

From Learning to Earning: The Impact of Postsecondary Education on Employment for Individuals with Intellectual Disability


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OVERVIEW:

Postsecondary education (PSE) is more than just a learning opportunity for people with intellectual disability—it's an effective pathway to competitive employment and financial independence. Research shows PSE leads to higher employment rates and increased wages for people with intellectual disability, and long-term cost savings for supporting them. This resource highlights key research on the impact PSE has on the employment outcomes for people with intellectual disability.


Higher Employment Rates

People with intellectual disability who participated in PSE with vocational rehabilitation (VR) support are **2x** more likely to be employed




Source: Sannicandro et al. (2018)

74% of graduates who completed a federally funded TPSID* program were engaged in paid employment one year after graduation



Source: Grigal et al. (2024)

69% of Ruby's Rainbow scholarship recipients — individuals with Down syndrome who pursue PSE — who have graduated are employed




Source: Ruby's Rainbow (2024)

*TPSID = [Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities](#)

Increased Earnings

People with intellectual disability who participated in PSE with VR support earn **51%** more than those without PSE



Source: Smith et al. (2018)

Cost Savings

PSE is **COST-EFFECTIVE** and **COST-EFFICIENT** for people with intellectual disability, with upfront costs recovered in 28 months resulting in **REDUCED LONG-TERM GOVERNMENT BENEFITS**



Source: Cimera et al. (2018)

CONCLUSION

The evidence is clear—PSE unlocks employment and earnings potential for students with intellectual disability. Yet only 3.2% of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) aged 18–25 are enrolled in a college or university (National Core Indicators, 2022). Investments in higher education opportunities empower people with intellectual disability to achieve their fullest potential, contribute to the workforce, and lead fulfilling, independent lives. Learn more about the impact of PSE on employment at thinkcollege.net.

Postsecondary education unlocks employment and earnings potential for students with intellectual disability.



Sources

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About the Think College National Coordinating Center

The National Coordinating Center (NCC) provides coordination and evaluation of Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSID) programs funded by the Office of Postsecondary Education, US Department of Education. The NCC also offers technical assistance to TPSIDs and other postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disability nationally, develops related resources, disseminates information about college opportunities for students with intellectual disability, and supports students and their families to learn about and prepare for college. Learn more about the NCC at <https://thinkcollege.net/projects/ncc>.

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