

**Report on Access to Higher  
Education for Persons with  
Intellectual and Developmental  
Disabilities**

**Texas Education Code, Section 61.06641**

**October 2024**

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### Agency Purpose

Our purpose is to strengthen Texas through higher education. By making higher education accessible to a wide range of people, we can ensure Texas remains one of the world's most innovative, valuable educational systems. By bringing together data, policymakers, and institutions, we can inform sensible policies that make a difference and make education beyond high school available to every person in our state. When we do that, we will improve lives, communities, and our shared economy.

### Agency Vision

The THECB will be recognized as an international leader in developing and implementing innovative higher education policy to accomplish our mission.

### Agency Philosophy

The THECB will promote access to and success in quality higher education across the state with the conviction that access and success without quality is mediocrity and that quality without access and success is unacceptable.

The THECB's core values are:

**Accountability:** We hold ourselves responsible for our actions and welcome every opportunity to educate stakeholders about our policies, decisions, and aspirations.

**Efficiency:** We accomplish our work using resources in the most effective manner.

**Collaboration:** We develop partnerships that result in student success and a highly qualified, globally competent workforce.

**Excellence:** We strive for excellence in all our endeavors.

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, gender, religion, age, or disability in employment or the provision of services.

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## Executive Summary

"In Texas and across the country, our economy is racing forward in directions that require far greater skills, more education, and more credentials for a good job than ever before" (Harrison Keller, Former Commissioner, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board). The state's strategic plan for higher education, *Building a Talent Strong Texas*, expands goals for postsecondary attainment to include all working-age Texans. In doing so, Texas will increase employment opportunities and income for individuals, create a deeper talent pool for employers, and align students' skills with workforce demands.

The following report outlines how individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) are included in the state's postsecondary and employment goals.

Postsecondary enrollment, credential attainment, and employment rates for individuals with disabilities are alarmingly low compared to those without disabilities. Only 31% of Texas high school graduates with a disability continue to pursue postsecondary education, and just 17% earn a credential (Miller et al., 2020). Of all individuals with disabilities, just 22.5% are employed nationwide, and people with IDD are four times more likely to be unemployed than those with all other disabilities (AmeriDisability, 2024).

Targeted efforts have significantly enhanced educational and employment opportunities for this underserved population. For example, 61% of students who complete a Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) program secure paid employment after graduation (Papay et al., 2017), much higher than the general employment rate of 22.5% for individuals with IDD.

While Texas has implemented protocols to support students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including the creation of this advisory council, the Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, by the 86th Texas Legislature, further attention and investment are essential to ensure Texas remains competitive with other states nationwide.

This report examines the state of postsecondary education for individuals with IDD in Texas and proposes concrete, data-driven recommendations to enhance accessibility for all Texas students to improve their educational and employment opportunities. The council suggests 15 recommendations that advocate for constructive policy reforms and relevant financial assistance to advance Texas higher education as a whole.

The following list of recommendations are provided to help:

- Students find IDD postsecondary programs.
- Families and students learn about enrollment.
- Families and students identify financial aid and other resources.
- Students receive support on campus during transition from high school to postsecondary through formal services and peer-to-peer support.
- Improve pathways to credentialing and degrees.
- Measure student outcomes.

Additional recommendations are offered that are specific to students in foster care and those with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Some recommendations can be implemented at a program or college/university level or can be initiated by state agencies (e.g., Texas Workforce Commission, Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board), while others may require state or federal legislative change.

## Members of the Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

The Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is comprised of a diverse group of Texans that includes students with IDD/neurodevelopmental disorders (self-advocates), parents of individuals with IDD/neurodevelopmental disorders, state agencies, and higher education personnel who serve college-age students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. A full list of the members of the advisory council and their affiliations is provided in [Appendix A](#).

## Advisory Council's Summary of Recommendations

### Students and Families Finding Programs and Navigating Enrollment - High Priority

**1) Inventory Page Expansion:** The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and Texas Education Agency (TEA) should expand their program inventory pages to include the following data: name of program, location, age limits, guardianship requirements, certificates and degrees offered, cost, funding sources, living arrangements, and other arrangements available, such as a path from a community college to a four-year university. The THECB should also consider using a user-friendly survey tool to capture and update the inventory for IDD programs.

**2) IDD Program and Recruitment Literacy:** Information about the availability of IDD postsecondary programs in Texas should be included in all college recruitment and promotional materials. Similarly, college and university recruiters, and high school college and career counselors should become knowledgeable about postsecondary IDD programs to share information with prospective students and families.

### **3) Expand Access to Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs) for Students with Intellectual Disabilities:**

- a) The Texas Legislature should direct the THECB to establish a program to incentivize and support the creation and approval of additional CTPs within more institutions of higher education (IHEs) across Texas.
- b) THECB, in consultation with existing CTPs and Think College, an institute for promoting inclusive higher education options for people with IDD, should create training materials for IHEs that provide technical assistance on how to apply to become an approved CTP so students with IDD who have exited high school (received a high school diploma or high school equivalency, or aged out at 21 from a transition program) are eligible to receive federal financial aid.

- c) Leverage partnerships to provide grants to allow IHEs to develop postsecondary educational programs on their college campuses or in training schools that develop supports and services for students with IDD, especially in rural communities.

## **Supporting Students During Transition and On Campus**

**4) Campus Support through Disability Service Office (DSO) and Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS):** THECB, IHEs, and the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) should consider piloting the creation of a co-located space between TWC’s Texas Workforce Solutions-VRS and an IHE’s disability service office to collect data on potential use and its effect on student outcomes. A formal memorandum of understanding should be considered between partners to implement this strategy.

**5) Case Manager Transition:** TWC should allow case managers to follow a student from high school through their college program, rather than transitioning to a new case manager, to improve the ease of obtaining necessary supports. Students who do not choose a local program would have two counselors until there is a natural handoff.

**6) Peer-to-Peer Support:** Increase peer support for students who are neurodivergent by offering traditional and nontraditional peer supports. Promote social inclusion and belonging for people with IDD on college campuses by ensuring that IHE faculty encourage community engagement through one-on-one relationships and campus organizations.

**7) Campus Accessibility: Implement Evacuation Chairs in Essential Locations - *High Priority***  
Students who use wheelchairs should be provided with access to appropriate rescue chairs in campus housing as well as in educational buildings. Rescue chairs are standard in airports, some colleges, and other public buildings, and only require one person to operate them.

## **Student Financial Aid - *High Priority***

**8) Financial Aid Support Options:** Through THECB and TEA’s channels, THECB should provide a summary of methods to finance IDD postsecondary programs, showing for example, available federal CTP funds (five programs in Texas), Texas’ available [tuition exemptions](#), TWC [Vocational Rehabilitation Program supports](#), [Medicaid Home and Community Based Services](#), and [Achieving a Better Life Experience \(ABLE\) 529a accounts](#).

**9) State-Funded Scholarships:** Create scholarships for students with IDD that are not dependent on registering as a full-time student on a degree granting plan, possibly using other states as models.

## **Pathways to Graduation, Credentialing, and Employment**

**10) Reverse Transfer Accessibility:** Students with IDD who audit credit courses and meet course requirements should have a method to receive a grade or reverse transfer credit to a community college in a similar manner as non-disabled students.

**11) Strong Pathways for Transition and Graduation in Degree and Certification Programs:** For students in community colleges, create paths to transition to four-year campus and degree-seeking programs, similar to the “Bats to Cats” transition program between Austin Community College and Texas State University.

**12) Credentials of Value:** Ensure program value by providing industry certification that is well known across Texas and explore new credentials and certifications that demonstrate program rigor and student achievement.

#### **Other Student Considerations: Foster Care and IDD**

**13) Transition in Foster Care System:** Local education agencies (LEAs), TEA, and the Department of Family Protective Services (DFPS) should strengthen collaboration with students' admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committees to develop and monitor a comprehensive, person-centered postsecondary plan for each foster student with IDD that includes supporting the academic and functional strengths of the student to promote success after graduation.

**14) Outcomes Data for Foster Care Students with IDD:** TEA should develop a policy to identify and code students in foster care in the Public Education Information Management System in real time, adding outcome data related to students in foster care with IDD, tracking until they have passed the age to be eligible for postsecondary support.

#### **Other Student Considerations: Neurodivergence Including ADHD**

**15) Study and Data Requirements:** THECB and TEA should collect specific data regarding students with ADHD, including the number of students with ADHD graduating from high school; the number of students with ADHD enrolling in higher education programs; and the number of students with ADHD graduating from IHEs. Recent legislation called for this data for students with autism. This committee suggests it also be collected for ADHD.

This council is pleased to live in a state where postsecondary education is a priority. The Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities encourages THECB to more formally and strategically include individuals with IDD in our systems to expand opportunities and lifelong achievement.

## Introduction

The Texas Education Code (TEC), Section 61.06641, authorized through the passage of Senate Bill 1017, 86th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to periodically review the policies and practices that increase access to higher education opportunities, distribute educational outreach marketing materials, and establish an advisory council on postsecondary education for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). According to the statute, the report should include historic and current higher education data and recommendations for changes to support success and achievement for persons with IDD in accessing higher education (TEC, Section 61.06641(k)). Reports are to be submitted to the governor and members of the Legislature by December 1 of each even-numbered year.

This report reflects the most current scientific standard in which developmental and intellectual delays are categorized, as recognized by the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-V-TR 2022). In the 2013 version, a new category was established, "neurodevelopmental disorders." The following disorders were placed under this category: autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, specific learning disorder, and intellectual disabilities.

A neurodevelopmental disorder is a group of conditions with onset in the developmental period. Current diagnostic criteria define this as before the age of 22. A person who experiences the onset of a disability after the age of 22 may have similar functional limitations but the disability is not defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder. Neurodevelopmental disorders can produce impairments of personal, social, academic, or occupational functioning and persist for a lifetime.

The charge to the Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities is to address the population of individuals with IDD, including autism. The interpretation of this charge is to not limit the definition of "intellectual disability" to that found in the Texas Health and Safety Code<sup>1</sup> but to use the broader definition of developmental disability, the industry-accepted term of "neurodevelopmental disorders." Addressing the four most commonly diagnosed and most easily documented neurodevelopmental disorders is recommended as a first step in this first report; the THECB should consider expanding the charge to include all categories of neurodevelopmental disorders in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Texas Health and Safety Code, Section 591.003 (7-a): "Intellectual disability" means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning that is concurrent with deficits in adaptive behavior and originates during the developmental period.

# Report on Access to Higher Education for Persons With Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

## Students and Families Finding Programs and Navigating Enrollment

### Inventory Page Expansion

**Background:** Some Texas community colleges and universities offer nontraditional programs for their students with IDD, each crafting them from the ground up. Thus, they differ in outcomes (trade certificates or college degrees), in internships and employment experiences, in campus courses, and in whether they are commuter programs or offer living quarters. Information on nontraditional programs for students with IDD needs to be as seamless and accessible as it would be for a student accessing traditional college programs.

The THECB maintains an inventory of these programs, which is shared by TEA in their *Texas Transition and Employment Guide*. The information in the inventory is collected through a survey sent to each college and university. The survey allows IHEs to include IDD students enrolled in non-degree certificate and degree programs; however, it's possible that responses may only include students with IDD in degree programs, and the surveys don't always route to and include the college's specific program for IDD students. So THECB plans to launch a website with more complete information in fall 2024. This site will continue to grow, making it a one-stop place for choosing a college IDD program. One example of how Texas could improve resides at [Think College](#), an institute for promoting inclusive higher education options for people with IDD.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 1:** THECB and TEA should expand their program inventory pages to include the following data: name of program, location, age limits, guardianship requirements, certificates and degrees offered, cost, funding sources, living arrangements, and other arrangements available, such as a path from a community college to a four-year university. The THECB should also consider using a user-friendly survey tool to capture and update the inventory for IDD programs.

### IDD Program and Recruitment Literacy

**Background:** Currently, a student and their family might learn about a college program by attending an independent school district's (ISD's) college fair. Traditionally, ISD college recruitment fairs do not include IDD programs in promotional materials and events. Similarly, high school college counselors often have limited information about the various targeted IDD programs on college campuses, leaving it up to the high school special education department to distribute the information. Including IDD programs in general college recruitment might attract students who are unaware of all their options and unsure of their next step. For example, a student might consider beginning with an IDD program and then transitioning to a degree granting program. With a reported 365,522 Texans of high school age with an IDD, there is a large population to recruit (United States Census Bureau, 2022).

**Advisory Council Recommendation 2:** Information about the availability of IDD postsecondary programs in Texas should be included in all college recruitment and promotional materials. Similarly, college and university recruiters, and high school college and career counselors

should become knowledgeable about postsecondary IDD programs to share information with prospective students and families.

## **Expand Access to Comprehensive Transition Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities**

Background: CTPs are designed to support students with intellectual disabilities in continuing academic, career, and independent living instruction to prepare for gainful employment. Created by the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, CTPs define key requirements for programs, including access to federal student aid for students attending an approved CTP. Currently, only 5 CTPs are approved by the U.S. Department of Education in Texas, which is inadequate given the state's size, especially when compared to 8 in Tennessee, 12 in Pennsylvania, and 20 in Florida. These states have pursued legislative approaches designed to increase college options for students with IDD and to address affordability and quality.

For example, Florida's Senate Bill 672 (2016), or the Florida Postsecondary Comprehensive Transition Program (FPCTP) Act, established the Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities and allocated \$8 million to create college programs for students with IDD. This act also established the FPCTP Scholarship, requires higher education institutions to submit plans for inclusive environments, and engaged businesses to provide training and employment opportunities, setting evaluation and accountability standards. Legislation like the FPCTP Act is being implemented throughout the country to support the establishment of additional CTPs in each state and is extremely effective in increasing access to postsecondary opportunities for students with IDD.

### **Advisory Council Recommendation 3:**

- a) The Texas Legislature should direct THECB to establish a program to incentivize and support the creation and approval of additional CTPs within more institutions of higher education across Texas.
- b) THECB, in consultation with existing CTPs and Think College, should create training materials for IHEs to provide technical assistance on how to apply to become an approved CTP so students with IDD who have exited high school are eligible to receive federal financial aid.
- c) Leverage partnerships to provide grants to allow IHEs to develop postsecondary educational programs on their college campuses or in training schools that develop supports and services for students with IDD, especially in rural communities.

## **Supporting Students During Transition and On Campus**

### **Campus Support Through Disability Service Office and Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

Background: The disability services office (DSO) at each college coordinates accommodations for students with permanent and temporary disabilities as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. DSOs offer accommodations to help level the playing field and create opportunities for success for students with disabilities. Accommodations may include: peer

volunteer note-taking, extended test time, alternative test-taking locations, readers, scribes, oral or American Sign Language interpreter services, adaptive equipment, assistive technology, tape recorders for classroom use, alternate format reading material, and/or in-class accommodations. DSOs are typically not as experienced in supporting students with IDD.

The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is the state agency charged with overseeing and providing workforce development services to employers and job seekers of Texas. Texas Workforce Solutions (TWS)-Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) operates under TWC and TWS to support youth and adults with disabilities. TWS-VRS is the state agency with the primary focus to assist people with disabilities in obtaining integrated, competitive employment. TWS-VRS services may include vocational counseling, evaluation and assessment, guidance and assistance with job placement, time-limited job coaching, training programs, technology services, and vehicle and home modifications. According to the [Vocational Rehabilitation \(VR\) Office Locator](#), there are 57 VR locations across Texas that specialize in VR services for students.

One strategy to increase awareness at DSOs and to coordinate transition is by creating a co-located, one-stop shop for students with IDD to secure their postsecondary education supports.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 4:** THECB, IHEs, and the Texas Workforce Commission should consider piloting the creation of a co-located space between TWS-VRS and an IHE's disability service office to collect data on potential use and its effect on student outcomes. A formal memorandum of understanding should be considered between partners to implement this strategy.

Students demonstrate greater success during transition when there is continuity of support. Ongoing involvement by the student's high school TWS-VRS counselor would help maintain knowledge and relationships along the student's path. This would also facilitate the transition to a new TWC counselor at the postsecondary level.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 5:** The Texas Workforce Commission should allow case managers to follow a student from high school through their college program, rather than transitioning to a new case manager, to improve the ease of obtaining necessary supports. Students who do not choose a local program would have two counselors until there is a natural handoff.

### **Peer-to-Peer Campus Support**

**Background:** Students in degree programs who have learning or physical disabilities have access to disability offices on their college campuses for student support for the purpose of helping them succeed academically. While these more formal supports are essential, students have reported an interest in and success with additional support from peer relationships. This may include a student-to-student match or affiliation with organizations such as recreation and leisure, fine arts, or even disability organizations that the student joins or forms. These peer relationships lead to greater participation in the full array of residential life, campus life, student organizations, employment, and relationships.

Quote from AL, former student with IDD:

*“I worked part-time on campus and I joined four clubs! I was welcomed into: Student Peace Alliance, Southwestern University Native, Sigma Phi Lambda Christian sorority, and the university’s disability organization which morphed into a broader student-led Theatre for Social Justice, addressing issues such as bodies, disabilities, inclusion, environmentalism, and racism through audience-participation theatre. Area high schools then invited us to perform in their assemblies!”*

**Advisory Council Recommendation 6:** Increase peer support for students who are neurodivergent by offering traditional and nontraditional peer supports. Promote social inclusion and belonging for people with IDD on college campuses by ensuring that IHE faculty encourage community engagement through one-on-one relationships and campus organizations.

**Background:** Across the U.S., fire departments responded to 3,379 structure fires in dormitories each year from 2017 to 2021 (National Fire Protection Association, 2022). Among Texas fire-related deaths and structural fires, 60% involve a person with a mobility disability who requires assistance (U.S. Fire Administration, 2022). Standard electric wheelchairs can become drenched by sprinkler systems rendering them unusable, therefore specialized rescue chairs are required. The National Fire Protection Association recommends all campuses provide or allow fire rescue chairs, yet all Texas campuses are not compliant with this recommendation (National Fire Protection Association, 2022).

**Advisory Council Recommendation 7:** Students who use wheelchairs be provided with access to appropriate rescue chairs in campus housing as well as in educational buildings. These are standard in airports, some colleges, and other public buildings, and only require one person to operate it.

## Student Financial Aid

### Financial Aid Support Options

**Background:** As students and their families explore college options, the question of how to pay for it is top of mind. Most students and their families use a combination of personal resources and support from other funding sources to pay for college. Several funding options exist, including federal student aid, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program, Medicaid, scholarships, veteran’s benefits, and Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) 529a accounts. Yet, financing postsecondary education for students with IDD remains a challenge for many reasons.

For students with intellectual disabilities, funding may come from:

- Comprehensive transition programs, federal student aid created by the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, are designed to support students with IDD who want to continue academic, career, and independent living instruction to prepare for gainful employment. There are only five approved CTPs in Texas, while several smaller states maintain from seven to 19 CTP programs.
- TWC’s VR Program is a funding source, but students must navigate postsecondary funding while working to achieve employment goals.

- Medicaid Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) waivers can be used to fund a variety of supports and services for students with IDD (Parisi, 2019), but Texas maintains an incredibly lengthy interest list for HCBS waivers, with thousands waiting decades for a waiver to support their community living goals (Texas Health and Human Services, n.d.).
- [ABLE accounts](#) are for people with disabilities and their families to save and invest money for qualified disability expenses. Postsecondary education is a qualified expense.
- Students with IDD can access some scholarships to help pay for college. However, because college programs for students with IDD are typically non-degree programs and/or full time, eligibility for scholarships can be extremely limited (Bates, 2022).

Even when a family has experience with finding financial aid for their student who attends degree granting programs, it changes when sending a student to a program for students with IDD. Having information about all the possible costs and savings in one place can help the student to decide if financing a program is possible.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 8:** THECB should provide a summary of methods to finance IDD postsecondary programs, showing for example, available federal CTP funds (five programs in Texas), Texas’ available [tuition exemptions](#), TWC [Vocational Rehabilitation Program supports](#), [Medicaid Home and Community Based Services](#), and [Achieving a Better Life Experience \(ABLE\) 529a accounts](#). This information should be distributed widely through THECB and TEA’s channels.

## **State-Funded Scholarships**

**Background:** There are hundreds of state-funded scholarships available for students entering degree-seeking programs. Scholarships often require high GPA or College Board scores or require that the student carry a full course schedule, and some require a student to have full-time or part-time employment. For a variety of reasons, students with IDD may not meet these educational and employment criteria, making them ineligible for state scholarships.

On April 30, 2024, the state of Oklahoma passed Senate Bill (SB) 1624 into law, creating the Oklahoma Access and Achievement Program to provide scholarships for students with IDD (Oklahoma SB 1624, 2024). The state of Arkansas passed SB 58 in March 2022, a \$2,000,000 scholarship program through their Department of Education–Division of Higher Education Appropriation (Arkansas SB 58, 2022). This scholarship program supports students with IDD pursuing higher education. In Minnesota, the Grants for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities program provides financial assistance to eligible Minnesota resident students with IDD who attend eligible Minnesota postsecondary institutions. The grant program was established in Fiscal Year 2018 and has received \$800,000 total in state appropriations (Mol Sletten, 2021).

**Advisory Council Recommendation 9:** Create scholarships for students with IDD that are not dependent on registering as a full-time student on a degree granting plan, possibly using the 88th Texas Legislature’s [House Bill \(HB\) 5146](#) and [HB 5148](#), plus other states’ legislation, as models.

## Pathways to Graduation, Credentialing, and Employment

### Reverse Transfer Accessibility

**Background:** In 2011, Texas passed [HB 3025](#), implementing a reverse transfer process to allow a student to transfer courses from their four-year school to a community college to receive an associate degree (HB 3025, 2011). Today, students with IDD who are enrolled in non-degree programs are taking college courses as part of their programs and successfully achieving the course requirements. However, in some cases, a student may meet criteria to receive a grade, yet the school maintains that the student must be enrolled in a degree granting program to reverse transfer the credit to a community college. THECB should promote that this type of reverse transferring a course when not enrolled in a degree granting program should be allowed.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 10:** Students with IDD who audit credit courses and meet course requirements should have a method to receive a grade or reverse transfer credit to a community college in a similar manner as non-disabled students.

**Background:** Data has shown that while 60% of Austin Community College (ACC) students intend to transfer to a four-year university, only 25% actually achieve this goal within three years (Manno, 2024). ACC and Texas State University have developed the “Bats to Cats” program to facilitate the transition of students from a two-year campus to a four-year school and to save students on average \$19,000 in the process (Manno, 2024). The University of Cincinnati and the state of Oklahoma also have model programs to facilitate these pathways. The stronger the pathway that is provided to students with IDD, the more financially independent they will become throughout their lifetime.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 11:** For students in community colleges, create transition paths for students to transition to a four-year campus and degree-seeking programs, similar to the “Bats to Cats” transition program between Austin Community College and Texas State.

### Credentials of Value

**Background:** The National Conference of State Legislatures (2023) reports that data learners who obtain a non-degree credential have higher employment rates and earn \$15,000 more in annual median income than learners without a non-degree credential. Grigal et al. (2019) validated that when a credential was awarded by the IHE, it almost doubled the likelihood that the student would obtain a paid job upon completion of the non-degree program.

A goal is for students to develop self-understanding and find the career they want rather than transition program staff or IHE staff at college outreach fairs steering them toward existing credentials and certifications, which may lead to pull-out programs and limited options. For example, Texas State’s Bobcat RISE program promotes an inclusive liberal arts education supporting students’ individualistic growth and development and discovery of new possible employment opportunities aligning with their goals and dreams.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 12:** Ensure program value by providing known industry certification that is well known across Texas and explore new credentials and certifications that match students’ interests, while demonstrating program rigor and student achievement.

## Other Student Considerations: Foster Care and IDD

The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (2022) reported 53% of children in DFPS care have at least one type of disability. Texas students in foster care navigate unique risk factors that impact academics; physical, mental, and emotional well-being; and access to postsecondary opportunities. For instance, students in foster care are more likely to be highly mobile, disrupting academic and functional skills acquisition, causing a decreased likelihood of pursuing postsecondary opportunities.

In 2022, in its “Foster Care & Student Success” guide states:

*“In 2017, DFPS and the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board exchanged state data for the first time on the outcomes of higher education for students formerly in foster care. The data revealed that out of the 33% of students formerly in foster care who enrolled in higher education within seven years of turning eighteen-years old, 1.5% obtained a Bachelor’s Degree, 0.5% obtained an Associate Degree, and 1.5% earned a certification in a technical field.” (p.15)*

All students in foster care are appointed an education decision-maker by DFPS regarding the education of the minor child or, in some circumstances, where the student is eligible to remain in foster care until the age of 22 (DFPS, n.d.). The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires state local education agencies (LEAs) to involve the person standing in parental relation in admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) meetings to decide special-education and related services. However, the liaison or appointed surrogate parent may not be well prepared to advocate for the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) without consistent collaboration with the LEA, DFPS, the self-direction of the student, and others who may be supporting the student during transition.

Beginning at age 16, children in foster care may take a Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) course to learn about life skills. However, currently these courses do not cover Texas programs for persons with IDD and students must be assessed to determine appropriateness (DFPS, n.d., PAL). Also, TEA publications pertaining to foster youth transition to postsecondary opportunities exclude programs specially designed for people with IDD. Individuals in foster care may require information about IDD programs through nontraditional systems of support.

### Double Down on Transition in Foster Care System

**Background:** Transition planning begins at age 14 and PAL begins at age 16. Yet, in spite of 53% of students in foster care having a disability, the PAL manual offers no path for foster students with IDD to access non-degree granting postsecondary programs or those who offer trade certificates.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 13:** LEAs, TEA, and DFPS should strengthen collaboration with students’ ARD committees to develop and monitor a comprehensive, person-centered postsecondary plan for each foster student with IDD that includes supporting the academic and functional strengths of the foster student to promote success after graduation.

1. If the student accesses their high school’s 18+ program, TEA and DFPS should continue to provide for the student, extending their respective transition schedules and plans.
2. TEA should adopt rules to create an IEP supplement for all students in foster care, including a checklist for transition-aged youth with an IEP.

3. TEA should require LEA Foster Care Liaisons to connect with the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), college, university, technical school, or vocational program of the student's choice to initiate a supportive transition before high school graduation.
4. TEA should incorporate public college programs for IDD into the Texas Transition and Employment Guide, the Foster Care and Student Success Chapter 13 manual, and the Preparation for Adult Living course.
5. TEA and DFPS should develop a process for highly mobile students in foster care who are transitioning to another campus to ensure that IEP goals, accommodations and modifications, and related services seamlessly follow the student to the receiving school.

### **Outcomes Data for Foster Care Students with IDD**

**Background:** The state data-tracking system, Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS), does not include variables to record public school students in foster care who have IDD in real time. Similarly, colleges are not tracking students in foster care who have IDD. Without recorded data, the state is unable to monitor student outcomes or address the factors cited above that impact student graduation and future employment.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 14:** TEA should develop a policy to identify and code students in foster care in PEIMS, adding outcome data related to students in foster care with IDD, tracking until they have passed the age to be eligible for postsecondary support.

### **Other Student Considerations: Neurodivergence Including Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

**Note:** This section covers neurodivergent students participating either in non-degree granting IDD programs or degree granting IDD programs.

#### **ADHD Data Requirements**

**Background:** ADHD can affect one's ability to focus, to make a plan or schedule and stick to it, and the ability to submit completed work. These tasks can become more challenging when moving onto campus, without family or supports to oversee progress on tasks. Some schools offer programs to assist with the transition, even offering a choice to repeat the freshman year, replacing the original grades. However, data is needed to determine the scope of the issue and what solutions are most effective for these students. Data on ADHD could be collected simultaneously with other studies related to autism initiated through recent law.

**Advisory Council Recommendation 15:** THECB and TEA should collect specific data regarding students with ADHD: the number of students with ADHD graduating from high school; the number of students with ADHD enrolling in higher education programs; and the number of students with ADHD graduating from institutions of higher education. Recent legislation called for this data for students with autism. This committee suggests it also be collected for neurodiversity conditions, such as ADHD and traumatic brain injury. The larger Other Health Impairment category collected by TEA encapsulates physical disabilities and special healthcare needs, in addition to neurodiversity conditions. We suggest the creation of a code that captures neurodiversity at TEA and THECB.

## Conclusion

This council is pleased to live in a state where postsecondary education is a priority among state leaders and the THECB. The work of this council is further supported by federal policies, including the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, all of which have offered meaningful opportunities to strengthen our education system and economy.

Research demonstrates that increasing access to higher education opportunities for students with IDD not only benefits students with IDD but also benefits students without disabilities. For example, inclusive college classes have led to greater comfort among students without disabilities during future interactions with students with disabilities (Griffin et al., 2012). Inclusive higher education has also been found to positively shift the attitudes on diversity and acceptance of people with disabilities among students without disabilities (May, 2012). These are marketable skills desired by business and industry (Kaplan, 2013).

The council encourages THECB to more formally and strategically include individuals with IDD in our systems to expand opportunities and access to tools and resources for all Texans; re-engage nontraditional adult learners; prioritize research, data, and technology to drive economic development; and identify and prioritize high-value credentials to improve future employability.

Therefore, the Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is pleased to submit the recommendations, priority areas, and attainable goals for students with IDD outlined in this report.

## Appendix A: Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

**Linda Litzinger, Presiding Officer**

Disability Advocacy Group  
Representative, Parent  
Texas Parent to Parent  
Austin

**Aaron W. Bangor, PhD**

Continuing Advisory Committee  
Representative for Special Education  
AT&T Services, Inc.  
Austin

**Brenda Barrio, PhD**

IDD College Program Representative  
Empower, Learn, Excel, enVision,  
Advance, and Rise Program  
University of North Texas  
Denton

**Elizabeth Fuller**

Student Representative  
Texas Tech University  
Lubbock

**Kristi Watson Gibson**

High School Teacher of IDD students  
Goesbeck ISD  
Goesbeck

**Tracy Glass**

IDD College Program Representative  
Postsecondary Access and Training in  
Human Services Program, Texas A&M  
University  
College Station

**Kristen Gooch**

IDD College Graduate  
Austin

**Christina Gushanas, PhD**

Transition to Employment Specialist  
Representative  
Sam Houston State University  
Huntsville

**Abby Hughes**

High School Representative  
Special Education Transition Services,  
NEISD  
San Antonio

**Susan Moraska**

IDD College Program Representative  
Vocational Advancement and Skill  
Training Academy, Houston Community  
College  
Houston

**Edward O'Neill, PhD**

Texas Education Agency Representative  
Office of Special Populations and  
Monitoring, Texas Education Agency  
Austin

**Christine Price**

IDD College Program Representative  
Skills, Training and Education for Personal  
Success Program, Austin Community  
College  
Austin

**Jolene Sanders**

Disability Advocacy Group  
Representative, Parent  
Coalition of Texans with Disabilities  
Austin

**Sabrina Gonzalez Saucedo**

Disability Advocacy Group Representative  
The Arc of Texas  
Austin

**Tamara Shetron, PhD**  
IDD College Program Representative  
Bobcat RISE, Texas State University  
San Marcos

**Beth Stalvey, PhD**  
Disability Advocacy Group Representative  
Texas Council for Developmental  
Disabilities  
Austin

**Laura Villarreal**  
Texas Workforce Commission  
Representative  
Vocational Rehabilitation, Texas  
Workforce Commission  
Austin

**Lauryn Woolfolk**  
Student Representative  
University of North Texas  
Denton

**Nina Zuna, PhD**  
University Centers for Excellence in  
Developmental Disabilities  
Representative  
The University of Texas at Austin  
Austin

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**For more information, contact:**

Waylon Metoyer  
Director for Student Success Strategic Initiatives  
Student Success Division  
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
George H. W. Bush Building  
1801 Congress Ave., Room 12.200  
Austin, TX 78701  
PHONE 512-427-6216  
[waylon.metoyer@highered.texas.gov](mailto:waylon.metoyer@highered.texas.gov)