



Post-Secondary Education and PDA:

What to be aware of if you're considering schooling/training after K-12

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This guide's author (Todd Van Wieren) has a son with PDA and has worked as a post-secondary disability services/resources professional for the past 23+ years at a state university. If you have further questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to him at toddvanwieren@gmail.com

Major disability-related differences:

	Primary/ Intermediate/ Secondary School <i>(grades K – 12)</i>	Post-secondary School <i>(e.g., college, university, vo-tech, etc.)</i>
Legal Framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) • Educational legislation • “Free appropriate public education” for school-aged students is a right 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Section 504 (Rehab Act) & ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) • Civil-rights legislation • Post-secondary education is not a right. • “Equal access” to the same programs and activities as all “otherwise qualified” students. • Protection from discrimination
Accommodations & Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodations, special education, related services, etc. provided by the school. • Appropriate modifications can be made to curriculum, classes, assignments, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Reasonable” accommodations • All students (with or without disabilities) must meet the same fundamental curriculum requirements. • No special education services. • “Personal” services are not provided by the school.
Identification Documentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School’s responsibility to identify disabilities. • School provides evaluations/ documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student’s responsibility to self-identify and disclose disability to school. • Student provides and pays for disability evaluations/ documentation.
Role of Parent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents have the right to be very involved (e.g., IEP planning) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited parental involvement with school (student considered legal adult). • Student’s responsibility to request, coordinate, and use their accommodations.



Post-secondary documentation & registration of disability:

- 504 Plans and IEPs do not transfer into post-secondary schools.
- Students must provide their post-secondary school with a current (i.e., usually no older than 3 years) psycho-educational evaluation report written by the professional evaluator.
- Students must proactively seek out their school's disability services/ resources office to register their disability with the school and to request accommodations.
- Students must regularly and proactively communicate with their school's disability services/ resources office every semester (and throughout each semester) to request and coordinate their accommodations.

Post-secondary accommodations:

- Requested by the student (not initiated by the school)
- It's the student's choice to make use of their accommodations or not (post-secondary schools won't proactively schedule or coordinate accommodations without the student's request each semester).
- Accommodations are based on the psycho-educational documentation that the student submits to the school.
- Accommodations are reasonable adjustments, based on a student's disability-related "functional impairment(s)" (as described in their psycho-educational documentation), with the intent of providing "equal access" to the same programs and activities as all "otherwise qualified" students.
- While schools are required to provide reasonable accommodations for a student's disability-related functional impairment(s), they do not necessarily have to provide the exact same accommodations as requested by the student and/or as suggested by the evaluator in their psycho-educational documentation.
- Most post-secondary institutions only offer "reasonable" accommodations (i.e., adjustments that do not "fundamentally alter" the nature of a curriculum, program, activity, etc., or result in "undue financial or administrative burdens").
- Post-secondary accommodations generally do not include services of a "personal" nature (e.g., transportation, personal aids or assistants, typing papers, specialized therapies, etc.).



Common accommodations for post-secondary students with autism:

- Extended time (not unlimited) for timed tests (such as quizzes and exams)
- Testing in separate/ distraction-reduced rooms
- Readers or scribes for exams (generally word-for-word)
- Short breaks during exams
- Note-takers or audio-recording for class lectures.
- Access to audio or alternate format/ digital textbooks
- Access to limited assistive technology (e.g., specialized software)
- Preferential classroom seating
- Reduced course loads
- Early/ priority registration status
- Accessible specific on-campus housing (e.g., priority access to available single rooms)
- Common special dietary requirements for on-campus dining
- Ability to keep an emotional support animal (ESA) in on-campus housing.

Accommodations that may be [much] more difficult to acquire:

- Alternate test formats (e.g., multiple-choice in place of essay [or vice-versa], reduced multiple-choice test options, reduced questions, papers in place of tests [or vice-versa], etc.)
- Exam questions re-worded/ re-phrased
- Breaking single exams into multiple testing times/days
- Study guides for exams
- Professors' lecture notes
- Relaxed attendance requirements
- Remote/ virtual attendance for on-campus/ in-person classes or programs (or vice-versa)
- Extended due dates for specific assignments
- Modifications to curriculum, course requirements, assignments, etc.
- Purchase of assistive technology for personal use (i.e., outside the classroom).



Considering post-secondary education?

- Ask your K-12 school district for a newly updated and complete psycho-educational evaluation (not simply a “reevaluation”) well before graduation.
- Contact your state’s vocational rehabilitation services office. They may be able to help with:
 - Updated psycho-educational evaluations
 - Financial assistance, equipment, services (e.g., tuition grants, textbooks, assistive technology, personal services, and equipment, etc.)
 - Advocating on your behalf (to your post-secondary school)
 - Obtaining employment after graduation
- RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH your post-secondary school options!
 - Community college? 4-year college/university? Vo-tech? Something else?
 - On-campus/ in-person vs. Online/ distance education?
 - Request brief virtual meetings with prospective schools’ disability services/ resources offices.
 - What types of accommodations do they commonly provide for students with autism?
 - How open are they to considering other types of accommodations that you might be interested in requesting?
 - How receptive was the office to scheduling a meeting with you, and does the representative(s) seem easy to communicate with?
 - Overall, does the office appear to be eager to support your accommodation needs, or do you get the sense you’ll need to fight with them for what you need?
 - Does the school have an additional (or separate) support program specifically for students with autism?
 - Schedule on-campus visits with the schools you think you might be able to work with.
 - Meet briefly in person with the disability services/ resources office to get a fuller sense of what it will be like to work with this office.
 - Visit other offices or departments (including academic majors you might be interested in pursuing) on campus that you know will be important to support your future success.