AUTISM TRAINING
and Technical Assistance Project

SUPPORT CHANGES: FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

Following the overall increase in the prevalence rate of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), the number of students seeking admission to college is also increasing. Obtaining accommodations in higher education, whether it is a four-year college, two-year program, or a trade school, is very different from getting accommodations in high school. While high school has federally mandated procedures for obtaining accommodations, such as Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and 504 Plans, the process for obtaining postsecondary accommodations is different in college than it was in high school. The following chart provides an overview of general differences between legislation, services, and supports in high school compared to those in college. Review these differences listed between high school and college to help prepare for the college academic environment.

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
All students have the right to an education.	College education is a privilege, not a right.
High school is governed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).	Postsecondary education is governed by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
"Entitlement" law: Students with disabilities (ages 3-21) are guaranteed access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE).	"Non-discrimination" law: Colleges and universities may not discriminate in recruitment, in admission, or after admission based on a disability. However, these are not entitlement laws, meaning they do not guarantee successful learning or mandate the creation of special programs for persons with disabilities.
School attendance is mandatory.	You should attend lectures to maintain grades, but class attendance is not always mandatory.
Schools must provide services designed specifically to meet students' needs (i.e., instruction, modifications, accommodations) based on their IEP.	Reasonable accommodations may be made to provide equal access and participation for students with disabilities; however, formal special education services comparable to those in high school are not available.

Parent or guardian is the primary advocate; students learn ways to become their own advocate.	Students are their own advocate.
Counties are required to identify students with disabilities through free assessment and the IEP process.	Students are responsible for coordinating with staff and faculty in order to receive accommodations. This does not mean students are required to name a disability when discussing accommodations with their individual professors.
School officials implement and monitor students' progress towards their IEP goals and communicate openly with parents and the student.	There are no formal IEPs, so students are responsible for monitoring their own progress and communicating with their professors, academic advisors, and guardians themselves.
Fundamental changes to programs of study might be made.	Fundamental changes of programs are not allowed, students need to meet the requirements of the institution for enrollment.
Depending on the transition needs laid out in the IEP, schools often help connect students to community support services.	Students are responsible for making their own transportation connections with school-provided or external support services. Services for adults on the spectrum are often limited.

At the college level, college students must advocate for themselves. This includes contacting the disability service office, explaining and disclosing themselves as having ASD, as well as asking for the accommodations they will need. College faculty are only required to provide accommodations for students if the student has registered with the disability service office. Most colleges have a disability service office to ensure that their campuses are inclusive for all students. It's a good idea to register with disability services, even if the student may not think they will need any accommodations. Then, if the student does, accommodations will be in place when supports are needed.

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