

FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO COLLEGE

Understanding the Accessibility Transition

The transition from high school to college changes how disability-related access and accommodations are requested, determined, and implemented. Students take a more active role in college, while the Student Accessibility Resource Center (SARC), faculty, staff, and other campus partners share responsibility for creating access. The comparisons below describe common differences; individual experiences may vary.



HIGH SCHOOL

MODIFICATIONS MAY BE PROVIDED



In high school, **modifications** may be provided.

Modifications may change **what** a student is expected to learn or demonstrate by altering curriculum, assignments, or academic expectations.



COLLEGE

ACCOMMODATIONS ARE PROVIDED



In college, **accommodations** are provided.

Accommodations change **how** a student accesses or demonstrates learning while maintaining the essential academic requirements and learning outcomes of the course or program.

The **SHIFT:**

High school modifications may change **WHAT** is expected.
College accommodations change **HOW** access is provided—not the essential academic requirements.

ACCESS IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY.



Student Accessibility
Resource Center

MAKING THE SHIFT

S START	H HANDLE	I INITIATE	F FOLLOW THROUGH	T TAP INTO SUPPORT
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The details that follow are explaining what changes and how students can prepare.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and Section 504 (Subpart D) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 guide disability-related services in many K-12 settings. Under IDEA, eligible students are entitled to free appropriate public education (FAPE).	The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 (Subpart E) protect qualified students with disabilities from discrimination and require equal access in higher education.
Schools may provide special education, related services, accommodations, and, when appropriate, modifications to support FAPE.	Colleges provide reasonable accommodations and other access measures when appropriate. Accommodations do not lower essential academic or technical standards or fundamentally alter a course, course objectives, program, service, or activity.
The K-12 framework emphasizes access to and provision of an appropriate education.	Students must meet admission requirements and the essential requirements of their courses and programs, with reasonable accommodations, when applicable.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
The school district generally has a substantial role in identifying disability-related needs, evaluating students, developing plans, and coordinating services.	The student and the institution each have responsibilities. Students initiate the accommodation process by identifying disability-related barriers and requesting accommodations.
Teachers, school personnel, and parents/guardians may take an active role in coordinating supports and reminding students about responsibilities.	Students manage their schedules, coursework, communication, and use of accommodations more independently. SARC can help students understand options and develop self-advocacy skills.
The school typically arranges approved disability-related services.	SARC works collaboratively with students through an interactive process to determine reasonable accommodations. Faculty and other campus partners help implement approved accommodations.

IEPS, 504 PLANS, AND DOCUMENTATION

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
An IEP or 504 Plan may identify services, accommodations, goals, and supports in the K-12 setting.	An IEP or 504 Plan does not automatically transfer to college. However, previous plans, evaluations, medical records, and other documentation may help SARC understand a student's disability-related barriers and accommodation history. Students are responsible for providing documentation to the university. WKU requires recent documentation (within the last 3-5 years) from a licensed professional familiar with your condition notating the diagnosis, functional limitations, and recommendations.
School districts may conduct evaluations as part of determining eligibility and services.	Colleges are not generally responsible for conducting disability evaluations. SARC reviews each request individually and may request documentation when additional information is needed to understand disability-related barriers or reasonable accommodation needs.
Documentation requirements are connected to K-12 eligibility and educational planning.	SARC's review focuses on information relevant to the student's current functional limitations, disability-related barriers, and requested accommodations.

HOW ACCOMMODATIONS BEGIN

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
The school may identify a student and initiate disability-related services.	Students initiate the SARC registration process and request accommodations.
Accommodations may be implemented through an IEP or 504 Plan.	SARC engages with the student in an interactive process to determine reasonable accommodations.
Teachers may already know which accommodations and services apply to the student.	Students send their Faculty Notification Letter (FNL) to faculty each semester and communicate about implementation. Faculty are expected to acknowledge receipt of the FNL and discuss relevant accommodations with students to determine how reasonable accommodations work in their individual class.
Parents/guardians and school personnel may play a central role in the process.	The student is the primary participant. SARC is available to consult with students and faculty when questions, barriers, or concerns arise.

PRIVACY AND COMMUNICATION

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
Parents/guardians commonly participate in educational planning and may have access to school records under K-12 rules.	College student education records are protected by FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act). Parents/guardians do not automatically have access to a student's SARC records or participate in the accommodation process.
Teachers and school teams may receive detailed information needed to develop and implement a student's educational plan.	Faculty generally need information about approved accommodations and their implementation, not a student's diagnosis or detailed medical history. At WKU this is outlined via a Faculty Notification Letter (FNL). Students are not advised, nor required, to send any medical documentation directly to faculty.
Communication may occur routinely among parents/guardians, teachers, counselors, and other school personnel.	Students may choose to authorize SARC to communicate with another person by completing the appropriate consent. Such consent is optional and can be submitted by completing a FERPA form.

ACCOMMODATIONS AND SERVICES

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
K-12 supports may include accommodations, special education services, related services, and, when appropriate, curriculum modifications.	Higher education provides reasonable accommodations that address disability-related barriers without fundamentally altering essential course or program requirements.
Schools may provide some personal or non-academic services as part of a student's educational program, such as personal care assistance, transportation, behavioral supports, or individualized adult prompting/supervision.	Colleges are generally not required to provide services of a personal nature, such as personal attendants, transportation for personal needs, ongoing prompting/supervision, or individualized daily-living assistance. Students may be referred to campus or community resources when appropriate.
A student's high-school plan may include supports that are specific to the K-12 environment.	Not every high-school accommodation will be reasonable or necessary in college. College accommodations are determined individually based on disability-related barriers and the context of the course, program, service, or activity.
Course requirements may sometimes be modified as part of an individualized K-12 educational program.	Essential academic requirements remain in place. In limited circumstances, an appropriate course substitution may be considered through applicable university processes.

ACADEMICS AND STUDENT SUCCESS

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
Schedules and assignments are often more structured, and teachers may provide frequent reminders about assignments, due dates, and priorities, as well as opportunities to re-do work.	Students are expected to read and use the syllabus, monitor deadlines, manage their time, and complete coursework with greater independence.
Teachers may approach students when they believe assistance is needed.	Faculty are generally available to help, but students are usually expected to initiate contact, ask questions, attend office hours, and seek assistance.
Classes may meet more frequently, and assigned material may be reinforced during class.	Classes may meet less frequently, and substantial reading, writing, or other preparation may be expected outside class even when material is not directly reviewed in class.
Tutoring or study support may be included in an IEP or 504 Plan.	Tutoring is generally an academic support rather than a disability accommodation. Students with disabilities may use tutoring and other academic resources available to the broader student population.
Study time varies, but the high-school day often provides more built-in structure.	College students should plan for significant work outside class. A common planning guideline is approximately two to three hours of preparation or study for each hour spent in class, although course demands vary.
Tests may occur frequently and cover smaller amounts of material.	Exams may occur less frequently and may be cumulative or cover larger amounts of material.

ADVOCACY

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
Parents/guardians, teachers, counselors, or other school personnel may serve as primary advocates or help coordinate advocacy.	Students assume a more active role in communicating their needs, requesting accommodations, and addressing access concerns.
Students may have significant adult support in navigating school systems and services.	Self-advocacy does not mean doing everything alone. SARC can help students understand their rights and responsibilities, identify barriers, communicate about accommodations, and connect with appropriate resources.

FINANCES

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
Public K-12 education is generally funded through public resources, and disability evaluations required by the school may be provided without cost to the family.	Students are responsible for college costs and for applying for financial aid or arranging payment. If updated disability evaluation or documentation is needed, the student is responsible for obtaining it.
Disability-related supports are provided through the student's K-12 educational program.	Approved reasonable accommodations are provided by the University at no additional cost to the student.

MAKE THE SHIFT

Five things to remember as you move from high school to college

S	START the process Initiate requests for accommodations and assistance.
H	HANDLE your responsibilities Manage your schedule, deadlines, coursework, and accommodation needs.
I	INITIATE communication Contact faculty, ask questions, attend office hours, and speak up when barriers arise.
F	FOLLOW THROUGH Send your FNL each semester, use approved accommodations, and complete needed steps.
T	TAP INTO support Independence does not mean doing everything alone. SARC and other WKU resources are here to help.

College independence does not mean doing everything alone.

You've Got This!



TAKE AN ACTIVE ROLE.

Be engaged in your success.



ASK QUESTIONS.

Seek clarification when needed.



COMMUNICATE.

Share your needs and advocate for yourself.



USE YOUR RESOURCES.

We are here to support you.



ACCESS IS A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY.



Student Accessibility
Resource Center

*Same Goals.
More Possibilities.*