

Differences between IDEA IEPs, 504 Plans, and College Accommodations

Rochester College Accommodation Office

IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is a federal law that governs any special education service or policy for children ages 3 to graduation (or until age 21 if a student remains in high school until then). Each IEP (Individualized Education Plan) is developed by an *educational team* for that specific child and stipulates how that child's education will be individualized in order for the child to learn. The IDEA is stylized so the child has the best opportunity to succeed. The child may be allowed modifications in the curriculum, the delivery, testing, and in the grading process in order to achieve some success in school. Therefore, a child with an IEP may make an A in a course if he/she completes 70% of coursework, rather than 100%, or the child may be allowed the modification of having one correct answer and one incorrect answer to choose from on a test rather than one correct answer and 3 incorrect answers that the rest of the class has.

Section 504: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects individuals from discrimination based on their disabilities. This Act governs any public school or college that accepts any type of federal financial assistance; however, the Act itself provides no funding for the schools or colleges affected by its mandates. The seven-part Act is divided into Sections A-G. Subpart D applies to K-12 schools and Subpart E applies to postsecondary institutions. Subpart E mandates that qualified postsecondary students with disabilities be offered the opportunity to complete a degree with all other non-disabled students.

The ADA: The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 is a federal civil rights law structured to provide equal opportunities for all people with disabilities. The ADA requires equal access and protects individuals from discrimination based on their disabilities. The ADA trumps all other acts regarding students in the postsecondary world.

Differences Explained: In high school, a student often has a "504 plan" that suffices for services. Most of the time, the high school does NOT test the student who falls under 504, but offers modifications to help the student succeed. The special education student, in contrast, MUST be regularly tested and/or reevaluated in order to remain in the special education program. The problem of adequate and comprehensive documentation comes into play when the 504 student goes to college. In most cases, the screening instruments often used for developing a 504 plan are insufficient as documentation for college accommodations. The student goes from an environment that is structured to *ensure student success* to one that is designed to *allow equal access*. The success of the student is up to the student in the college setting. The college must ensure access, NOT success.

| Process | Kindergarten through High School | College |
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| Identification | Schools responsible for identifying students. | Students must self-identify. |
| Documentation | Schools responsible for testing students. | Students must pay for their testing, if needed. |
| Services | Schools responsible for any needed services. School must provide whatever services will help student succeed in class, testing, and any school-sponsored activity. School must provide individualized tutoring. | Students must seek out services. Student allowed only certain accommodations in college classroom and testing. Students must seek out tutoring, if needed, and must pay for it if college does not provide tutoring for non-disabled students. Individualized instruction is not guaranteed. |
| Communication | Schools must communicate with parents at regular intervals regarding the student's progress. | College is not allowed to contact parents without student's permission. |
| Accommodation Arrangements | Schools must develop formal plan and it is the school's responsibility to track student. | Student must ask for and qualify for services each semester, and the student is responsible for much of the accommodation process (i.e., discussing accommodations with professors and notifying office of test dates, etc.). |
| Accommodation Differences | Reduced assignments, (requiring student to submit less work than others), extended time on assignments, grading changes (counting daily work equal with semester tests), test format changes (take away 2 wrong answers and leave one right and one wrong answer), repeated chances to make a passing grade. | No reduced assignments, extended time on assignments is very rare, no grading changes, no test format changes other than providing equal access (such as providing extended time or providing a test in large print |

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| | | or Braille), no extra attempts at tests unless promised accommodations were not provided during the first attempt. |
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Frequently Asked Questions for College Accommodations

Who do I ask for accommodations?

Every college is required to have an office or an individual responsible for ensuring equal access for students with disabilities. At Rochester College, the Accommodation Office is through the Academic Center for Excellence. You can find more information about accommodations at www.rc.edu/accommodations.

When should I submit my documentation?

Students should submit documentation as soon as possible to ensure that expensive or difficult-to-arrange accommodations are ready by the first day of class. For example, if Brailled texts are required, documentation and a list of required books should be submitted at least a couple of months prior to these needed services to ensure adequate time to have the textbooks Brailled since many colleges outsource this service and it is a very time-consuming process.

Is it ever too late to request accommodations?

Students may submit documentation and provide accommodations at any point during the semester, but any grades already in place or tests taken BEFORE accommodations were granted will not be changed or repeated with accommodations. Not all accommodations can be immediately implemented, and no grades given during the implementation period will be changed.

Do I have to pay for accommodations at the college?

Students are not charged for academic accommodations which are determined by the college to be necessary to ensure equal access for a student with disabilities.

Do I have to use all of my accommodations in every class?

No; a student has the right to never mention his/her disability to a professor and to never have the Accommodation Officer send an accommodation memo to that teacher, or to any teacher, if so desired. However, the student may not make up work or tests with accommodations at a later date if the student chooses not to have the accommodation memo sent and/or discuss the implementation of their accommodations with their professor(s) at the beginning of the semester. Ideally, a student should discuss the accommodations to be implemented in class with the professor at least one week prior to any test for which accommodations are desired.

Why is there a difference between the services I received before and those received at Rochester College?

College accommodations usually differ considerably from high school modifications. Colleges are not required by law to provide modified curriculum, different tests, reduced assignments, or personal assistance of any sort. Accommodations may also differ between colleges. There are many reasons for denial of accommodations received at a previous college: (1) the documentation does not meet the college's guidelines, (2) the documentation does not support the requested accommodation, (3) the accommodation would fundamentally alter the activity, course, or program, (4) the accommodation is in conflict with the academic policies of the college, (5) providing the accommodation would pose a direct threat to the student or others, or (6) providing the accommodation would constitute an undue financial or administrative burden to the college.

Who informs my instructors about my accommodations?

The Accommodation Officer sends out a memo to a qualified student's professors and academic advisor; the student is copied on this electronic communication. Students are then responsible for discussing the sent accommodation memo with the instructors so that the accommodations can be successfully implemented in each course. Students must renew their accommodations every semester. Students are responsible for arranging all tests and tutoring appointments with the Academic Testing Center (ATC) and Academic Center for Excellence (ACE) respectively; tutoring appointments and tests must be scheduled in a timely manner.

Can't I request an accommodation directly from my instructor?

No; instructors have no obligation to provide any accommodations to a student without official accommodations issued from the Accommodation Office. All accommodations must be approved by the Accommodation Officer before the instructor is obligated to provide any accommodations to a student.

What if I need help with transportation, medical services, psychological services, or personal hygiene services?

Colleges are not responsible for providing any services of a personal nature, including transportation (unless transportation is being provided for all students, as in the case of a field trip or athletics). Students must arrange all services themselves, or request assistance from an outside agency.

What if my disability requires a waiver of a course in my program?

Most colleges do not waive essential courses in a student's curriculum. If the course is part of the *Core Curriculum* required by the college's state, the course will most likely NOT be waived.