

The Importance of Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability

The education, employment, and community outcomes for individuals with intellectual disability have historically been bleak in our country. Many people with intellectual disability wind up living in poverty, working subminimum-wage jobs in segregated “sheltered workshops,” or living at home with aging parents and little community engagement.

This situation is starting to improve as students with intellectual disability are being included with their nondisabled peers in postsecondary education. There are 264 of these programs across the country. As colleges and universities open their doors to students with intellectual disability, these individuals are experiencing substantially better outcomes in employment, social engagement, and community living (Butler, Sheppard-Jones, Whaley, Harrison, & Osness, 2016, Grigal, Hart, Smith, Domin, Sulewski, & Weir, 2016; Hartz, 2014; Moore & Schelling, 2015).

What does postsecondary education change for people with intellectual disability?

- **Higher wages:** Youth with intellectual disability who participated in postsecondary education and vocational rehabilitation (VR) were 26% more likely to exit with paid jobs. They also earned 73% higher income than those who received only VR services (Migliore, Butterworth and Hart (2009) Postsecondary Education and Employment Outcomes for Youth with Intellectual Disabilities. Think College Fast Facts #1)
- **Meaningful work experience:** In 2015–2016, 86% of students at model transition programs for students with intellectual disability (TPSIDs)* participated in paid employment or unpaid career development activities, such as internships, service learning, or volunteering.
 - » 25% of students did both paid and unpaid work.
 - » 56% of students who were employed had never held a paid job before entering the program.
 - » 78% were paid at or above the minimum wage.
- **Continued employment after college:** In 2014–2015:
 - » 76% of students exiting TPSID programs had a paid job, had participated in unpaid career development, or had done both at the time they exited.
 - » 40% of students exiting TPSID programs had a paid job within 90 days of exiting.
 - » Of the students employed at exit, 90% were in jobs that are integrated and in the competitive labor market.
- **Living in inclusive settings:** In 2015–2016, 67% of TPSID campuses serving students were residential campuses open to TPSID students, or were commuter schools.

How do we know these programs are growing and sustainable?

- **Program growth:** 31 states have received TPSID grants (2010–2020). There are 264 postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disability in 47 states, and the number is growing.
- **Student retention:** The retention rate (i.e., the percentage of students returning to college the following year) among first-year students who enrolled at TPSID programs from 2010 to 2014 was between 70% and 80%.
- **Fund matching:** TPSID projects are required to match 25% of the funds they receive from the Department of Education thus extending the reach of the federal dollars.
- **Cross-agency support:** In 2015–2016, 98% of TPSIDs received some financial support from external sources, such as state VR and state intellectual and developmental disability agencies, including for student tuition further leveraging the federal dollars.

In comparison, what are current outcomes for individuals with intellectual disability?

- **Lack of competitive employment:** The number of adults with intellectual disability in integrated employment has remained level since 2004 (Butterworth et al., 2014). A survey of 11,599 adults with intellectual disability in 16 states found that only 14.7% were competitively employed (Human Services Research institute, 2012).
- **Facility-based work:** In 2011, 81% of people with intellectual disability were being served in facility-based and non-work settings (Butterworth et al., 2013).
- **Poor transition outcomes:** In 2011, the employment rate for transition-age individuals (ages 16–21) was 18%, or less than half the employment rate for people without disabilities (Butterworth et al., 2013).
- **Worse adult outcomes:** This gap becomes worse as people with intellectual disability age, with only 32% of adults ages 20–30 having employment, compared to 74% of people without disabilities in the same age group (Sulewski et al., 2013).

*TPSIDs: The Higher Education Opportunity Act created the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities, or TPSIDs. These model demonstration programs develop inclusive higher education options for people with intellectual disability. The program was first implemented by the Office of Postsecondary Education in 2010, through the awarding of five-year grants to 27 institutes of higher education (IHEs). The five-year TPSID grants were awarded again in 2015 to a second cohort of 25 IHEs. These IHEs are tasked with creating, expanding, or enhancing high-quality, inclusive higher education experiences to support positive outcomes for individuals with intellectual disability.