

# Chapter 4

## Integrating the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) Into Practice

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### ABSTRACT

*While educators often prioritize curriculum, instruction, school culture, and student engagement in pursuing academic achievement, the physical environment where teaching and learning occur is equally crucial. Beyond the structure of the educational building, considerations such as safety, health, accessibility, cost, and management are essential. Educational facilities should be seen as an environment that shapes learning. The physical environment impacts student attitudes and behavior and plays a critical role in the learning process. Therefore, the school's inspection, maintenance, upkeep, cleaning, and repair should be a top priority for educators, administrators, and central office constituents. This commitment to maintenance is not just a duty but a responsibility and a sign of our commitment to creating a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students, especially those with disabilities. Given the advanced age of many institutions, administrators must take an active role in maintaining the structure and safety of their respective facilities for all learners.*

### INTRODUCTION

Transitions are a natural part of life, and the educational system is no different. All students undergo transformative changes throughout their lives (i.e., primary school to high school, high school to higher education, and higher education to the workforce) (Sadowski, 2021). However, some students (e.g., minoritized, disabled, disadvantaged, adult learners) experience disparities compared to their peers concerning in-school and post-school outcomes. One way to enhance student outcomes is by tailoring

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the learning environment to improve overall experiences and academic performance (Christiaens et al., 2025). The transition in education is a process that presents them with several challenges in adaptation. Numerous factors, such as teaching methods and resources used, availability of support, and accommodations made by respective educators and institutions, can affect students' adaptation and academic performance (Ecclestone et al., 2009, 2010; Sadowski, 2021).

Structured school transitions, like matriculating from primary to secondary education and secondary to tertiary education, are impactful life events for adolescents that can stimulate growth or disrupt development. Around these school transitions, adolescents explore their interests, needs, and capabilities to find an education that fits their current identity and who they wish to become (Christiaens, 2024). Although most students do – and will – navigate through school transitions more successfully, more than a handful do struggle with this undertaking. This information highlights the adverse effects of anxiety and self-doubt on educational identity development and how the social environment, including educators, administrators, and peers, can be a vital source of support and connection to promote healthy exploration and affirm students' sense of fit in their education (Hyseni Duraku et al., 2023; Russell & Topham, 2012).

Students who belong to minority groups, have disabilities, come from low-income families, or are older than their typical classmates often face significant disparities during educational transitions compared to their peers. Studies suggest that these students drop out of school at a higher rate than their counterparts, impacting both short and long-term learning and employment opportunities and reducing financial stability (among other outcomes). This calls for everyone involved to accurately implement effective interventions targeting deficits and addressing root learning challenges so these students can fulfill their responsibility of preparing them for life during and after schooling (Charamba & Ndhlovana, 2025; Verhoeven et al., 2019).

These disparities manifest in both in-school experiences and post-school outcomes, influenced by systemic inequities and insufficient support structures (Sadowski, 2021). Transitioning from primary to secondary education, higher education, and eventually to the workforce presents unique challenges for marginalized groups (Ecclestone et al., 2009, 2010). Thus, addressing these disparities through intentional, targeted interventions and systemic changes is not just important but imperative. These changes are not just beneficial; they are necessary to promote equity for all learners. They require our collective commitment and motivation to bring about meaningful change (Charamba & Ndhlovana, 2025; Johnson & Johnson, 2025).

## **Disparities in Transition Outcomes**

People classified as “disabled” encounter continued challenges in their lives post-formal education, and this can be attributed to deeply entrenched systemic ableism coupled with deficiencies in comprehensive and inclusive transition planning methodologies (Chhabra, 2016). Students with disabilities often experience poorer post-school outcomes due to systemic ableism and a lack of inclusive transition planning (Brown & Finn, 2024). In order to effectively combat these inequities and to cultivate a more just and equitable framework for transition services, scholars recommend that educational institutions and policymakers adopt anti-oppressive practices alongside established equity frameworks (Sinclair et al., 2023). Implementing these practices is not a one-time task but a continuous process that requires

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