments and notes.	Generally, course materials are posted in the online learning management system utilized by the institution. If not, students are expected to ask for materials from missed classes from their instructor and notes from their peers. Assignments and exams are allowed to be made up according to the professor's course policy as established in the syllabus. Accommodations may be provided for make-up exams.
Do students have to read the textbook?	Students are usually assigned short and frequent readings. Most high school teachers will teach and review the reading in class. Students are told what they need to know.	Generally, students are assigned readings from the textbook. They are expected to read and comprehend it on their own time. Most of the materials are generally covered in the lecture; so, it is important to take good notes from the textbook and during the lecture.
Will there be homework assignments?	Homework may be frequent, and assignments are usually checked, or turned in. Students are reminded if assignments are missing.	Course assignments are frequent in higher education and students are expected to complete them by the established deadline. Reminders are sometimes provided.
What if I don't understand what my teacher is teaching me?	Teachers may approach you if they believe you need help, or you "appear" to look confused.	Professors expect you to come to them if you need assistance. They usually have office hours each week and students are welcome to stop by for assistance or request an appointment. This information is generally available on the course syllabus.
How often are students tested on the material?	Testing is frequent and covers small amounts of material.	Testing is usually infrequent and may cover large amounts of material. A class may have only 2 to 3 tests in a semester.