

Chair Pelowski, Chair Youakin, Higher Education and Education Finance Committee members:

We applaud your focus on linking K-12 schools and Higher Education Institutions with Workforce Community Partnerships. We believe it is imperative that you factor in the needs of all Minnesota students – including students with disabilities. Individuals with disabilities experience significant education and employment disparities that continue to persist in spite of federal and state initiatives with little progress made over the past decade. In fact, Minnesota's current laws and policies have the stated goal that **all** students are career and college ready. However, many of the existing state initiatives do not include students with disabilities. You can change this by making sure students with disabilities are included in this initiative and mandating that data be collected/reported that will put a spotlight on the issues, craft solutions, and track progress for all students, including students with disabilities.

Recommendations

1. Include students with disabilities in all initiatives to strengthen the links between K-12 schools and Higher Education Institutions with Workforce Community Partnerships.
2. Require disaggregated data for students with disability by disability type and the intersectionality of traditionally under-represented groups, to spotlight disparities, craft solutions, and track progress.
3. Eliminate barriers and open access to postsecondary education to **all** students with disabilities.

Current Minnesota Law and Policy Initiatives

2013 [Minnesota World's Best Work Force](#)

One stated goal of this law is "**All Students** are ready for career and college."

The Statute includes a definition:

[120B.30 Subdivision 1. \(p\)](#) For purposes of statewide accountability, "career and college ready" means a high school graduate has the knowledge, skills, and competencies to successfully pursue a career pathway, including postsecondary credit leading to a degree, diploma, certificate, or industry-recognized credential and employment. Students who are career and college ready are able to successfully complete credit-bearing coursework at a two- or four-year college or university or other credit-bearing postsecondary program without the need for remediation.

The career and college-ready definition needs to be refreshed to include the variety of postsecondary credentials that are available today including micro-credentials. In addition, the definition should be updated to reflect the inclusive postsecondary education options for students with intellectual disabilities who would not be included in the current definition as career and college ready.

2015 [Higher Education Attainment Goal](#)

Minnesota Legislature enacted a goal that 70 percent of Minnesota adults (ages 25-44) will have attained a postsecondary certificate or degree by 2025. While the [Educating the Future, 2022](#) report concludes there should be “a concerted effort to encourage and support adults with no college or some college to enroll and complete a postsecondary credential,” the report contains no data about Minnesota students with a disability on a combined basis or disaggregated by disability type. This needs to change.

Students with disabilities experience disparities in educational attainment rates similar to Minnesotans across different race and ethnicity groups of students. The intersectionality of disability and membership in diverse cultural, racial, and ethnic groups must therefore be addressed. We believe it is essential to disaggregate the data for students with disabilities by disability type and by membership in traditionally under-represented groups based on racial/ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity in order to clearly show the disparities that are hidden when all students with disabilities are grouped together.

2020 Minnesota’s [Four-Year State Plan](#) Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century

With the 2019 reauthorization of the Perkins Act a new focus area was added to expand access to Career and Technical Education (CTE) for special populations. One of the identified special populations is individuals with disabilities. One of the key goals of the State Plan is to support an expansion of data requirements and performance expectations for categories of student groups and special populations as defined by the [Every Student Succeeds Act](#) (ESSA). This does not go far enough to collect and report disaggregated data that measures increased access for CTE enrollment and improved support and success of students with disabilities.

2022 [Minnesota’s ESSA Plan](#)

MDE recognizes that the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) provides an opportunity to confront the serious and urgent nature of the gaps that exist between white students and students living in poverty, students of color, American Indian students, students learning English, **students with disabilities** and any other student needing additional support to meet Minnesota’s ambitious goals.

Minnesota is striving for excellence, equity, and opportunity by focusing on closing achievement gaps, supporting high-quality teaching, using innovative strategies to improve educational outcomes, and ensuring **all** students graduate from high school well-prepared for college, career, and life.

2022 [Minnesota Olmstead Plan](#)

The Lifelong Learning and Education Goals include a postsecondary education goal:

“By June 30, 2025, the percentage of students with disabilities who have enrolled in an integrated postsecondary education (an accredited institution of higher education) setting within one year of leaving high school will increase to 34.8 percent (from the 2020 baseline of 29.8 percent).”

The Olmstead plan uses the 2020 baseline data from the Statewide Longitudinal Education Data System (SLEDS) for all students with a disability who have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This does not include students with a disability who have a 504 Plan.

One example of the disparities that are hidden when the student data is not disaggregated is the enrollment rate for students with an intellectual disability. It is estimated that less than 3 percent of Minnesota students with an intellectual disability have access to post-secondary education. This is significantly lower than the 2020 baseline of students with disabilities and the State’s 70 percent postsecondary education attainment goal.

[Statewide Longitudinal Education Data Systems \(SLEDS\)](#)

Minnesota has developed SLEDS, matching student data from pre-kindergarten through completion of postsecondary education and into the workforce. Unfortunately, the database does not include disaggregated data that could be transferred from the student data captured and maintained by MDE. There is an opportunity to review and redesign SLEDS to support policy development and innovative strategies more effectively, especially for students with disabilities.

Available Resources and Work-In-Progress

Currently, several initiatives and projects are in process and have direct implications for secondary and postsecondary education outcomes for Minnesotans with disabilities. One of the goals of the projects listed below is to raise awareness of postsecondary education options for students with disabilities. Many students with disabilities, their parents, and educators are unaware of the different postsecondary education options available.

State Agencies

[Minnesota's Transition Framework](#)

Recent inter-agency collaboration between the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE), the Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHS) has created a transition toolkit and transition framework.

Minnesota's transition framework defines high-quality transition programming for youth with disabilities and those who support them, as well as resources that schools can use to support high-quality outcomes in this area. The transition framework aims to establish a common language for consistency across all key stakeholders. The targeted audience is students with disabilities, their families, and professionals. The inter-agency workgroup launched the transition framework and transition toolkit website this year. The project is a work-in-progress.

[Postsecondary Enrollment Options Reference Guide](#)

The MDE resource includes definitions of postsecondary options, eligibility of students, and participation requirements including students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). There is an opportunity to review the State's policy on the use of IDEA funds to pay for students with IEPs attending college classes, based on the US Department of Education's September 17, 2019 Q&A letter.

[US Department of Education September 17, 2019 Q&A Letter "Increasing Postsecondary Opportunities and Success for Students and Youth with Disabilities"](#)

The guidance letter describes how State educational agencies (SEAs), local educational agencies (LEAs), and State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies may coordinate to assist students and youth with disabilities, including students and youth with intellectual disabilities who are in high school and at postsecondary education institutions, through appropriate supports funded under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Institute on Community Integration

[National Center for College Students with Disabilities \(NCCSD\)](#)

The Institute on Community Integration (ICI) has joined with the Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), and other partners, to oversee and expand NCCSD. The consortium serves a variety of stakeholders, including college and transition-age students with disabilities, families, faculty and staff at institutions of higher education, other secondary programs, and transition programs of local education agencies. The NCCSD serves a variety of

functions providing: training, resources, and technical assistance to stakeholders. Current initiatives include the development of online faculty training modules that will better prepare postsecondary education instructors and staff to support the needs of students with disabilities. In addition, NCCSD staff are initiating a national survey designed to better understand the resources that institutions of higher education, including 2- and 4-year colleges, CTEs, and non-degree granting programs have available to support the recruitment, retention, and graduation/program completion of students with disabilities.

Administration for Community Living (ACL) Project of National Significance: Community-Based Collaborative Transition Model for Minnesota Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) project

A second initiative led by ICI is the five-year federally funded ACL project that includes the inter-agency group of MDE, DEED, DHS, and local education agencies from across the state. The project goal is to increase postsecondary education participation, community-based employment, and independence of Minnesota youth with IDD in identified urban, suburban, and rural communities.

[Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Consortium \(MIHEC\)](#)

Inclusive Higher Education

MIHEC is leading the initiative to expand inclusive higher education for Minnesotans with intellectual disabilities. A key component of an inclusive higher education credential is paid employment in the student's area of interest and strength. The [Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Act](#) (HF687) was reintroduced this session and has a hearing in the House Higher Education Committee on Thursday, February 16. The bill takes direct aim at the barriers to expanding college to include students with intellectual disabilities. The legislation will establish a Minnesota-based technical assistance center and competitive grant funding for Minnesota colleges and universities, to cover the initial funding necessary to plan, start and achieve a self-sustaining enrollment level. There is a need for technical assistance to support and guide university staff and faculty who are leading their campus initiatives. Technical assistance will be available and customized to the individual college and university and reduce the learning curve while supporting the initiatives in meeting the national accreditation standards and guiding principles for inclusive higher education.

College-based Transition

Another solution to increase access and postsecondary education credentials for students with intellectual disabilities is College-based Transition. This is an alternative to what school districts

typically offer to students with disabilities who are eligible and chose to continue their education beyond 12th grade in secondary education. College-based Transition is based on an individualized education plan (IEP) for the student who attends college classes on a college campus and is in the community. College-based Transition includes job experience and paid employment in the student's area of interest and strength. The offering is a collaboration between local education agencies and a college/university. The State of Massachusetts is leading the way nationally and has 15 universities and colleges across the state offering College-based Transition. The [Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative](#) (MAICEI) was established through State legislation and appropriations. The MAICEI offers grants to college-school partnerships to support eligible public high school students with intellectual disabilities, ages 18–22, to increase their academic and career success by being included in a college or university community of learners. The grants provide initial funding and, over time, the cost shifts to the school district utilizing IDEA funds.

College-based Transition is part of the continuum of postsecondary education options that Minnesota needs to offer. The ACL Transition grant led by ICI will reflect expanding Minnesota postsecondary education to include College-based Transition for students with IDD.

The ACL Transition project, Inclusive Higher Education, and College-based Transition all include inter-agency collaboration and the opportunity to blend, braid, and sequence existing State and Federal funding. Minnesota state agencies, higher education, and LEAs are still working through this and the Institute on Community Integration and the Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Consortium are part of the collaboration providing technical assistance.

Conclusion

In summary, we ask that as you meet and discuss how to strengthen the link between K-12 schools and Higher Education Institutions to the Workforce Community Partnership, please factor in the needs of students with disabilities and how to include **all** students in the identified action steps and solutions. We welcome the opportunity to be part of the conversation, provide additional information, and collaborate with the joint committee.

Thank you for your consideration.

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