

SECTION I: RATIONALE

What are the data regarding PSET enrollment for students with disabilities?

More individuals with and without disabilities enroll in college today than 20 years ago. According to data from the National Center on Education Statistics (2016), there was a 42% increase in college enrollment in the United States from 1998 to 2012 with an anticipated increase of 15% from 2012 to 2023. The same report indicated the largest segment of that growth was for individuals ages 18 to 24. Additionally, Black or Hispanic students are projected to experience the largest percentages of growth in college enrollment in the next several years. Finally, the report projects Associate's degrees to be conferred at more than double the rate of Bachelor's degrees through 2023. In 2017, the U.S. Department of Education summarized data from five data sets (US DOE, 2017) and concluded that 11% of undergraduates are students with disabilities. The [report](#) included detailed tables regarding various disability groups, services, and their outcomes.

With changes to the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA, 2008), enrollment in postsecondary education by students with intellectual disabilities and other disabilities has also increased in the last decade. Students with intellectual disabilities may receive funding from the Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, and Federal Work-Study programs. In 2016, of the 4,700 degree granting institutions in the United States, only 263 offered programs for students with intellectual disabilities (Glatter, 2017). However, this was a 77% increase in institutions with programming for this specific population over nine years (Glatter, 2017).

Since 2006, state education agencies have been required to report data regarding the enrollment in postsecondary education of former students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) one year after exiting high school. Since a common measure for this reporting was put in place in 2009, median enrollment has fluctuated between 26% and 29% of potential exiters enrolled.

According to a U.S. Department of Education report (2016), there is a 60% completion rate for all first-time students at four-year colleges and universities and approximately 30% at two-year colleges. Statistics for students with disabilities enrolling and then obtaining a degree are more discouraging. The National Center for Education Statistics (2009) found 29% of individuals with disabilities (up to 8 years out of high school) graduated from a 4-year institution compared to 59% of students without disabilities (6-year graduation rate). However, more recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), indicate 16.4% of individuals with a disability earned a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 34.6% of those without a disability.

It should be noted that even in the absence of earning diplomas, individuals enrolled in postsecondary education are more likely to find jobs that pay better wages compared to their peers who did not have any postsecondary education experiences (Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; Leonhardt, 2011; Marcotte,

Bailey, Borkoski, & Kiensl, 2005). Findings show that youth who exited the vocational rehabilitation (VR) program after receiving postsecondary education services reported higher weekly wages compared to their peers who did not receive any postsecondary education services (Gilmore et al., 2001; Migliore, Butterworth, & Hart, 2009).

Data regarding participation in training programs or non-traditional learning beyond high school are unclear. States report annually regarding student engagement in “some other postsecondary education or training”; however, disaggregation of these data for specific types of programs or descriptive information is not available at the national level. A recent examination by the National Center on Education Statistics (2018) includes data on enrollment and completion of non-degree credentialing programs. While 45% of working adults report a postsecondary degree, 58% of working adults report having either a postsecondary degree or some postsecondary work credential, including an occupational certificate or license.

What are the legal requirements or protections related to accessing PSET?

One purpose of the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004**, also known as IDEA, is to ensure all children with disabilities have available to them, a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for *further education*, employment, and independent living. [34 CFR 300.1(a)] [20 U.S.C. 1400(d)(1)(A)]. In IDEA 2004, Congress added “further education” as a purpose of the law, establishing a new expected outcome of special education.

In 2006, the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs began tracking this performance through the State Performance Plan data submitted annually. Within this process, States report on the percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school and were: “(a) enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school, (b) enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school, or (c) enrolled in higher education or some other postsecondary education or training program...within one year of leaving high school” (20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)). “*Enrolled in higher education*” means youth have been enrolled on a full- or part-time basis in a community college (2-year program) or college/university (4- or more year program) for at least one complete term, [according to the National Post-School Outcomes Center and NTACT](#). Another requirement of IDEA (2004) is that upon exit from high school, a student with a disability must be provided “with a summary of the student’s academic achievement and functional performance and recommendations to assist the student in meeting postsecondary goals” (IDEA Regulations 34 C.F.R. §300.305(e)(3)). While the Summary of Performance (SOP) document is not a required precursor to PSET participation, it is intended to assist students, in part, as they link to postsecondary education service providers. The **Higher Education Opportunity Act** (P.L. 110-315) (HEOA) was enacted on August 14, 2008 and reauthorized the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (the HEA). The HEOA created opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities in postsecondary settings by:

1. Creating eligibility for Federal Financial Aid by waiving certain criteria (e.g. regular high school diploma) including:
 - Pell Grants
 - Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants
 - Federal Work-Study Program
2. Funding the Model Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID), which provides grants to institutions of higher education or consortia of institutions of higher education to enable them to create or expand high quality, inclusive model comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities.
3. Providing a Coordinating Center designed to coordinate model programs and provide technical assistance, evaluation, and develop accreditation standards for postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities.
4. Establishing the National Center Dissemination center to provide support services for all students with disabilities, including students with intellectual disabilities.

Additionally, the HEOA provided a [statutory definition of Universal Design for Learning](#), addressing accessibility of content at institutes for higher education.

While the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by the **Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (2014)** did not affect access to postsecondary education by students with disabilities, one of the five required pre-employment transition services of the act is relevant to the topic. The preamble to the final regulations explain that

“counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education in a group setting may include information on course offerings, career options, the types of academic and occupational training needed to succeed in the workplace, and postsecondary opportunities associated with career fields or pathways. This information may also be provided on an individual basis and may include advising students and parents or representatives on academic curricula, college application and admissions processes, completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and resources that may be used to support individual student success in education and training, which could include disability support services.” (Final VR Regulations at 81 FR 55683,55694-55695, August 19, 2016)

This provision in the Act suggests an opportunity for VR and educators to each have roles in preparing students with disabilities to plan for success in postsecondary education and training (PSET).

Section 1111(b)(1) of the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015)**, requires each State to adopt the same challenging academic content standards and aligned academic achievement standards for all public schools and public school students in the State, and on November 16, 2015, the US Department of Education, Office of Special

Education and Rehabilitative Services, issued a *Dear Colleague Letter* to clarify “that an individualized education program (IEP) for an eligible child with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) must be aligned with the State’s academic content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled,” further ensuring that all children, including children with disabilities, are held to rigorous academic standards and high expectations. See

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/guidance-on-fape-11-17-2015.pdf>.

While not required by federal legislation, many states have developed definitions of college and career ready over the last decade that are framing the national conversation regarding postsecondary education expectations for all students, including students with disabilities. An online map of [state level work in this area](#) is available on the website of the College and Career Readiness and Success Center. According to a 2016 analysis of states’ work to define college readiness, definitions included such skills as academic knowledge, critical thinking, collaborative traits, resilience, and community involvement (English, Rasmussen, Cushing, & Therriault, 2016). As a result, the environment is ripe with possibilities for all students to succeed through additional education beyond high school. The resources in the remaining sections of the *Postsecondary Education and Training Preparation Toolkit* can help more students and their IEP teams plan for PSET success.

