

## Building the Pathway Towards Inclusivity: A Policy Brief Advocating for Inclusive Postsecondary Education

Authors: Callie Fore, BSW, MSW Candidate; Crystal Morales, BSW, LSW, MSW Candidate;  
DeAnn Prouty, BS, MSW Candidate; Emily Whittaker, BA, MSW Candidate

Department of Social Work, Minnesota State University — March 2023

Post-secondary education provides a structure to support continued development, broaden social networks, attain a career, and expand lifelong opportunities.

### Issue Statement

People with intellectual disabilities (ID) lack a pathway and adequate support to pursue post-secondary education in Minnesota. Opening pathways to inclusive higher education will strengthen the state's workforce and economy and will reduce dependence on costly formal supports. In Minnesota less than [3% of students with ID](#) have access to in-state postsecondary education, and there are only four colleges and universities that specifically offer enrollment to students with ID. [Barriers to resources](#) and funding have dramatically slowed progress toward expanding inclusive higher education options, and Minnesota is far behind other states in the nation. Inclusive higher education is a proven pathway to independence and financial stability that must be an available and accessible opportunity afforded to people with intellectual disabilities.

### The Need

For young adults with intellectual disabilities (ID), having the opportunity and access to pursue postsecondary education and earn recognized credentials is critical for personal and professional growth, community belonging, and true inclusion.

- Students with intellectual disabilities who [access postsecondary education](#) opportunities are 2x more likely to be employed, earn 80% more per year, are more likely to live in their own home, experience better health & healthier relationships, & rely less on SSI and vocational rehabilitation service – compared to peers who did not receive postsecondary education.
- Youth with ID who receive postsecondary education have a higher rate of employment compared to their peers who do not continue their education after high school: approximately [60% employed versus 11%](#).

Furthermore, inclusive higher education benefits us all by supporting a stronger economy and stronger workforce.

Despite the known benefits, inclusive postsecondary education remains [underfunded and unimplemented](#). Young adults with ID in Minnesota face barriers to access and enrollment in Minnesota's postsecondary institutions. Of the [nearly 200](#) postsecondary institutions in Minnesota, [only 4 colleges](#) offer enrollment to students with ID, with zero offering an inclusive education.

## Current Policy Approaches and Efforts

The [Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Consortium](#) (MIHEC) has been leading the way to “increase sustainable opportunities for inclusive postsecondary education for people with ID”. Current [legislative efforts \(SF 655/HF 687\)](#) seek to establish a technical assistance center that will enhance existing resources, provide expertise in inclusive higher education for students with ID, & provide grant funding for higher education institutions to invest in inclusive higher education.

Three pieces of federal legislation support inclusive postsecondary education:

- The [Higher Education Opportunity Act](#) (HEOA) of 2008 created opportunities for young adults with IDD to attend college, including funding the model demonstration project known as Transitional Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID). Data on the [outcomes](#) of TPSID participants demonstrate that one year after exiting from college, 59% of students were employed, and three years after exit, [67% reported](#) having a paid job. TPSID has led to the creation or expansion of higher education programs at [119 college or university campuses in the US enrolling over 4,500 students with ID](#), and there are currently 165 [Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary](#) programs (CTP) across the country.
- The [Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act](#) (WIOA) of 2014 was enacted to strengthen the workforce development system throughout the United States. For people with IDD, WIOA means increased access to vocational rehabilitation programs and assistance in transitioning from high school to work or high school to college.
- The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) of 2004 provides funding for concurrent enrollment for students with ID to continue receiving [special education services while taking college classes](#) until the age of 21.

Refer to the [original policy advocacy](#) brief for a more detailed analysis.

## Policy Position Statement

Inclusive higher education is a proven pathway to independence and financial stability that must be an available and accessible opportunity afforded to all people with intellectual disabilities who want to go to college. Barriers must be addressed to ensure that young adults and lifelong learner with ID have the supports, access, and options necessary to pursue their education in truly inclusive settings right here in Minnesota.

- Pass legislation introduced in the 93<sup>rd</sup> Minnesota Legislative session (2023-24) ([SF 655/ HF 687](#)) to create a technical assistance center and provide grant funding to develop inclusive postsecondary education options.
- Update the Minnesota State 2020-2023 Equity and Inclusion Strategic Plan to include adults with intellectual disabilities by adopting the Think College Standards for Inclusive Higher Education and Accreditation. Form a collaboration between the Minnesota State and MIHEC/Think College to plan and expand access for students with ID at the 30 Minn State colleges and 7 universities.
- Create and fund Transition and Postsecondary Programs (TPSID) for all Minnesota high school students with intellectual disabilities to provide a pathway to higher education.

