

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion: Access to Higher Education for Students with Disabilities

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**STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER
EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA**

Themes

- I. Disability is a strategic equity issue
- II. The scope of the issue is vast
- III. There are differences in student experiences for secondary and postsecondary
- IV. Students face barriers to both access and persistence
- V. Advisory Committee as a means to identify issues
- VI. Data collection is a first step

Virginia Plan for Higher Education

- **Goal 1 - Equitable higher education**
 - **Expand postsecondary opportunities** and awareness to Virginians who may not view higher education as an option.
 - **Strengthen student support services** for persistence and completion: mental health, mentoring, career services, social, student basic needs, information technology, **disability support and other services.**

Disability Status has an Effect on Prosperity

Any postsecondary credential improves one's earning power.

- **Increases earnings by 84% over a lifetime**
- **Labor force participation rates:¹**
 - **19.5% for those with disabilities**
 - **68% for those without**
- **Degree completion rates (within 6 years):²**
 - **34% for students with disabilities**
 - **57% for those without**

¹ *Bureau of Labor and Statistics*

² *U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights*

Population of Students with Disabilities in Virginia Public Schools (K-12) 2021-2022 School Year

Disability Type	Total Count
Autism	24,207
Deaf-Blindness	24
Developmental Delay	13,840
Emotional Disturbance	8,590
Hearing Impairments	1,171
Intellectual Disabilities	8,321
Multiple Disabilities	2,678
Orthopedic Impairments	489
Other Health Impairments	34,537
Specific Learning Disabilities	51,718
Speech or Language Impairments	23,143
Traumatic Brain Injured	335
Visual Impairments	525

Source: Virginia Department of Education

Implications for the Pipeline to Postsecondary Education

- There are currently **169,578** students with disabilities in K-12
 - 13% of the K-12 population
- There are **14,116** students with disabilities in 12th grade this year
 - Equivalent to 40% of the total number of first year students entering Virginia institutions this year

Disability in Secondary vs. Postsecondary

- **Secondary Education:**
 - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires school districts to provide students with disabilities a “free and appropriate public education.”*
 - Burden is on the district to identify disabilities and accommodations
- **Postsecondary Education:**
 - Must provide “appropriate academic adjustments as necessary to ensure that [the institution] does not discriminate on the basis of a disability.”*
 - Burden is on the student to document their disability

* *United States Department of Education Office for Civil Rights*

Barriers to Access

- **Students with disabilities are less likely to seek higher education**
 - 13% of students with disabilities are “unengaged” one year out of high school*
- **Barriers**
 - Admissions
 - Accommodations
 - Financial

** Virginia Indicator 14*

Barriers to Successful Persistence

- **Students with disabilities are less likely to complete their degree***
 - 41% completion rate for students with disabilities
 - 51% completion rate for general youth population
- **Barriers**
 - Onus is on the student
 - Documentation
 - “Intangibles”

**any type of postsecondary credential (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010)*

Institutional Challenges

- Faculty-Staff training in support services and accommodation procedures
- Responding to emerging technology
- Student transitions from secondary to postsecondary education

Study on Access to Higher Education

- Virginia was the first state in the nation to complete a comprehensive study of students with disabilities in higher education
- *Examination of Access to Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities in Virginia (2017)*
 - Advisory committee
 - Better data collection
 - Proposed enhanced resources for targeted categories of disability such as Intellectual Disability/Developmental Disability

Disabilities Access to Higher Education Committee

- **Established in 2017**
- **Membership includes:**
 - State Council of Higher Education for Virginia
 - Students with disabilities
 - Two- and four-year institutions of higher education
 - Virginia Board for People with Disabilities
 - Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services
 - Virginia Department of Education
 - Virginia Department of Veterans Services

Advisory Committee Outcomes

- Brought in national experts to provide training and guidance to assist institutions
 - Documentation
 - Disability services
- Identified research priorities
 - Data collection

Postsecondary Data Collection: A first in the Nation

- **Removing the barriers to higher education for students with disabilities begins with data collection**
- **SCHEV's Policy Analytics section worked with the Advisory Committee to identify the data we need and a process to implement collection**

Implications

- **Data about students with disabilities in higher education may provide us with more information about:**
 - **K-12 college preparation**
 - **College access efforts**
 - **Resource allocation**

Questions?
