

From School to Work. What Changes? IDEA vs. ADA

Introduction

Transitioning from school to work means navigating a shift in disability rights related to supports, particularly access to accommodations. In school, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that requires schools to actively identify eligible students and arrange and provide supports to students with disabilities through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). At work, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects people with disabilities from discrimination, but supports are no longer identified by the institution; reasonable accommodations must be requested by the employee. Understanding the differences between IDEA and ADA can help students understand how supports change from school to work.

Here are some things students should know.

What Changes from School to Work

In school, supports are often built around the student. Employment works differently. Under the ADA, students will take a more active role in getting the support they need as they enter the workforce. This means moving from a system in which others “do for” them to learning how to speak up and advocate for themselves.

IDEA vs. ADA: What’s the Difference

In School (IDEA)	At Work (ADA)
IEP team identifies needs and arranges supports	Employee advocates and requests accommodations
Requires formal evaluation and eligibility determination	Requires disclosure of disability and sometimes documentation of the impact of disability
The school or the parent initiates	Individual initiates
<u>Entitlement:</u> Schools must provide and fund services for access and ensure educational progress	<u>Reasonable Accommodation/Anti-Discrimination:</u> Employers must provide equal access as long as it does not provide undue hardship to the employer

Supports Don’t Disappear -- They Change

As VR counselors support individuals moving from school to employment, it is important to recognize how access to support changes and help translate that for those they serve.

In the workplace, accommodations are not automatically put in place. VR counselors can help consumers understand that they will take a more active role in recognizing and communicating their support needs. If an accommodation is needed, the employee must request it and may need to share information about their disability. A requested accommodation is also not automatically guaranteed.

This is where VR counselors can help consumers build self-awareness by supporting them to:

- Recognize when something is challenging
- Identify what support might help
- Connect that need to a specific job task or situation
- Practice communicating their needs to others

The role of the VR counselor is to help build the self-awareness that leads to self-advocacy.

Self-Advocacy is a Workplace Skill

Self-advocacy looks like consumers understanding their accommodations, explaining why they need them, and practicing requesting supports. When consumers understand how their disability affects them, they can teach their employer how best to support them.

How can we prepare consumers for employment success?

Remember, VR counselors are not just helping consumers get a job; they are preparing them to maintain ongoing employment.

- This means:
- Helping consumers identify their strengths, interests, and abilities during career and employment planning.
 - Helping consumers translate their educational accommodations into workplace accommodations.
 - Identifying accommodations, assistive technology, and other supports that will help consumers perform job tasks.
 - Talking about and practicing how to request accommodations
 - Helping consumers understand the role of a job coach in the accommodation process.

Conclusion

The transition from school to work is more than a change in setting; it is a shift in responsibility. Helping consumers understand the difference between IDEA and ADA and practice self-advocacy is an important step toward successful, competitive integrated employment.



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