

Access to the Disability Supports Office by Students with Intellectual Disability in TPSID Programs

By Clare Papay, Frank A. Smith, & Meg Grigal

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act require institutions of higher education (IHEs) to provide students with disabilities reasonable accommodations that enable equal access to participation in postsecondary education programs (US Department of Education [USDOE], 2017). Many colleges and universities have a disability supports office (DSO), and students must disclose and provide documentation of their disabilities to the DSO to access accommodations (USDOE, 2017).

Typically, only about 35% of postsecondary education students with disabilities have been found to self-disclose their disabilities, and only 24% receive accommodations (Newman & Madaus, 2014). Students with intellectual disability are eligible to access accommodations for postsecondary education programs and classes (Thomson, Weir, & Ashmore, 2011). However, many programs have been established that provide supports for students with intellectual disability over and above those provided by the DSO.

In this Fast Fact, we examine recent data on access to the DSO by students with intellectual disability attending institutions of higher education implementing model demonstration projects called Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSIDs). TPSID grantees were tasked with creating, expanding, or enhancing high-quality, inclusive postsecondary education programs to support positive outcomes for individuals with intellectual disability (e.g., educational attainment, employment, and community inclusion). Annual program and student data from each TPSID were collected by the TPSID National Coordinating Center (NCC) at Think College.

METHODS

As part of its charge to evaluate the TPSID model demonstration projects, the NCC developed a set of common measures and established a data reporting protocol, called the Think College Data Network. This network was aligned with the TPSID Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) performance measures that TPSIDs are required to report on each year, as well as with the Think College Standards, Quality Indicators, and Benchmarks for Inclusive Higher Education (Grigal, Hart, & Weir, 2012).

Data were collected annually from TPSIDs on program

structure, staffing, and student activities and supports, including access to disability support services. Data reported here were collected from program staff at the 25 TPSID grantees implementing projects at 44 IHEs in 2015–2016. Data include both questions asked at the program level (e.g., program-wide access to the DSO), as well as the student level (e.g., individual student use of supports and accommodations through the DSO).

KEY FINDINGS

PROGRAM-LEVEL.

In 2015–2016, 56.8% of IHEs reported that students with intellectual disability used the DSO (see Table 1). Programs at 2-year IHEs were more likely to have access to the DSO: 80.8% of 2-year IHEs had students who used the DSO, compared to 50.0% of 4-year IHEs, although this difference was not statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N=44) = 2.835, p = .092$).

TABLE 1. Percentage of TPSID programs at which students have used the DSO this year

	TYPE OF INSTITUTION		
	2-Year	4-Year	Overall
Students use DSO	8 (80.8%)	17 (50.0%)	25 (56.8%)
Students do not use DSO	2 (20.0%)	17 (50.0%)	19 (43.2%)

N = 44 TPSID programs

STUDENT-LEVEL.

Overall, 60.1% of students attending TPSID programs received accommodations or supports from the DSO (see Table 2). This figure is substantially higher than the percentage of college students with disabilities in general who receive accommodations (24% as reported by Newman & Madaus, 2014). Students attending TPSID programs at 2-year IHEs were significantly more likely to receive accommodations or supports from the DSO than those at 4-year IHEs (68.4% vs. 57.2%; $\chi^2(1, N=441) = 4.449, p = .035$).

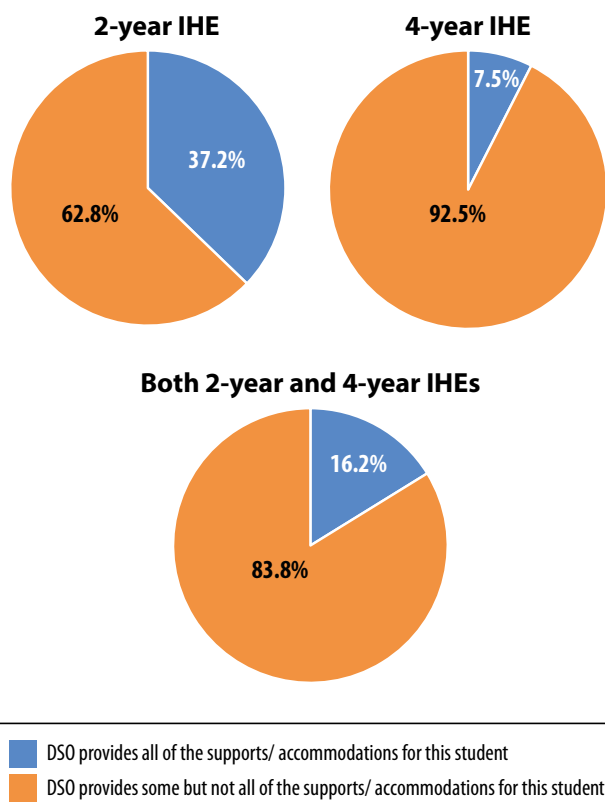
TABLE 2. Percentage of students who receive any accommodations or supports from the DSO

	TYPE OF INSTITUTION		
	2-Year	4-Year	Overall
Receive	78 (68.4%)	187 (57.2%)	265 (60.1%)
Does not receive	36 (31.6%)	140 (42.8%)	176 (39.9%)

N = 441 students

The majority of students (83.8%) who received accommodations or supports from the DSO also received supports through other entities (e.g., TPSID program staff, faculty, or peer mentors). The degree to which the DSO provided accommodations and supports differed by the type of institution. Of students who received accommodations and supports from the DSO (n = 265), only 7.5% of students at 4-year IHEs received all of their supports and accommodations through the DSO, compared to 37.2% of students attending 2-year IHEs (see Figure 1). This difference between 2-year and 4-year IHEs was statistically significant ($\chi^2(1, N=265) = 35.70, p < .001$).

Figure 1. Degree to which the DSO provides accommodations/ supports for students



N = 265 students who received at least some accommodations/supports from DSO

No students were reported to have been denied services by the DSO.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings presented here suggest that students with intellectual disability are beginning to gain access to supports and accommodations through the DSOs at their colleges and universities. More than half of all TPSID programs reported that students have accessed the DSO. This figure is substantially, even if not significantly, higher at 2-year IHEs, in part due to the types of classes that students are taking. Previous reports of data on students attending TPSIDs have found that enrollments in academically inclusive classes are higher at 2-year IHEs than at 4-year IHEs (Grigal, Hart, Smith, Domin, & Weir, 2016). Accommodations provided by the DSO would be more likely to be provided in inclusive classes than in

separate classes for students with intellectual disability offered by the TPSID, therefore it is to be expected that students attending 2-year IHEs are accessing the DSO at a higher rate than those at 4-year IHEs.

Although all students with intellectual disability should be eligible for accommodations (provided they disclose and provide documentation of the need for accommodations), not all students attending TPSID programs choose or are able to receive these through the DSO. It is promising that students at TPSID programs are self-disclosing and receiving academic accommodations through the DSO at a much higher rate than for the typical college population. However, to ensure that TPSID students receive the support and accommodations available to all students through the DSO, continued outreach to and partnership with DSO personnel is critical.

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