Completion Rates of Students Attending Colleges and Universities via a TPSID Program

By Caitlyn A. Bukaty & Clare Papay

Completing a program of study and earning a credential is a mark of student perseverance and success. Student completion rates can tell us how well colleges and universities support students in completing an educational program. Completion impacts later employment success: The US Department of Education reported students who completed non-degree certificate programs had higher rates of employment than peers who did not (Burns et al., 2020).

In the same report, Burns et al. (2020) found 52% of students who began a non-degree certificate program completed it within three years. Although this report did not include completion rates specific to students with disabilities, a long-term study of postsecondary completion of students with disabilities at different types of colleges and universities indicated these students completed their various programs of study at lower rates than peers without disabilities (Newman et al., 2011).

Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSIDs) are federally funded model demonstration programs at colleges and universities that provide postsecondary education to students with intellectual disability. Three grantee cohorts have received 5-year TPSID grants: 2010–2015 (Cohort 1), 2015–2020 (Cohort 2), and 2020–2025 (Cohort 3). Each year, TPSIDs report program and student-level data to the Think College National Coordinating Center (NCC). For students who leave or *exit* a program, TPSIDs report the reason for each student's exit, including information on whether the student completed their program of study.

The NCC's Annual Reports provide the number of students at TPSIDs each year who exit their programs and the percentage of those exiters who complete a program (versus those who exit for other reasons see the [Think College TPSID Annual Reports)](#). In this Fast Fact, we bring together data across years to explore the overall completion rate for students who enrolled in Cohort 2 TPSID programs.

METHODS

TPSID program staff report data to the NCC on an annual cycle using an online data collection system built in the Quickbase platform. The NCC creates a record for each student who attends a TPSID program. TPSID staff report data on students' activities during their enrollment and at the point of exit, including their reason for exit.

The reason for a student's exit helps us understand whether the student completed the program. Table 1 shows reasons students exit TPSID programs and whether the reasons are considered completion or non-completion of a program of study.

TABLE 1. REASONS FOR EXIT IN TPSID DATA FOR STUDENTS WHO COMPLETED VS. DID NOT COMPLETE A PROGRAM OF STUDY

	Completed	Did not Complete
Reason for Exit	**The student:** • completed the TPSID program OR • completed a degree or certificate program other than the TPSID program (i.e., available to TPSID and non-TPSID students)	**The student:** • transferred to another postsecondary education program OR • no longer wanted to attend the TPSID program OR • was dismissed OR • left for another reason

To calculate the completion rate of students who attended Cohort 2 TPSIDs, we considered the entire group of students who began a TPSID program between the 2015–2016 and 2019–2020 academic years. We looked at exit data reported for each student between 2015–2016 and 2022–2023 (up to August 2023). We reviewed students' reasons for exit to determine how many students
 (1) exited the program without completing,
  (2) completed their TPSID program, or
  (3) did not have exit information.

Because TPSID programs vary in length from 1–5+ years, we did not use a time limit to determine completion. We were able to calculate average length of enrollment for:

 • students who exited the program without completing
 • students who completed their TPSID program

Students with no exit information may still have been enrolled in the TPSID program when these data were analyzed, or they may have been attending TPSID programs whose funding cycle ended in 2020, meaning their program was not required to report further data on student activities to the NCC.
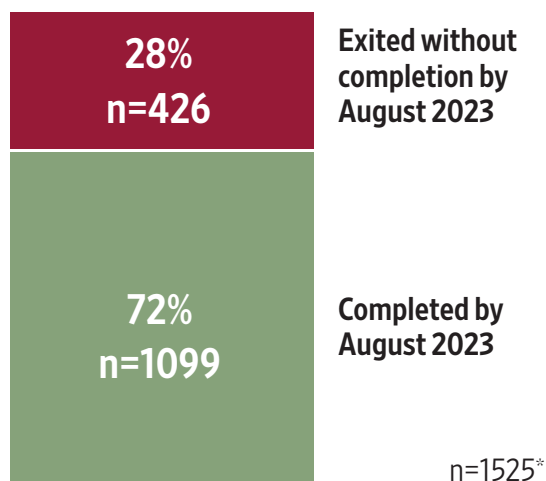
FINDINGS

The graph in Figure 1 shows the percentage of students entering TPSID programs in Cohort 2 who went on to either (a) complete their program of study by August 2023 (72%) or (b) exit without completion by August 2023 (28%). The statistics in the graph represent the exit outcomes for 1,525 students enrolled at 65 TPSID programs. An additional 548 students enrolled at TPSID programs between 2015–2016 and 2019–2020 but their exit information was not reported by August 2023.

The data revealed a 72% rate of TPSID program completion among students who exited a TPSID program by August 2023. Twenty-eight percent of students who exited in the same timeframe exited without completing their program of study. Students who completed a TPSID program were enrolled for 2.3 years on average. Students who exited a TPSID program without completion did so after being enrolled for an average of 1.5 years.

LIMITATIONS

One limitation of our analysis is the lack of complete data after the 2019–2020 academic year on students who were still enrolled when the Cohort 2 TPSID grants ended. TPSID programs are not obligated to continue reporting student enrollment or completion data after the funding cycle ends. We were able to include exit data in our analysis from 17 programs that subsequently received Cohort 3 TPSID grants and therefore continued reporting data to the NCC, but data from 48 programs were not available after 2020.

IMPLICATIONS

The completion rate for students enrolled in TPSID programs is well above the national rate of 52% for non-degree programs in the United States (Burns et al., 2020). Students persevering to complete their program of study at TPSID programs indicates good matches between students and programs, strong student

FIGURE 1. TPSID STUDENT COMPLETION, COHORT 2

28% **n=426**	**Exited without completion by August 2023**
72% **n=1099**	**Completed by August 2023**

n=1525*

*Note: A total of 2,073 students enrolled in TPSID programs between 2015 and 2020. Exit information is not available for 548 students.

engagement, and successful efforts by TPSID programs to support students to program completion. The longer average enrollment period for students who completed a TPSID program than those who exited without completion may encourage TPSID programs to look at retention trends and strategies. It seems possible students who enroll beyond the first year of a TPSID program may be more likely to complete their program of study.

As TPSID programs continue their work, monitoring completion rates at the program level and across all students helps programs and the NCC learn more about effective practices for recruitment, retention, and student support. We can use program level information to identify programs with completion rates above the TPSID program average and look for effective strategies and best practices in supporting students and keeping them engaged resulting in program completion. Programs with completion rates below the TPSID program average may benefit from technical assistance and support in implementing practices other TPSID programs have found successful to help students succeed in TPSID programs.

REFERENCES

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

CAITLYN A. BUKATY, PhD, is a Senior Research Associate for the Think College National Coordinating Center.

CLARE PAPAY, PhD, is a Senior Research Associate/Project Manager for the Think College National Coordinating Center.

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