

Impact of Postsecondary Education on Employment Outcomes of Youth With Intellectual Disability Served by Vocational Rehabilitation

by Frank Smith, Meg Grigal, & John Shepard

Access to postsecondary education (PSE) has been associated with improved employment outcomes for young adults with intellectual disability served in federal model demonstration projects (Grigal, Hart, Smith, Domin, & Weir, 2016). But less is known about the impact of how the general vocational rehabilitation (VR) system supports youth with intellectual disability to access PSE.

This Fast Fact describes the employment outcomes, including rehabilitation rate and wages, of youth with intellectual disability served by VR who participated in postsecondary education as part of their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), compared to youth with intellectual disability who did not participate in PSE.

Nationally, there is a growing interest in PSE as a pathway to improve employment and other key life areas for individuals with intellectual disability (Plotner & Marshall, 2016). State VR agencies can play an important role by supporting the inclusion of individuals with intellectual disability in postsecondary education, and including higher education in clients' IPEs (Grigal & Whaley, 2016). Previous research demonstrated that when VR services included access to PSE, it had a positive impact on employment and wages (Migliore, Butterworth, & Hart, 2009)¹. Given the recent increase in access to higher education for people with intellectual disability, this brief explores if other current data reflect similar findings.

In 2014, a total of 19,050 youth with intellectual disability who entered VR services between the ages of 16 and 26 left VR after receiving services under an IPE. Of these individuals, 577 (3.0%) received PSE services from VR and participated in some type of postsecondary education. This percentage has fluctuated between 2.9% and 3.6% between 2007 and 2014, never exceeding 4%. Thus, the number of individuals with intellectual disability receiving PSE services from VR has remained consistently low for a prolonged period of time.

Youth with ID who received PSE services as a part of their IPE had higher employment rates and higher wages than youth with ID who did not receive PSE services.

Table 1 reflects VR outcomes for youth with intellectual disability who exited after receiving services under an IPE, and the associated differences in employment, educational attainment, and wages relative to accessing PSE services. Youth who received PSE services had a 61% integrated employment rate and earned an average of \$288 weekly. In contrast, youth with intellectual disability who did not receive PSE services had a lower employment rate (56%) and an average weekly income of \$200.

Of 577 students who received PSE services, 364 (63.1%) made gains in educational attainment between application and closure, meaning that they exited the VR program with greater levels educational attainment than they entered with. Youth with intellectual disability who received PSE services as part of their IPE from VR and made gains in educational attainment fared the best, demonstrating 51% higher wages than their counterparts who did not receive PSE services.

	Total who received services*	Paid integrated employment at exit		Weekly earnings
	#	#	%	\$
Youths with intellectual disability who did not receive PSE services	16,672	9314	55.9%	\$200
Youths with intellectual disability who received PSE services	577	350	60.7%	\$288
Youth with intellectual disability who received PSE services and made gains in educational attainment while in the VR program	364	232	63.7%	\$302

* Postsecondary education services information for 1801 exiters with intellectual disability who received services under an IPE was missing.

¹ Migliore et al., 2009 used 2007 RSA 911 data which included a broader sample of youth with developmental disabilities and other cognitive impairments in addition to those with intellectual disability. For these reasons, direct comparisons between the findings of these two publications cannot be made.

Those youth who accessed PSE but did not increase their education attainment² also fared better than those who did not access PSE, demonstrating 44% higher wages. The youth that accessed PSE services and made gains in educational attainment were 14% more likely to exit with paid integrated employment than those who did not access PSE services.

Youth with ID who received PSE services as a part of their IPE had higher employment rates and higher wages than youth with ID who did not receive PSE services. Despite the positive employment outcomes for youth with intellectual disability who receive PSE services, the percentage of youth who receive these services as part of their IPE has remained below 4% for the past 8 years. The data summarized for this Fast Fact indicate that continued study of the impact of PSE on educational attainment, integrated competitive employment, and wages is warranted.

With the increased focus on integrated paid employment and early engagement in pre-employment transition services prioritized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act of 2014, state VR agencies should consider how to increase the provision of PSE services for youth with intellectual disability.

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² Gains in educational attainment are based upon differences between levels of education at closure and the levels of education at application using the RSA-911 codes (0-12).

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