

Comparison of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504), and The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

	IDEA	SECTION 504	ADA
Requirements in the law	Provide a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment	Requires any agency, school or institution receiving federal financial assistance to provide persons with disabilities to the greatest extent possible, an opportunity to be fully integrated into the mainstream.	Extends coverage of Section 504 to employment, public and private educational institutions, transportation providers and telecommunications, regardless of presence of any federal funding
Definitions in the law	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific disability categories are defined in the law can include autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, hearing impairments, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairments, or health impairments, serious emotional disturbance, specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, traumatic brain injury and visual impairments; • Covers students with educational disabilities that require special services from specially trained teachers • Not all students with disabilities are eligible. 	Defines persons with disabilities who: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities • Has a record of such an impairment • Is regarded as having such an impairment • Major life activities include walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, working, caring for oneself, and performing manual tasks. 	Definition of disability is essentially the same as Section 504 and extend coverage to persons without disabilities who may be related to or associated with a disability; includes persons with HIV status, contagious and non-contagious diseases.
Who is covered	Covers student with educational disabilities that require special education services ages 3-21 or until graduation	Protects all person with a disability from discrimination in educational setting based solely on disability	Protects all person with a disability from discrimination in educational setting based solely on disability
Services provided	Offers educational services that are remedial in addition to services available to all mainstream students (i.e. PE, art, field trips)	Eliminates barriers that would prevent a student from full participation in programs/ services offered to the general school population	Eliminates barriers that would prevent a student from full participation in programs/ services offered to the general school population
Funding	Schools receive federal funding to provide remedial services	Requires that schools not discriminate based on a student's disability and must provide appropriate accommodations, but schools receive no additional financial support to provide support services or auxiliary aids.	Requires that schools not discriminate based on a student's disability and must provide appropriate accommodations, but schools receive no additional financial support to provide support services or auxiliary aids.
Evaluation/ Documentation	School district is responsible for identifying and evaluating students with disabilities	Same for elementary and secondary schools	Students must self-identify as having a disability and must provide adequate documentation of disability
		College Students: Students must self-identify as having a disability and must provide adequate documentation of disability	
	Evaluations are the responsibility of the school and are performed at no expense to the student/parent	Elementary and secondary schools: Evaluations are the responsibility of the school and are performed at no expense to the student/parent	Evaluations/documentation of disability are student's responsibility and expense
		College Students: Evaluations/documentation of disability are student's responsibility and expense	
Parents/Guardians must consent to evaluations and placement decisions	Elementary and secondary schools: Parents/Guardians must consent to evaluations and placement decisions	Student has responsibility for advocacy, negotiating accommodations plan	
	College Students: Student has responsibility for advocacy, negotiating accommodations plan		
IEP/Accommodations	Individual Education Plan (IEP) developed with parents teachers and other specialists involved with the student; provides specially designed instruction and accommodations	504 Plan developed with parents, teachers, school personnel involved with student (for elementary and secondary students)	Accommodation plan developed with student, Disability Services Coordinator on campus
		College/post-secondary: Accommodation plan developed with student, Disability Services Coordinator on campus	
Classroom placement	Placement must be in the least restrictive environment; may be special classrooms or regular classrooms. (Elementary, secondary & college students)	Placement is in a regular classroom with support services to eliminate barriers to the educational experience. (Elementary, secondary & college students)	All courses are mainstream with accommodations provided to students who qualify under ADA