

Study and Report on Assisting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Texas Education Code Section 61.06694

October 2025

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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.

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	i
Background	7
Postsecondary Education Programs in Texas	14
Study and Report on Assisting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder	19
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Findings	23
Recommendations for Action	60

Tables

Table 1. Postsecondary Programs for Degree-Seeking Students with Disabilities	14
Table 2. Postsecondary Programs for Non-Degree-Seeking Students with Disabilities	15
Table 3. Frequency and Percentage of Texas Public High School Graduates with Autism	24
Table 4. Statewide Public Two-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students	36
Table 5. Statewide Public Two-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD by Sex and Enrollment Status	37
Table 6. Statewide Public Two-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism by Sex and Enrollment Status	37
Table 7. Statewide University Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students	41
Table 8. Statewide University Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD by Sex and Enrollment Status	42
Table 9. Statewide University Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism by Sex and Enrollment Status	42
Table 10. Scholarship Opportunities for Students with Autism and IDD	49
Table 11. Specialized Scholarship Databases	50

Figures

Figure 1. Four Subtypes of Autism Spectrum Disorder	7
Figure 2. Percentage of Students Ages 5 Through 21 Served by IDEA, Part B, by Disability Category: Fall 2022	11
Figure 3. Total Number of Students Enrolled at a Texas Public Institution of Higher Education with Autism, Fiscal Year 2021-2024	20
Figure 4. Total Number of Students with Autism and/or IDD Enrolled at a Texas Public Institution of Higher Education, FY 2021-2024	25

Figure 5. Total Number of Students with Autism Enrolled at a Texas Public Institution of Higher Education, FY 2021-2024.....	25
Figure 6. Percentage Distribution of Higher Education Enrollments by Institution Type for Students with Autism and/or IDD, FY 2021-2024.....	26
Figure 7. Percent Distribution of Higher Education Enrollments by Institution Type for Students with Autism, FY 2021-2024.....	26
Figure 8. Percentage of Higher Education Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity for Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2021-2024.....	27
Figure 9. Percentage of Higher Education Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity for Students with Autism, FYs 2021-2024.....	27
Figure 10. Percentage of Higher Education Enrollment by Age, Enrollment Status, and Gender for Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2021-2024.....	28
Figure 11. Percentage of Higher Education Enrollment by Age, Enrollment Status, and Gender for Students with Autism, FYs 2021-2024.....	28
Figure 12. Top Five Universities Enrolled in by Students with Autism and/or IDD, FY 2024.....	29
Figure 13. Top Five Universities Enrolled in by Students with Autism, FY 2024.....	30
Figure 14. Top Five Public Two-Year Institutions Enrolled in by Students with Autism and/or IDD, FY 2024.....	30
Figure 15. Top Five Public Two-Year Institutions Enrolled in by Students with Autism, FY 2024..	31
Figure 16. First-Year GPA of FTIC Students with Autism and/or IDD at a Public Two-Year Institution, FYs 2021-2024.....	32
Figure 17. First-Year GPA of FTIC Students with Autism at a Public Two-Year Institution, FYs 2021-2024.....	32
Figure 18. First-Year GPAs of FTIC Students with Autism and/or IDD at Public Two-Year Institutions, by Gender, FYs 2021-2024.....	33
Figure 19. First-Year GPAs of FTIC Students with Autism and/or IDD at Public Two-Year Institutions, by Enrollment Status, FY 2021-2024.....	34
Figure 20. First-Year GPAs of FTIC Students with Autism at a Public Two-Year Institution, by Enrollment Status, FYs 2021-2024.....	34
Figure 21. First-Year GPAs of FTIC Students with Autism and/or IDD at Universities, FY 2021-2024.....	35
Figure 22. Top Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Three-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024.....	38
Figure 23. Top Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Four-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024.....	39
Figure 24. Top Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Six-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024.....	39

Figure 25. Top Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Three-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2022-2024	40
Figure 26. Top Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Four-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2022-2024.....	40
Figure 27. Top Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Four-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2022-2024.....	41
Figure 28. Universities with Highest Four-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024	43
Figure 29. Universities with Highest Five-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024	44
Figure 30. Universities with Highest Six-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024.....	44
Figure 31. Universities with Highest Four-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2023-2024	45
Figure 32. Universities with Highest Five-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2022-2024	45
Figure 33. Universities with Highest Six-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2023-2024.....	46
Figure 34. Financial Aid Awarded, FY 2021-2024.....	47
Figure 35. Successful Support Models	53

Appendices

Appendix A: Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities	60
Appendix B: Definitions	63
Appendix C: Developmental Disabilities Definition	64
Appendix D: Autism Program Survey	65

Executive Summary

This report was conducted in compliance with [Senate Bill 55 \(SB 55\), 88th Texas Legislature, Regular Session](#) (codified as Texas Education Code Section 61.06694): "an act relating to a study and report by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board regarding best practices for assisting students with autism spectrum disorder" (ASD). The report was prepared with the assistance of the Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD Advisory Council).

The study should determine best practices for assisting students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who are enrolled at institutions of higher education.

The legislation states that the study must identify and track:

1. The number of students with ASD who graduate from secondary schools in this state.
2. The number of students with ASD who are enrolled at institutions of higher education.
3. Financial assistance available to students with ASD who enroll at institutions of higher education.
4. Graduation rates of students with ASD who enroll at institutions of higher education.

Additionally, the study must identify and examine best practices and program modules from public and private institutions of higher education outside of Texas that have achieved successful results in working with students with autism spectrum disorder.

As directed by this bill, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) worked with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to conduct a study identifying specialized K–12 programs for students with ASD and explore how those programs could be replicated or expanded in postsecondary institutions. This report includes [recommendations](#) from the IDD Advisory Council on how to improve tracking and reporting.

Percentage of Individuals with Autism

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network, approximately 1 in 31 children aged 8 years old has been identified with autism, which equates to about 3.2% of the child population. This marks a continued increase from previous years, where the rate was 1 in 36 in 2020 and 1 in 44 in 2018, highlighting a trend of growing recognition and diagnosis of autism in early childhood.¹ While national data on adult autism prevalence is less precise, estimates suggest that 1–2% of U.S. adults may have autism or related conditions. This figure is likely an undercount, as many adults—particularly those diagnosed later in life or who were missed under earlier diagnostic criteria—remain undiagnosed.²

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, May 27). *Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network*. <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/addm-network/index.html>

² Dietz, P. M., Rose, C. E., McArthur, D., & Maenner, M. J. (2020). National and state estimates of adults with autism spectrum disorder. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 50(12), 4258–4266. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-020-04513-4>

Students with Autism in Secondary and Postsecondary Education

- The TEA reports 125,189 students with autism enrolled in 2023-2024 at Texas public and charter schools. These students account for 16.16% of the state's total special education population.³
- According to the most recent data available from the TEA, approximately 4,700 students with a primary, secondary, or tertiary diagnosis of autism graduated from a Texas public high school in 2023.⁴
- Data from the THECB report a total of 2,139 students with autism enrolled in postsecondary programs in 2024.⁵

The council highlighted the underidentification of students with autism in secondary settings who may be misclassified and families who may resist a particular diagnosis, as challenges. Another concern is the systemic denial of services, first driven by statewide performance indicators that limited the percentage of students receiving special education services and later worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, when many students were learning virtually.⁶

Collectively, these factors contribute to the inaccurate identification and tracking of autism in both secondary and postsecondary education. This, in turn, affects graduation rate reporting, postsecondary transition planning, funding distribution, and the development of targeted programs. The council offers [recommendations](#) in this report to improve tracking and reporting.

Financial Aid for Students with ASD at Institutions of Higher Education

As students with autism and IDD and their families navigate the college selection process, financing their education is a concern. Some programs are free to the students, some provide tiered support for students based on need, and others implement a higher cost for first- and second-year students, and lower costs for third- and fourth-year students. Based on the Autism Program Survey (see [Appendix D](#)) paid programs averaged \$2,070 per semester, with a semester defined as 16 weeks (range: \$0-\$4000 per semester).

Students with disabilities have access to several forms of financial aid from various sources, which may at least partially cover the cost of their college education:

- Federal financial aid
- Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)
- Tuition waivers and fee reductions
- Veterans' benefits

³ Texas Education Agency. (2024). Special Education Reports and Data. Retrieved from <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/student-data/standard-reports/peims-standard-reports>

⁴ Texas Education Agency. (2024). Retrieved from Texas Education Agency by Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board data request

⁵ Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2025). Retrieved from CBM001/CBM0C1

⁶ Texas Education Research Center. (2025). Texas Special Education Report. Retrieved from https://texaserc.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Texas_Special_Ed_Report_4.4.2025.pdf

- Assistive technology and disability-related support
- Texas ABLE Program – Achieving a Better Life Experience 529A Savings Accounts
- Private loans
- Scholarships

A detailed summary of these financial aid programs is provided in the Financial Aid section of this report (see page 43).

Best Practices for Serving Students with ASD at Out of State Institutions of Higher Education

SB 55, 88th Texas Legislature, Regular Session requires the THECB and IDD Advisory Council to "identify and examine best practices and program modules from public and private institutions of higher education outside this state that have achieved successful results in working with students with autism spectrum disorder." Most colleges and universities do not collect or publicly report college persistence and completion rates specifically for students with ASD. In the absence of this tracking, the IDD Advisory Council created a survey (see [Appendix D](#)) focused on best practices and program modules for serving students with ASD. The survey was sent to 57 institutions, including 55 outside Texas and 2 within the state, which were selected based on articles and research identifying them as top ranked in the U.S. for autism support in postsecondary education.

Respondents most frequently listed five support models that contribute to student success:

- **Academic Services:** Disability services, counseling, and accommodation processes for exams/assignments
- **Academic Supports:** Tutoring, study skills workshops, executive function coaching, learning strategies, and assistive technology
- **Teaching and Staff Training:** Ongoing training in autism awareness, communication strategies, and universal design
- **Social/Peer Support:** peer mentoring, social skills training, structured activities, and interest-based groups
- **Career Development:** Tailored career support, internships, employer partnerships, and neurodiversity-focused job prep

K-12 Supports for Students with ASD

Additionally, SB 55 requires THECB to collaborate with TEA to identify specialized programs offered to elementary or secondary students with ASD to determine how those programs could be replicated at or extended to postsecondary institutions. TEA does not maintain a statewide list of all specialized K-12 programs offered to students with autism. However, between 2022 and 2024, TEA issued grants to promote innovative services for students with autism. The funding for these grants originated in the 87th Texas Legislature to increase capacity of local

education agencies to implement programs that effectively serve students with autism ages 3-21. Innovations across 55 programs demonstrated four components with the greatest impact⁷:

- Classroom environment
- Individualized student support
- Parent and community engagement
- Staff training and professional development

Recommendations for Action

This report, prepared and submitted by the Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, outlines a set of strategic recommendations aimed at improving educational outcomes for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Texas. These recommendations were developed through collaborative discussion and formally approved during regularly scheduled meetings held in accordance with the Texas Open Meetings Act.

Autism Spectrum Disorder encompasses a wide range of abilities and support needs. Students with ASD vary significantly in terms of cognitive, social, and adaptive functioning. As such, their potential for success in postsecondary education also varies.

Therefore, any recommendations, policies, or supports proposed in this report should be contextualized based on each student's individual strengths, challenges, and goals. A one-size-fits-all approach is not appropriate. Instead, institutions, organizations, and agencies should adopt flexible, person-centered strategies that acknowledge and accommodate the wide range of abilities and needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

1. **Improve systems in K–12 schools to better identify students with disabilities, especially those with developmental or learning differences.** Schools should improve early identification processes for students with developmental or learning differences, including autism. Early detection ensures students can access vital supports—such as special education services and behavioral interventions—when they need them most. To achieve this, schools should use screening tools at key educational stages and adopt a centralized, secure data system that allows authorized staff to track evaluations, services, and student progress as they move between schools and districts.
2. **The Texas Legislature should explore establishing clear reporting and data requirements for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)** to collect—and for institutions of higher education to report—data on the number of students with autism and/or intellectual disabilities enrolled in higher education programs to ensure consistent and accurate statewide data collection.

⁷ Texas Education Agency. (2025). *Final Report for 2022-2024 & 2023-2024: Innovative Services for Students with Autism Grant*. <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/government-relations-and-legal/government-relations/final-report-2022-24-innovative-services-autism.pdf>

- a. THECB should seek consistent criteria and direction to capture enrollment of students in higher education programs full time, part time, and credit vs non-credit seeking.
 - b. The Texas Legislature and THECB should implement standardized definitions or uniform reporting to evaluate program effectiveness. Studies suggest that autistic students may persist and succeed academically at rates closer to their neurotypical peers when provided appropriate accommodation and supports, though challenges often emerge in credit accumulation and degree completion years later.
3. **Promote innovations and evidence-based programs for students in K-12 programs.** TEA's 2025 report on its Innovative Services for Students with Autism Grant⁸ outlines multiple barriers that need to be addressed to sustain and replicate innovative evidence-based practices in K-12 programs. Examples of solutions for overcoming barriers include:
 - Embedding best practices and parent training into district policies and training.
 - Improving recruitment and retention of specialized staff, particularly Board Certified Behavior Analysts and autism specialists.
 - Communicating consistently between central office special education staff, campus administrators, and campus-based staff to prevent uneven implementation.
 - Facilitating the development of student's self-advocacy skills.
 - Adapting purchased technology to individual student needs.
 - Developing robust monitoring systems to track student outcomes, teacher performance, and program effectiveness.
4. **Enhance academic and career pathways for students with autism and IDD.** The Texas Legislature and educational agencies should ensure that students with autism and intellectual disabilities have access to academic and career focused courses that reflect their interests and long-term goals, including opportunities for advanced coursework, dual credit, and career and technical education. During the 18+ transition years, students should be provided with a range of programs that foster independent living skills, vocational training, and college readiness. These offerings should encompass accessible higher education programs, community college bridge initiatives, and supported employment training, ensuring that students are equipped for successful transitions into postsecondary education and the workforce.
5. **Build on evidence-based practices in postsecondary programs that promote successful student outcomes.** To improve outcomes for students with disabilities, education systems should build on proven, evidence-based practices that support academic, behavioral, and social development. Programs that promote peer support, mental health integration, remote learning adaptations, certified coaching, and progress

⁸ Texas Education Agency. (2025). *Final Report for 2022-2024 & 2023-2024: Innovative Services for Students with Autism Grant*. <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/government-relations-and-legal/government-relations/final-report-2022-24-innovative-services-autism.pdf>

monitoring tools provide a scalable model for delivering support. These evidence-based program components should be shared more broadly to guide families and students through transition and postsecondary planning.

6. **Expand peer-to-peer and self-advocacy programs in postsecondary settings.**

Colleges and universities should expand peer-to-peer and self-advocacy programs to better support students. While some students may not have an official diagnosis of an intellectual or developmental disability—including autism—they may still face significant challenges completing coursework or meeting graduation requirements. Establishing early identification and support mechanisms is therefore essential. Programs that improve access to resources, foster self-advocacy, and empower students to articulate and address their unique educational needs are critical to student success. [The Mansfield Hall program](#) (described in the Successful Support Models section of this report) provides one example of how such supports can be implemented. By prioritizing these approaches, institutions can create stronger pathways to success, increasing opportunities and completion rates for all students who could benefit from additional resources.

7. **Establish dedicated, state-funded scholarships to support students with autism and IDD.** These scholarships should not require recipients to be enrolled full time in a degree-granting program, addressing the current limitations in both the number and dollar amount of existing awards. This approach aligns with recommendations from the 2024 THECB "Report on Access to Higher Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities" and could significantly expand access to higher education for this student population.

Background

Defining Autism

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is one type of neurodevelopmental disorders outlined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition* (DSM-5)⁹ defined by the following characteristics: “persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts” including “deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction,” and difficulty “developing and maintaining and understanding relationships.” It is important to note that not all individuals with autism have intellectual or other developmental disabilities.

Researchers at Princeton University identified four distinct subtypes of autism, marking a major advancement in the understanding of ASD. Using data from more than 5,000 children in the SPARK autism cohort,¹⁰ the team applied a person-centered computational model that analyzed more than 230 traits per individual. This approach allowed them to move beyond single-trait genetic associations and instead uncover meaningful groupings based on combinations of behavioral, developmental, and psychiatric characteristics.

The four subtypes identified are Social and Behavioral Challenges, Moderate Challenges, Mixed ASD with Developmental Delay, and Broadly Affected, as described in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Four Subtypes of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Social and Behavioral Challenges  Core autism traits like social difficulties and repetitive behaviors, often with co-occurring conditions such as ADHD or anxiety	Mixed ASD with Developmental Delay  Delayed developmental milestones but fewer psychiatric symptoms
Moderate Challenges  Moderate levels of both developmental and behavioral symptoms	Broadly Affected  Widespread developmental, behavioral, and psychiatric challenges

Source: Modified from Princeton University (2025)

⁹ American Psychiatric Association. (2022). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5th ed., text rev.). <https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.books.9780890425787>

¹⁰ Princeton University. (2025, July 9). *Major autism study uncovers biologically distinct subtypes, paving way for precision medicine*. <https://www.princeton.edu/news/2025/07/09/major-autism-study-uncovers-biologically-distinct-subtypes-paving-way-precision>

Understanding these differences is critical to evaluating the data presented in this report. This research is expected to significantly influence the future of autism definitions, diagnosis, and care, allowing for more personalized interventions. By identifying subtypes with clinical and behavioral features, the research better differentiates between features of autism and broader categories of developmental delay rather than a single diagnostic category.¹¹

The TEA uses the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.8, Child with a Disability, to define autism as "... a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences."¹²

Prevalence Rates of Individuals with Autism

The reported rates of autism have increased significantly over the past few decades, and there are several important reasons behind this trend. However, it is essential to understand that the increase in diagnosed cases does not necessarily mean that autism itself is becoming more common. Increased rates can be attributed to the following:

- **Expanded definition of autism:** Earlier editions of the DSM had narrower criteria. For example, in DSM-III (1980), only the most severe cases were typically diagnosed. With the introduction of terms like "autism spectrum disorder" in the DSM-5 (2013), a wider range of symptoms and severity levels now fall under the autism umbrella, including formerly separate diagnoses like Asperger's syndrome.
- **Screening and early intervention:** Pediatricians now routinely screen for autism in early childhood. Early detection has led to more diagnoses at younger ages than in the past.
- **Increased awareness and access to services:** Public, medical, and educational awareness of autism has grown substantially. Similarly, teachers, parents, and doctors are more likely to recognize signs of autism and refer children for evaluation. Public awareness and advocacy have also reduced stigma, encouraging more families to seek diagnoses.

Children with Autism

According to the CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network,¹³ approximately 1 in 31 children aged 8 years has been identified with ASD, which equates to about 3.2% of the child population. This marks a continued increase from previous years, where

¹¹ Litman, A., Sauerwald, N., Green Snyder, L. *et al.* Decomposition of phenotypic heterogeneity in autism reveals underlying genetic programs. *Nat Genet* **57**, 1611–1619 (2025). <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41588-025-02224-z>

¹² Texas Education Agency. (n.d.) *Federal and State Requirements*. Retrieved July 2025 from <https://fw.escapps.net/node/3829>

¹³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, May 27). *Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network*. <https://www.cdc.gov/autism/addm-network/index.html>

the rate was 1 in 36 in 2020 and 1 in 44 in 2018, highlighting a trend of growing recognition and diagnosis of autism in early childhood.

The prevalence remains significantly higher among boys than girls, with boys being diagnosed at more than three times the rate of girls. The ADDM Network also notes that prevalence rates vary by geographic region and racial/ethnic group, with some communities showing higher identification rates most likely due to better access to diagnostic services and early intervention programs.

Adults with Autism

While national data on adult autism prevalence is less precise, estimates suggest that 1–2% of U.S. adults may be on the autism spectrum. This figure is likely an undercount, as many adults—particularly those diagnosed later in life or who were missed under earlier diagnostic criteria—remain undiagnosed. Efforts are ongoing to improve the identification of autism in adults and to strengthen support systems.

Diagnosis of Autism

Although individuals can be diagnosed with autism at any age, it has been classified as a developmental disorder because its symptoms typically appear within the first two years of life. Historically, children may have been labeled with conditions such as “intellectual disability,” “language disorder,” or “behavioral disorder.” Today, many of these same individuals might instead receive an autism diagnosis—reflecting a shift in diagnostic practices rather than an actual rise in prevalence.

When evaluating students with autism, it is essential to consider a broader range of diagnostic categories. However, comprehensive data on autism and IDD is difficult to obtain because organizations collect and report information using varying definitions, populations, surveys, and timeframes. For instance, data on adult disabilities were taken from a 1994/95 *National Health Interview Survey* (NHIS),¹⁴ while the estimates for children were taken from a 2023 *National Health Interview Survey*¹⁵ and CDC National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network¹⁶ data. Additionally, data does not capture multiple diagnoses. Students with more than one diagnosis may self-disclose one and not another based on stigma or the availability of services for a specific disability.¹⁷

¹⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, June 25). *Healthcare Access and Quality*. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/dqs/topics/healthcare-access-quality.html>

¹⁵ Zablotsky, B., Black, L. I., & Blumberg, S. J. (2023). *Prevalence and trends of diagnosed autism spectrum disorder among U.S. children and adolescents, 2014–2023*. National Health Interview Survey. National Center for Health Statistics, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

¹⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024, February 9). *Developmental Disabilities*. <https://www.cdc.gov/environmental-health-tracking/php/data-research/developmental-disabilities.html>

¹⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2025, April 11). *Prevalence of Disabilities and Health Care Access by Disability Status and Type Among Adults*. <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/dqs/topics/healthcare-access-quality.html>

Prevalence Rates of Individuals with IDD

The TEA uses the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 34, Section 300.8, Child with a Disability to define intellectual disability as “significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance”.¹⁸ The term “intellectual disability” is included in the broader category of developmental disability that is included in [Appendix B](#).

Children with Intellectual Disabilities

The CDC estimates approximately 1 in 10 children have some form of developmental disability that includes autism, other intellectual disabilities, emotional disturbances, speech and language impairment, learning disabilities, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, and other conditions. While exact current rates for intellectual disability alone in children are not always reported separately, previous CDC estimates suggest that about 1% to 1.5% of children in the U.S. are diagnosed with intellectual and other developmental disabilities.^{19, 20} As of the most recent estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey (2019–2023), Texas has approximately 7.48 million children under the age of 18. This would translate to an estimated 112,200 children with IDD.²¹

Adults with Intellectual Disabilities

Like children, roughly 1 in 10 adults report intellectual or cognitive disabilities, such as difficulties with concentration, memory, or decision-making.¹⁹ In Texas, with a population of 23.5 million adults, this translates to an estimated 353,250 adults with IDD.²¹

Identification of K-12 Students with Autism

In K–12 education, autism and intellectual disabilities are typically identified through a combination of screening, evaluation, and multidisciplinary assessment processes. Schools may begin with early screening tools to flag potential developmental concerns, followed by a comprehensive evaluation conducted by a team that may include special educators, school psychologists, speech-language pathologists, and other specialists. This evaluation assesses cognitive, behavioral, social, and communication skills to determine whether a student meets the criteria for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). TEA currently

¹⁸ Texas Education Agency. (n.d.) *Federal and State Requirements*. Retrieved July 2025 from <https://fw.escapps.net/node/3829>

¹⁹ RISP Data Bytes. (2024, September). *Prevalence of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in the U.S.* Institute on Community Integration. <https://publications.ici.umn.edu/risp/data-bytes/prevalence-of-idd-in-the-us?draft=463428ea-7516-436e-a641-87ef71c7fc83>

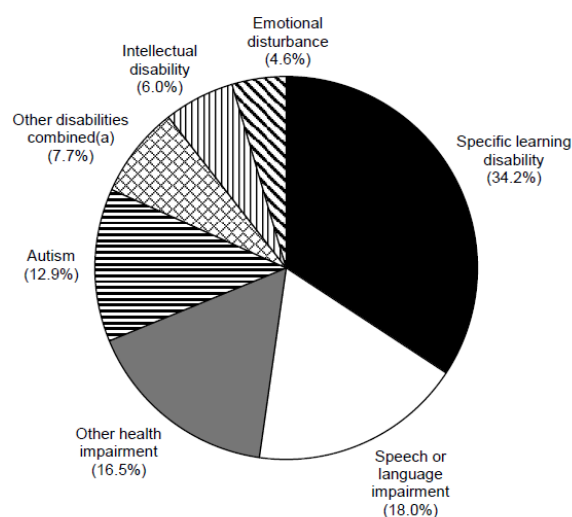
²⁰ RISP Data Bytes. (2024, December). *Status and Trends Through June 30, 2020*. Institute on Community Integration. <https://ici.umn.edu/news/risp-report-available-now>

²¹ U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey (2019–2023), <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/acs>

recognizes [14 disability](#) categories²² to determine qualification for IDEA services if a student meets the definition criteria and, per IDEA, the student "...by reason thereof, needs special education and related services"²³ to access the general education curriculum.

Figure 2 displays the most recent data from the U.S. Department of Education's 2024 "46th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act," which captures data across all 50 states on students who are served under IDEA, by disability category (fall 2022).²⁴

Figure 2. Percentage of Students Ages 5 Through 21 Served by IDEA, Part B, by Disability Category: Fall 2022



For autism, specific diagnostic tools such as the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule (ADOS) or the Childhood Autism Rating Scale (CARS) may be used. Parental input and developmental history are also critical components. Once identified, an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed to support the student's educational needs and promote accessibility in the least restrictive environment.

Once a student is identified with autism or an intellectual disability in K–12 education, a range of specialized services and supports are typically provided to meet their individual needs. Common services include speech-language therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral interventions, and specialized instruction tailored to the student's learning style and developmental level. For

²² Texas SPED Support. (n.d.) Disability Condition Eligibility Definitions. Texas Education Agency. Retrieved July 2025 from <https://spedsupport.tea.texas.gov/resource-library/administrator-toolkit-sped-and-intervention-101/disability-condition-eligibility>.

²³ U.S. Department of Education. (2004). Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Public Law 100-446, Section 300.8. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.8>.

²⁴ Office of Special Education Programs. (2024, June 30). *46th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2024*. U.S. Department of Education. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/2024-annual-report-to-congress-on-the-individuals-with-disabilities-education-act-idea/>

students with autism, programs often emphasize social communication skills, self-regulation, and functional academics, sometimes using evidence-based practices such as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA), visual supports, or structured teaching models.

Technology can play a dual role in academic and social support. Training students to use assistive technologies—alongside integrated digital platforms for communication and scheduling—can bridge gaps in executive function, organization, and social communication. Apps are being developed to support students with autism by integrating school, social, and independent living calendars, including a method for uploading task analysis to assist students in task completion.

The Texas Autism Supplement^{25,26} is a required component of the IEP process for students with autism in Texas public schools. Mandated by Texas Administrative Code (TAC) Section 89.1055, it requires Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) committees to annually consider 11 specific strategies designed to support the unique needs of students with autism spectrum disorder. These strategies include supports such as parent/family training, positive behavior supports, communication interventions, social skills instruction, and staff-to-student ratios, among others.

While not all 11 strategies must be implemented, each must be reviewed and discussed at every ARD meeting. If the committee determines that a strategy is not needed, the IEP must document the rationale for that decision. The supplement is often completed using a standardized form and is intended to ensure that educational planning for students with autism is comprehensive, evidence-based, and individualized.²⁶

TEA, in collaboration with the Texas Statewide Leadership for Autism Training network, provides guidance documents and training to support implementation. These resources are designed to help educators and families understand and apply the supplement effectively, ensuring that students with autism receive appropriate support to meet their academic, functional, and behavioral goals.

Transition from K-12 to Postsecondary

In Texas, transition planning for students with disabilities—including those pursuing postsecondary education after age 18—is a structured process embedded in the student's IEP. According to the Texas Transition and Employment Guide, transition planning must begin by age 14 and is designed to prepare students for life after high school, including further education, employment, and independent living.²⁷

²⁵ Texas SPED Support. (2025). *Autism Supplement Guidance Document*. Texas Education Agency. Retrieved July 2025 from <https://prntexas.org/texas-autism-supplement/>

²⁶ Partners Resource Network. (n.d.). Texas Autism Supplement. [Texas Autism Supplement – Partners Resource Network](#)

²⁷ Student-Centered Transitions Network. (2021). *Pathways – The Texas Transition & Employment Guide to a Successful Life After High School for Students with Disabilities*. Texas Education Agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/academics/special-student-populations/special-education/transition-and-employment-guide.pdf>

Students can continue receiving special education services through age 21, and many districts offer specialized “18+ programs” that focus on real-world skill development such as job training, independent living, and community involvement.

School districts are not required to offer 18+ programs, but when available, they provide tailored support based on each student’s postsecondary goals. Local education agencies are legally required to provide transition services, but they have discretion over how those services are delivered. The programs often include career exploration, on-the-job training, and life skills instruction, and are developed collaboratively through the ARD committee process.

Texas also supports transition through interagency collaboration. For example, the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) partners with TEA to assign vocational rehabilitation counselors to high schools to help students access employment services and postsecondary training.

Some schools also support the transition between high school and college with summer bridge programs, extended orientations, and assistance in the development of life skills associated with college entry. Unique situations like managing roommates or deciding which organizations to join can be challenging for many students, including neurotypical students, without additional support. Students develop self-advocacy, time management, and social navigation skills during these transitions.

Postsecondary Education Programs in Texas

Among students with disabilities who graduate high school, about 60–70% express interest in postsecondary education, but only around 30–40% actually enroll.²⁸ Many opt for alternative pathways that may better align with their individual goals, strengths, and support needs. These include vocational training, certificate programs, community-based transition programs, or employment-focused initiatives that emphasize independent living and job readiness. In Texas, for example, 18+ transition programs often provide real-world experiences, such as internships, supported employment, and life skills instruction tailored to students' postsecondary goals. Under Texas Education Code (TEC), Title 3, Section 61.663, the Coordinating Board is required to annually collect and maintain an inventory of postsecondary educational programs and services offered by institutions of higher education for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who are degree-seeking students, as illustrated in Table 1..

Table 1. Postsecondary Programs for Degree-Seeking Students with Disabilities

University	Program	Anticipated Outcomes	Source
Texas Tech University	CASE serves students with autism.	CASE provides assistance navigating college to empower students to reach their postsecondary academic goals and find competitive employment after graduation.	https://www.depts.ttu.edu/burk_hartcenter/case/
University of North Texas	UNT Engage serves neurodivergent students (with ADHD, autism, etc.).	Program provides individualized support so students can meet their academic or vocational goals.	https://wise.unt.edu/engage/index.html
Houston Community College	Pathways Bridge to Careers serves students ages 18 to 25 with IDD/autism Level 1 and Level 2.	Students earn stackable workforce credits and competitive employment through comprehensive support services (case management, wrap around services, and supports).	https://www.hccs.edu/continuing-education/departments/hcc-vast-academy/
Sam Houston State University	Neurodiverse Student Lab serves degree-seeking neurodiverse students in a two-semester program.	Students assume control of lab inventory, ordering, equipment management, safety protocols, and stock preparation, developing confidence in competitive employment.	https://www.shsu.edu/academics/science-and-engineering-technology/neurodiverse-student-lab
LeTourneau University	Bridges College Success Program , serves students with autism, providing	Students with autism gain independence; interpersonal, intrapersonal, professional growth; and community development to	https://www.letu.edu/student-life/building-bridges.html

²⁸ National Center for College Students with Disabilities, Institute on Community Integration, University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, University of Minnesota Accessed September 2025
<https://nccsd.ici.umn.edu/clearinghouse/audience-specific-resources/researchers--policy-makers/stats-college-stds-with-disabilities>

University	Program	Anticipated Outcomes	Source
	academic coaches, tutors, advisors, peer mentors, counseling services, career services.	reach meaningful employment in their chosen career.	
Lee College	Access Center for those with IDD and autism.	College provides: 1) college certificates or degrees in preparation for a career or university transfer; 2) dual enrollment studies; and 3) community education and non-credit workforce experience.	https://www.lee.edu/disabilities/index.php

Table 2. Postsecondary Programs for Non-Degree-Seeking Students with Disabilities

University	Program	Anticipated Outcomes	Sources:
Alamo Colleges	Project Access serves students with documented intellectual disability.	Program helps students earn a General Office Certificate, comprehensive skills, computer skills, and workplace responsibility.	https://www.alamo.edu/pac/admissions-aid/student-accessibility-services/
Alvin Community College	STRIVE is a one-year program serving students with IDD.	STRIVE facilitates students joining the workforce or furthering their education, developing independence.	https://www.alvincollege.edu/cwd/strive.html
Austin Community College	STEPS serves students with IDD in a two-year program.	STEPS provides supports to increase independence, employability, and further education. The program can lead to a choice of 90 certifications.	https://continue.austincc.edu/steps
Dallas College, El Centro and Richland campuses	Project Aspire serves students ages 18 to 28 who have IDD to improve workplace readiness skills.	Students accomplish: planning and organizing, problem solving, decision making, and business fundamentals.	https://www.dallascollege.edu/cd/pages/aspire.aspx
El Paso Community College District	Project HIGHER serves El Paso County students ages 18 to 25 who have IDD.	Students can earn a Level 1 certificate, provided in collaboration with a Master of Rehab Counseling program, Texas Workforce Solutions, Volar Center for Independent Living, and ESC-19.	https://www.epcc.edu/Services/csd/project-higher
Houston Community College	VAST Academy serves post-secondary students with IDD. This is a	Program provides college and career readiness, vocational certificates, career readiness credentials, employment	https://www.hccs.edu/continuing-education/departments/hcc-vast-academy/

University	Program	Anticipated Outcomes	Sources:
	Comprehensive Training and Postsecondary (CTP) program.	assistance, and pre-college bridge courses.	
Lamar State College	The college serves students with physical or mental illness that results in a loss of a major life activity.	Accommodations are assigned based on individual needs and might include notetaking, testing accommodations, reader/scribe, ASL interpreter, or assistive technology.	https://www.lamarpa.edu/student-services/academic-services/disability-services.html
Lone Star College	Life PATH Foundations: two-year program to serve students with neurodiversity.	The two-year program prepares students for entry-level employment, earning a Customer Service or Animal Care certificate.	https://www.lonestar.edu/lifePATH-Foundations.htm
Lone Star College	Life PATH: four-year program to serve students with neurodiversity.	The four-year program results in either an Occupational and Life Skills associate degree and/or a Business Operations Certificate.	https://www.lonestar.edu/lifepath.htm
Navarro College	Elevate serves students age 18 to 21 with IDD.	Elevate provides enhanced work-related skills, computer literacy, preparation for employment, and communication.	https://www.redoakisd.org/departments/specialized-learning/elevate-program
North Central Texas College	Office for Students with Disabilities serves students with IDD who have a documented disability.	The college offers strategies for academic success; individual, career and academic counseling services; referrals to campus and community services; and assistance with admission and registration.	https://www.nctc.edu/osd
San Jacinto Community College	SJCC provides accessibility services counselors and supports.	Programs include: Entry Point, Job Accommodations Network, and Emerging Leaders.	https://www.sanjac.edu/support/accessibility
Tarrant County College District	For students with IDD, programs include: STEPS, First Choice, Transitional Skills, Career Exploration Camp , and 68 certificate programs.	The college provides successful transition, person-centered career choices, various certificate programs, and college readiness programs.	• https://www.tccd.edu/academics/lcl/transitional-skills/steps/ • https://www.tccd.edu/academics/lcl/transitional-skills/first-choice/ • https://www.tccd.edu/academics/lcl/transitional-skills/ • https://www.tccd.edu/academics/lcl/transitional-skills/idd-career-exploration-camp/

University	Program	Anticipated Outcomes	Sources:
			https://www.tccd.edu/academics/lcl/transitional-skills/a-step-above/
Texas State University	Bobcat RISE is a four-year program serving students with IDD.	Bobcat RISE provides an opportunity to learn independent living skills and experience employment opportunities.	https://www.education.txst.edu/departments/bobcat-rise.html
Texas A&M University	Aggie Achieve is a four-year program serving students with IDD. This is a CTP program.	The program provides an opportunity to learn independent living skills and experience employment opportunities.	https://aggieachieve.tamu.edu/
Texas A&M University	HOPS is a two-year program serving students with IDD to provide industry-recognized certificates.	Certificates can be in Landscape Management, Floral Design, or Greenhouse/Nursery.	https://cdd.tamu.edu/education/hops-program/
Texas A&M University	PATHS is a two-year program serving students with IDD to provide industry-recognized certificates.	Certificates can be in Child Care, School Paraprofessionals, or Direct Care Support.	https://paths.tamu.edu/
Texas A&M University-San Antonio	TU CASA serves students with ID to earn a University and Career Experience Certificate.	TU CASA provides an 18-month supportive college experience to achieve integrated employment and independent living skills. This is a CTP program.	https://www.tamusa.edu/academics/TU-CASA/About.html
Trinity Valley Community College	Cardinal Success Center serves academically qualified students with physical or learning disabilities.	The program provides assistance to students with disabilities and their instructors.	https://www.tvcc.edu/Student-Access-and-Counseling/article.aspx?a=1627
The University of Texas at Austin	E4Texas is a one-year certificate program for students with IDD.	E4Texas provides a Caretaker Certification, plus independent living skills.	https://disabilitystudies.utexas.edu/e4texas
The University of Texas San Antonio	LifeLong Learning with Friends is a program for students with IDD.	The program provides integrated education while paired 1:1 with typical student peers.	https://www.lifelonglearningwithfriends.org/utsa

University	Program	Anticipated Outcomes	Sources:
University of North Texas	UNT ELEVAR is a four-year program serving students with IDD. This is a CTP program.	The program provides a non-degreed supportive college experience.	https://elevar.unt.edu/index.html

Study and Report on Assisting Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

State Methods of Identification and Tracking

Students in K-12 Secondary Programs

The Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS)²⁹ is TEA's comprehensive data collection system for primary and secondary programs. It gathers and manages a wide range of information from Texas public schools, including:

- Student demographics and academic performance
- Personnel and staff data
- Financial and budgetary information
- Organizational structure
- Program participation
- School leaver and discipline data
- Course completion and attendance records

PEIMS data is submitted electronically by school districts using standardized formats and definitions, as outlined in the PEIMS Data Standards.

Autism is identified in PEIMS using the DISABILITY1 field, which records the primary disability listed in a student's IEP. The code for autism is used when a student meets the eligibility criteria outlined in TAC, Title 19, Section 89.1040, which aligns with the federal definition under IDEA.

In 2023-2024 school year, TEA reported 125,189 students with autism enrolled in Texas public and charter schools. Students with autism represent 16.16% of the total special education population in Texas.³⁰

According to the National Autism Data Center,³¹ in the year 2021-2022 (the last year data is available), 72.4% of students with autism graduated from high schools with a regular diploma. There is no reliable tracking method to follow students with autism from high school to college.

Students in Postsecondary Programs

In Texas, data on students identified with ASD in postsecondary programs is collected and reported by THECB, primarily under its CBM (Coordinating Board Management) reporting system and state statute. This reporting does not contain personally identifiable information.

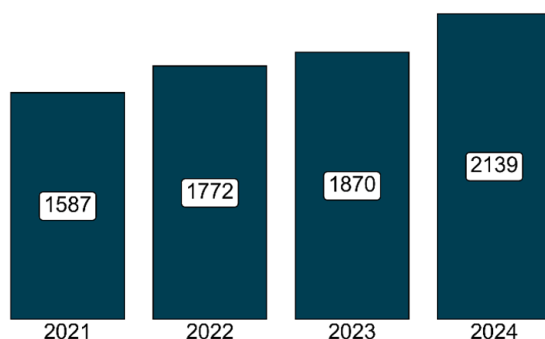
²⁹ 2023-2024 TEA Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) Data, Texas Education Agency reported in Final Report for 2022-2024 & 2023-2024 Innovative Services for Students with Autism grant, Texas Education Agency 2025

³⁰ Texas Education Agency. (2024). Special Education Reports and Data. Retrieved from <https://tea.texas.gov/reports-and-data/student-data/standard-reports/peims-standard-reports>

³¹ National Autism Data Center. (n.d.). Exit Status of Students with Autism. Retrieved September 24, 2025, from <https://nationalautismdatacenter.org/exit-status/>

Institutions submit disability coding through the CBM002 report, which includes a specific code for “Autism Spectrum Disorder” if the student self-identifies and/or receives documented special services. If a student is coded as having both ASD and an intellectual disability, institutions must prioritize reporting the intellectual disability over autism as per THECB rule.

Figure 3. Total Number of Students Enrolled at a Texas Public Institution of Higher Education with Autism, Fiscal Year 2021-2024



Source: THECB, CBM001/CBMOC1 (Item #40 - Individual with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities). Enrollment includes only students identified with autism spectrum disorder with IDD=2. Enrollment excludes flex entry students and represents an unduplicated annual count.

Data Considerations and Opportunities for Improvement

While THECB maintains robust systems for collecting, tracking, and reporting on multiple student variables, the IDD Advisory Council recognizes opportunities to enhance the enrollment and graduation data specific to this population.

Systemic Underidentification

A consistent challenge is the underidentification of students with autism in secondary settings, particularly those with Level 1 support needs. These are students who are academically capable but still require support in areas like executive functioning, time management, and social skills. Many students are not tracked by schools or TEA, which skews graduation data and service delivery.

Some families report that even when a student has a formal autism diagnosis from a licensed medical professional, schools may refuse to recognize it in the student’s records. Instead, students are often classified under other categories such as:

- Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)
- Emotional Disturbance
- Other Health Impaired (OHI)
- Anxiety

This misclassification can result in students receiving a Section 504 plan rather than an IEP, which limits access to specialized services.

Cultural Stigma

Some parents actively resist having their child labeled with autism, especially if the child has a high IQ and functions well academically. This reluctance can lead to missed opportunities for support, and students may struggle later in college without the structure of home and school.

Other families advocate for years to have autism recognized in their child's IEP, often facing resistance from school staff. These students may go without services or receive generic accommodations that don't address their specific needs.

Disability Identification and Assessment

For years, TEA enforced a performance indicator that resulted in school districts limiting the percentage of students receiving special education services to 8.5% of total enrollment. This policy, though not a formal cap, was interpreted as a target, leading to systemic under-identification of students with disabilities—particularly in districts concerned about accountability ratings and resource allocation.

The implications were significant. Many students who would have qualified for services under IDEA were either delayed in receiving support or denied it altogether. This disproportionately affected students from historically underserved communities, including those in rural and low-income districts, where access to diagnostic resources was already limited.³² The benchmark also created tension between compliance and fairness, as educators navigated the challenge of meeting state expectations while ensuring students received appropriate support.

Following public input and federal scrutiny, including investigations by the U.S. Department of Education in 2018, TEA revised its practices. While the 8.5% benchmark is no longer enforced, the impact continues to influence data analysis and student outcomes.³³

Lack of Standardized Criteria and Reporting

The accuracy of data collection and reporting is further hindered by inconsistent interpretations of the definitions for autism and intellectual disability across institutions. This lack of standardization affects how data is gathered and reported. Additionally, the use of coding systems that combine ASD with intellectual disabilities—along with regulatory directives that prioritize intellectual disability—contributes to both overreporting and underidentification of students with autism.

Additionally, there is a lack of clarity regarding who holds responsibility for collecting and reporting this data to THECB. In some institutions, the task falls to the office of disability services, while in others, data is gathered at different administrative levels. Moreover, there is no standardized process for autism-specific programs to report student data and outcomes to their postsecondary administration.

³² Simmons, M., Shin, M., Sharp, L. (2021). Special Education Eligibility Identification Rates in Texas: A Comparative Analysis of Rural and Urban School Districts. *Texas Education Review*, 9(1), 6-21. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/11422>

³³ Aleman, S. & McGuire, K. (2022, August 10). *Texas Commission on Special Education Funding* [Presentation]. Texas Education Agency. <https://tea.texas.gov/finance-and-grants/state-funding/additional-finance-resources/drtx-and-tcase-sped-finance-commission-8-10-22.pdf>

Only public colleges and universities are represented in this data—students who graduated high school and attended a private school or postsecondary institutions outside of Texas are not included. Enrollment in other non-traditional learning programs is not reported but may lead students to future program enrollment.

Collectively, these factors contribute to the inaccurate identification and tracking of autism in both secondary and postsecondary education. This, in turn, affects graduation rate reporting, postsecondary transition planning, funding distribution, and the development of targeted programs.

Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Findings

Background

The findings in this report reflect the following data for: (1) students with autism, and (2) students with autism and/or IDD as specified under SB 55:

- The number of students with autism spectrum disorder who graduate from secondary schools in this state.
- The number of students with autism spectrum disorder who are enrolled at institutions of higher education.
- The financial assistance available to students with autism spectrum disorder who enroll at institutions of higher education.
- The graduation rates of students with autism spectrum disorder who enroll at institutions of higher education.

The higher education outcomes related to enrollment, financial aid, and graduation rates above are broken out by public two-year institutions and public universities with several years of data to offer comparisons over time. Academic performance via students' GPAs are also included in the report.

The THECB collects data from public two-year institutions and public universities about individuals with IDD on the CBM0C1 Student Census Report. For reporting purposes, IDD is defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder that must meet the following criteria:

- a. Student exhibits deficits in intellectual functions, such as reasoning, problem solving, planning, abstract thinking, judgment, academic learning, and learning from experience.
- b. Student exhibits deficits in adaptive functioning that result in failure to meet developmental and sociocultural standards for personal independence and social responsibility. Without ongoing support, the adaptive deficits limit functioning in one or more activities of daily life, such as communication, social participation, and independent living, across multiple environments, such as home, school, work, and community.
- c. Note that (a) and (b) may occur after the developmental period (such as in the case of a traumatic brain injury).
- d. Students with IDD may include those diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder.

Institutions must identify students as: "0"-student not identified as having an IDD, "1"-student identified as having an IDD as defined above, or "2"-student identified as having an autism spectrum disorder but not an intellectual disability. Institutions are instructed to report a "1" if the student is also identified as having an intellectual disability. Because of the way we collect this information, the findings in the sections below are reported for two populations of students: (1) the autism and/or IDD population or those identified with a "1" on the CBM0C1 and (2) the autism-only population or those identified with a "2."

Additionally, institutions must report on whether a student participated in a postsecondary program for students with IDD. For reporting purposes, these programs must be a degree, certificate, or non-degree program for students with IDD that is offered by an institution of higher education. These programs are designed to support students with IDD who want to

continue academic, career, and independent living instruction following completion of secondary education. Data for these programs can be found in the enrollment section.

Texas Public High School Graduates with Autism

According to the most recent data available from TEA, approximately 4,700 students with a primary, secondary, or tertiary diagnosis of autism graduated from a Texas public high school in 2023. Table 3 shows that the number of high school graduates with autism has increased by 53% between 2019 and 2023. Despite this increase, only about 1% of Texas public high school graduates have an autism diagnosis.³⁴

Table 3. Frequency and Percentage of Texas Public High School Graduates with Autism

Graduation Year	Public High School Graduates with Autism	Public High School Graduates	% High School Graduates with Autism
2018-2019	3,107	344,021	0.9%
2019-2020	3,474	347,392	1.0%
2020-2021	3,969	349,496	1.1%
2021-2022	4,337	355,537	1.2%
2022-2023	4,753	364,227	1.3%

Source: Texas Education Agency (2024)

Enrollment at Texas Public Institutions of Higher Education

Students with ASD and/or IDD have several options when enrolling into higher education. While more students in this population who pursue higher education enroll directly in academic or technical programs, a smaller subset of this population enroll in continuing education (CE) courses at a public two-year institution. CE courses can lead to a variety of career and industry certificates to help students enter the workforce.

Additionally, some students may enroll in programs designed for students with an IDD. These programs include degree, certificate, or non-degree programs designed to support students with IDD who want to continue academic, career, and independent living instruction. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, only 25% of students with autism and/or IDD enrolled in a postsecondary program for students with IDD, and all of them did so at a community college. In FY 2024, approximately 43% of students with autism enrolled in a postsecondary program for students with IDD. The data below focuses on enrollments into academic or technical programs.

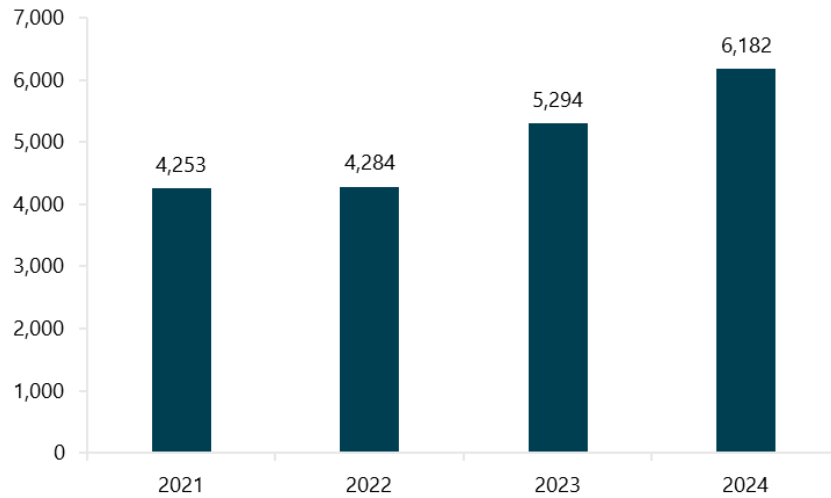
Statewide Trends: Total Enrollments

Figure 4 shows the total number of public higher education enrollments of students with autism and/or IDD for the four most recent years. Though student enrollments for this population remained stagnant in 2021 and 2022, there were noticeable increases in enrollments in 2023 and

³⁴ Texas Education Agency. (2024). *Unpublished data on High School Graduates with Autism*. Retrieved by Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board via data request

2024. Between 2022 and 2024, student enrollments increased by 44%, increasing from 4,284 to 6,182.

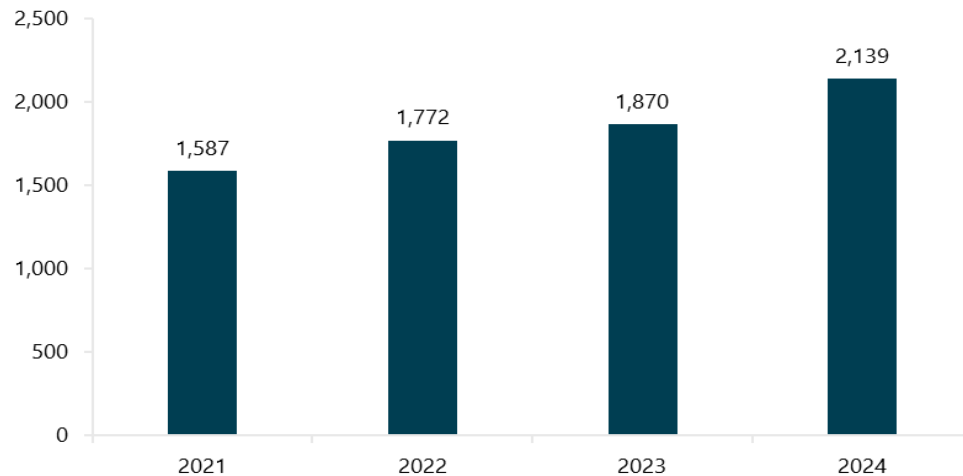
Figure 4. Total Number of Students with Autism and/or IDD Enrolled at a Texas Public Institution of Higher Education, FY 2021-2024



Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1

Figure 5 shows the total higher education enrollments of students identified with autism only. Since 2021, this group has experienced small enrollment increases from year to year with the highest enrollment reported at 2,139 in 2024. There was about a 35% increase in the number of enrollments from 2021 to 2024.

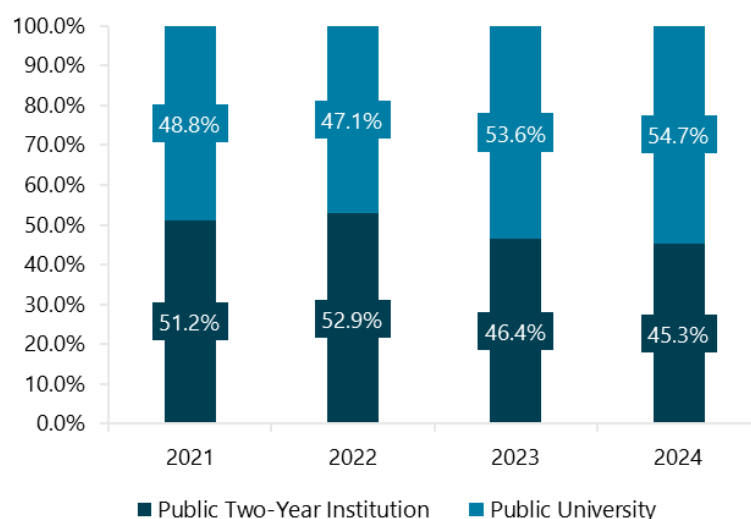
Figure 5. Total Number of Students with Autism Enrolled at a Texas Public Institution of Higher Education, FY 2021-2024



Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1

Figure 6 shows the breakouts, by institution type, of enrollments at Texas higher education institutions by students with autism and/or IDD for FYs 2021-2024. Though a higher percentage of students with autism and/or IDD were found enrolled at a public two-year institution in FYs 2021 and 2022, the two most recent years of enrollment data suggest a shift in enrollment patterns with more students enrolling in a public university.

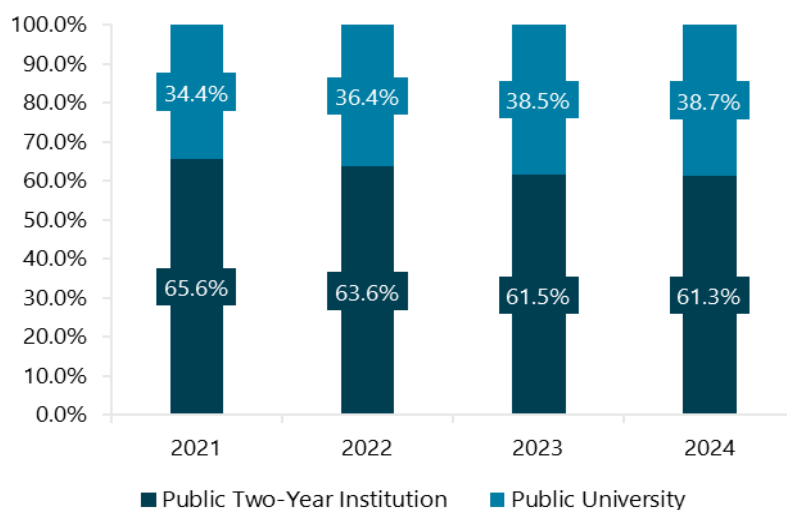
Figure 6. Percentage Distribution of Enrollments at Texas Higher Education Institutions, by Institution Type, for Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2021-2024



Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1 Note: This figure does not include those enrolled in health-related institutions due to the small number of students enrolled at that institution type.

In contrast to the combined autism and/or IDD population above, Figure 7 shows that the autism-only student population has consistently had greater enrollments at public two-year institutions. The most recent data for 2024 shows that about 61% of students with autism only are enrolled at a public two-year institution.

Figure 7. Percentage Distribution of Enrollments at Texas Higher Education Institutions, by Institution Type, for Students with Autism, FYs 2021-2024

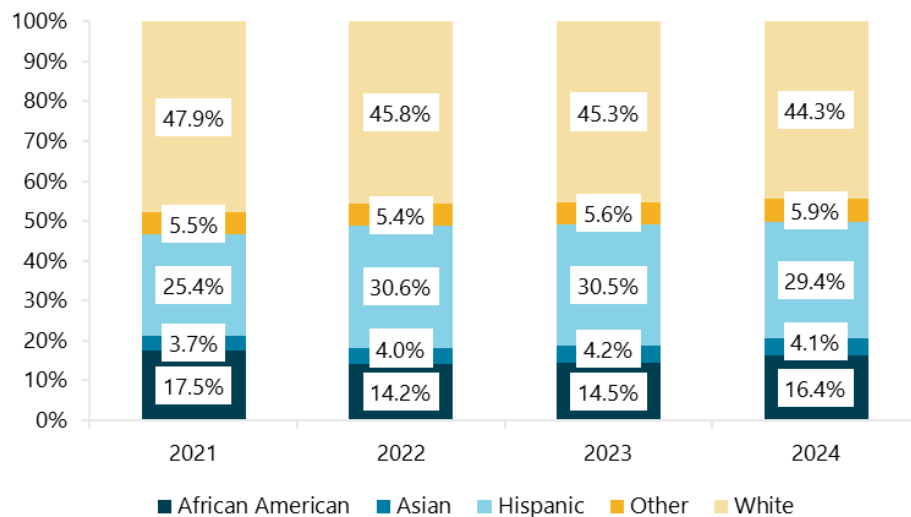


Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1

Statewide Trends: Enrollment by Student Characteristics

Figure 8 shows the breakdown of enrollment at Texas higher education institutions, by race/ethnicity, for students with autism and/or IDD. Among this student population, White students made up the greatest racial/ethnic group percentage at around 44% in 2024, followed by Hispanic (29%), African American (16%), Asian (4%), and students of an Other race/ethnicity (6%). This trend has remained consistent for the four most recent years.

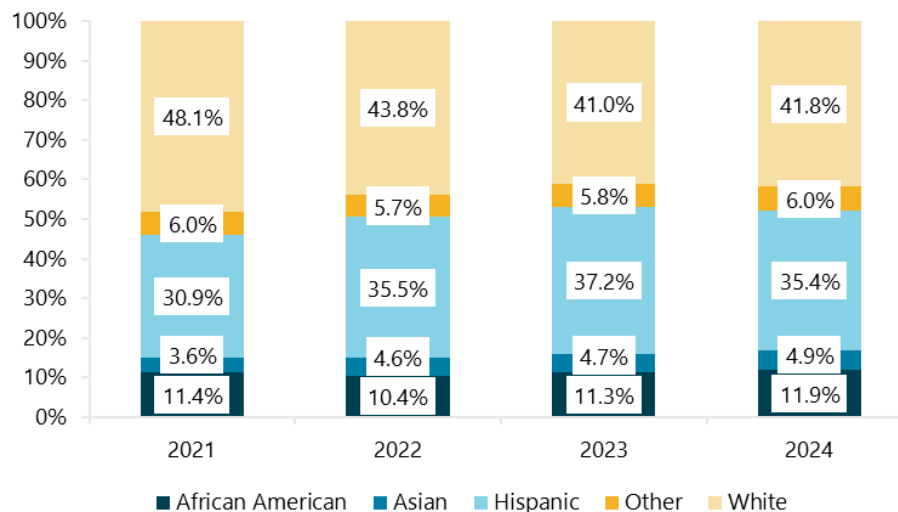
Figure 8. Percentages of Enrollment at Texas Higher Education Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity, for Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2021-2024



Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1

Figure 9 confirms the same pattern by race/ethnicity for students with autism compared to the autism and/or IDD population. Among this student population, White students continue to make up the greatest racial/ethnic group percentage at around 42%, followed by Hispanic students at about 35%, and African American students at 12%.

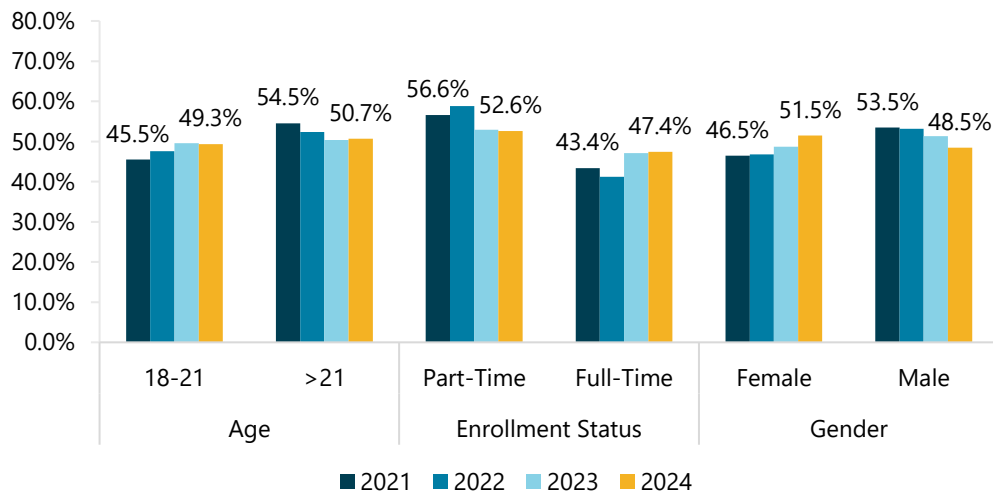
Figure 9. Percentages of Enrollments at Texas Higher Education Institutions, by Race/Ethnicity, for Students with Autism, FYs 2021-2024



Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1

Figure 10 shows the higher education enrollment breakdown by age, enrollment status, and gender for students with autism and/or IDD for the four most recent years. Slightly more than half of this population consists of part-time students taking less than 12 credit hours in a semester and students over the age of 21. While a higher proportion of male students were enrolled between 2021 and 2023, more female students were enrolled in 2024.

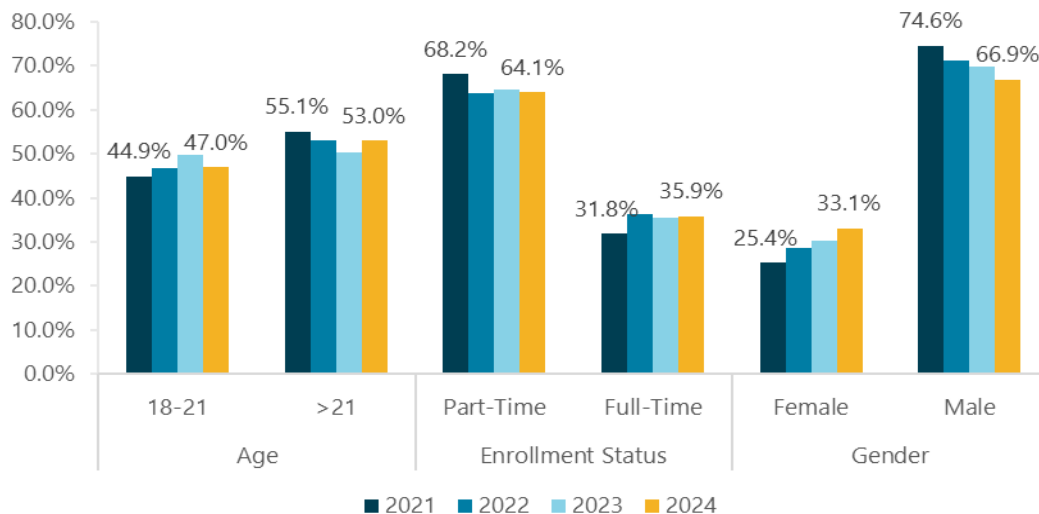
Figure 10. Percentage of Enrollments at Texas Higher Education Institutions, by Age, Enrollment Status, and Gender for Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2021-2024



Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1

Figure 11 shows the higher education enrollment breakdown by age, enrollment status, and gender for students with autism for the four most recent years. Like the autism and/or IDD population, slightly more than 50% of students are over the age of 21. For the past four years, more than 60% of students with autism have enrolled as part-time students. Finally, a higher proportion of male students have enrolled in higher education over the past four years. Most recently in 2024, this number was at 67% for males and 33% for females. Notably, there's been a 7.7 percentage point increase in female enrollments since 2021.

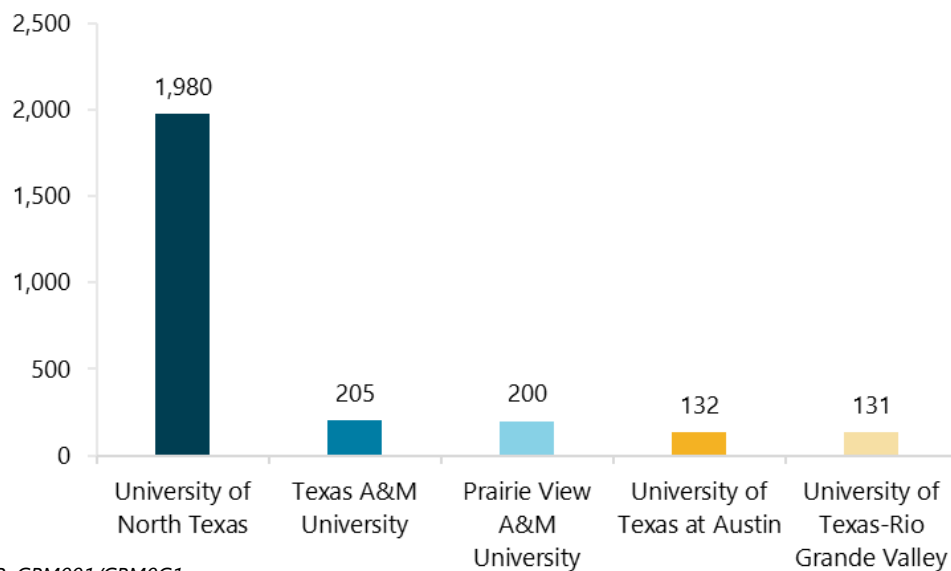
Figure 11. Percentage of Higher Education Enrollment by Age, Enrollment Status, and Gender for Students with Autism, FYs 2021-2024



Enrollment at Texas Public Universities

Figure 12 shows the top five universities that students with autism and/or IDD enrolled in during 2024. Nearly 60% of students who enrolled at a public university in 2024 enrolled at the University of North Texas (UNT). The higher enrollment numbers at the UNT may be attributed to the existence of programs such as UNT ELEVAR and UNT ENGAGE. UNT ELEVAR is a four-year postsecondary education program designed to help provide integrated college experiences for students with an intellectual disability. UNT ENGAGE is a program that serves neurodivergent students diagnosed with ADHD, autism, etc. by providing individualized services so students can meet their personal, academic, or vocational goals.

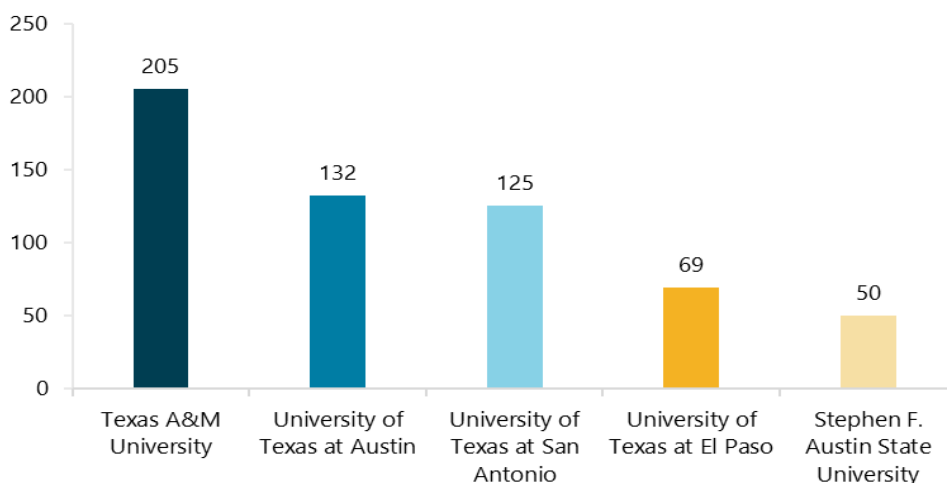
Figure 12. Top Five Texas Universities Enrolled in by Students with Autism and/or IDD, FY 2024



Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1

Figure 13 shows the top five universities that students with autism enrolled in during 2024. About 22% of all students who identified with autism and enrolled at a public four-year university enrolled at Texas A&M University.

Figure 13. Top Five Texas Universities Enrolled in by Students with Autism, FY 2024

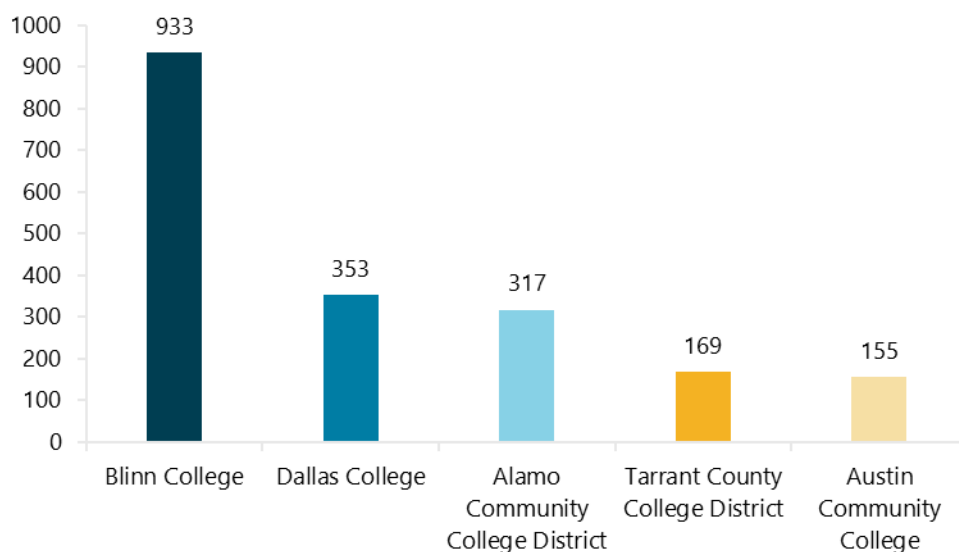


Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1

Enrollment at Public Two-Year Institutions

Figure 14 shows the top five public two-year institutions that students with autism and/or IDD enrolled in during 2024. Blinn College led the way with 933 student enrollments making up about one-third of all enrollments by this student population at a public two-year institution. Dallas College, Alamo Community College District, Tarrant County College District, and Austin Community College rounded out the other top institutions, though their enrollments were much lower than those at Blinn College.

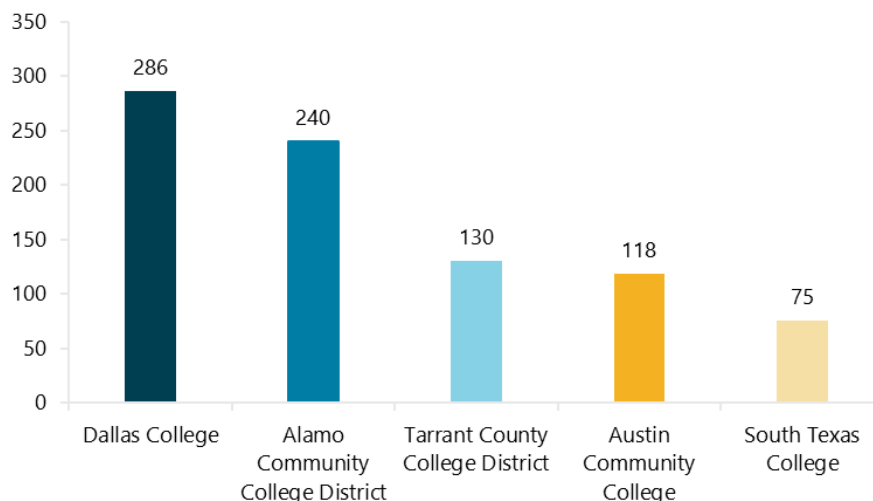
Figure 14. Top Five Public Two-Year Institutions in Texas Enrolled in by Students with Autism and/or IDD, FY 2024



Source: THECB, CBM001/CBM0C1

Figure 15 shows the top five public two-year institutions that students with autism enrolled in during 2024. Dallas College led the way with 286 student enrollments making up about 22% of all enrollments by this student population at a public two-year institution.

Figure 15. Top Five Public Two-Year Institutions in Texas Enrolled in by Students with Autism, FY 2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1

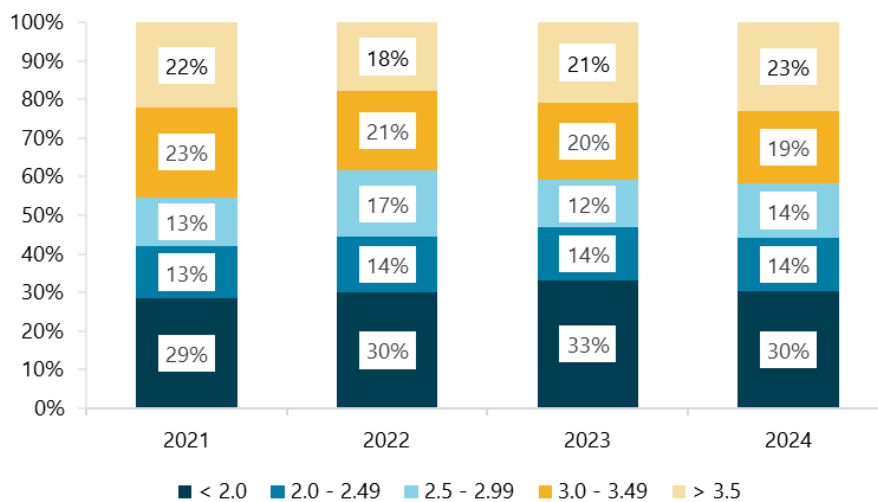
First-Year GPA

GPA is calculated based on the course grades students received during their first year of enrollment as a first-time-in-college (FTIC) student. Each course's grade point value is determined using a four-point scale as reported on the CBM00S report. Most of the findings below focus on students who received a GPA below 2.0 since they may be subject to academic probation or suspension depending on their institution's policies. Additionally, those students who are academically successful and received a 3.0 or above are also highlighted throughout the findings.

Public Two-Year Institutions, Statewide

Figure 16 shows the first-year GPA of FTIC students with autism and/or IDD attending a public two-year institution. Over the past four years, around 40% of these students maintained a 3.0 GPA or higher at the end of their first year. Over this same four-year period, around 30% of students completed their first year with less than a 2.0 GPA.

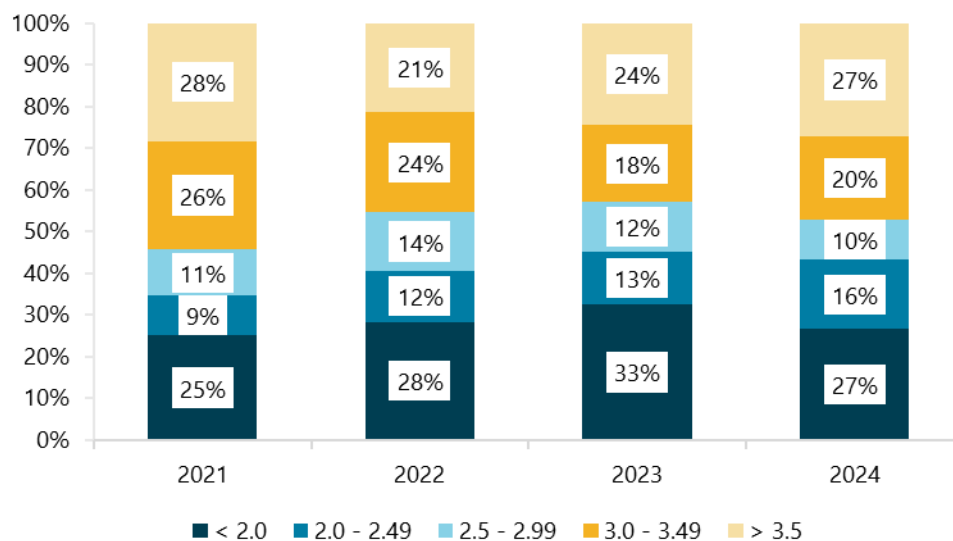
Figure 16. First-Year GPA of FTIC Students with Autism and/or IDD at a Texas Public Two-Year Institution, FYs 2021-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM00S

Figure 17 shows the first-year GPA of FTIC students with autism. The chart below shows similar breakdowns to the autism and/or IDD population, with slightly fewer students receiving less than a 2.0 GPA (27% compared to 30%) and slightly more students receiving a 3.0 GPA or higher (27% compared to 23%).

Figure 17. First-Year GPA of FTIC Students with Autism at a Texas Public Two-Year Institution, FYs 2021-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM00S

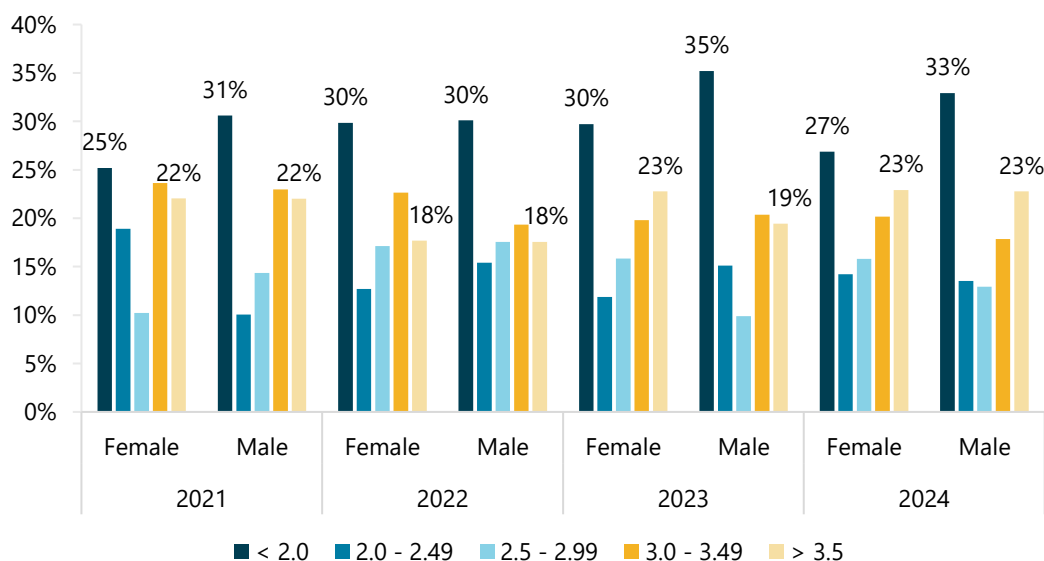
Public Two-Year Institutions, Student Characteristics

Though breakouts by race/ethnicity cannot be provided for all groups due to small counts, some findings can still be shared for the largest three groups with enrollment. Most recently, in 2024, almost 50% of all African American FTIC students with autism and/or IDD at public two-year

institutions received less than a 2.0 GPA at the end of their first year. For Hispanic and White students, these percentages were 36% and 24%, respectively. On the other side of the GPA spectrum, 47% of White FTIC students with autism and/or IDD received a 3.0 or higher GPA, while only 37% of Hispanic and 29% of African American students achieved the same GPA. In 2024, among FTIC students with autism, African American and Hispanic students had similar rates of receiving less than a 2.0 GPA (30% and 31% respectively). Meanwhile, only 18% of White students received less than a 2.0 GPA. Among students who received a 3.0 GPA or higher, rates were about 50% for White students, 48% for Hispanic students, and 40% for African American students.

Figure 18 shows the distribution, by gender, of first-year GPAs of FTIC students with autism/or IDD at public two-year institutions. Most recently in 2024, 27% of female students and 33% of male students received less than a 2.0 GPA at the end of their first year. Meanwhile, around 43% of female students and 41% of male students received a 3.0 GPA or higher at the end of their first year. Though breakouts by gender cannot be provided across all GPA ranges and years for students with autism, we can share some findings. In 2024, 24% of female students and 28% of male students received less than a 2.0 GPA at the end of their first year, performing slightly better than the autism and/or IDD population. Approximately 55% of female students and 44% of male students received a 3.0 GPA or higher, again performing better than the autism and/or IDD population.

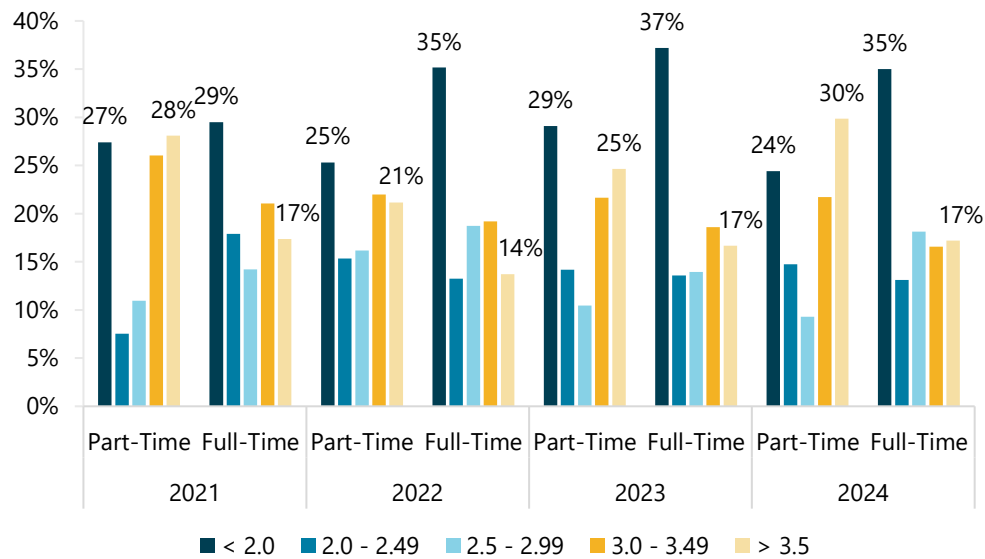
Figure 18. First-Year GPAs of FTIC Students with Autism and/or IDD at Texas Public Two-Year Institutions, by Gender, FYs 2021-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM00S

Figure 19 shows the distribution, by enrollment status, of first-year GPAs of FTIC students with autism/or IDD attending public two-year institutions. Since 2022, the percentage of students attending college full time and receiving less than a 2.0 GPA at the end of their first year has hovered between 35% and 37%. Meanwhile, over half of the part-time students in this population achieved a 3.0 or higher GPA at the end of their first year.

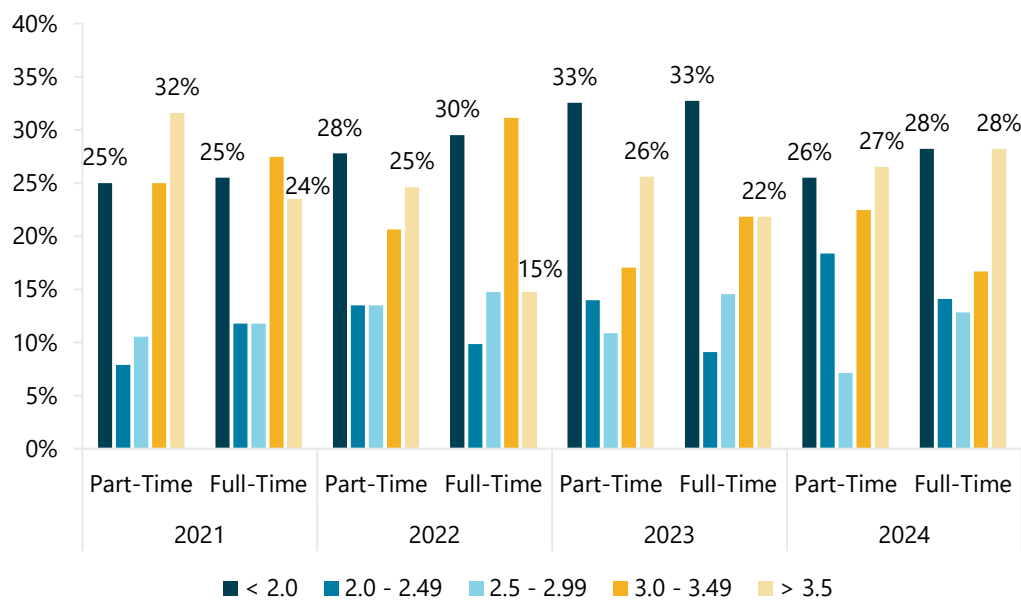
Figure 19. First-Year GPAs of FTIC Students with Autism and/or IDD at Texas Public Two-Year Institutions, by Enrollment Status, FY 2021-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM00S

Figure 20 shows the distribution, by enrollment status, of first-year GPAs of FTIC students with autism. GPA percentages for this population reveal fewer stark differences between full-time and part-time students compared to the percentages seen in Figure 19. For example, most recently, in 2024, 28% of full-time students and 26% of part-time students received less than a 2.0 GPA. Additionally, 49% of part-time students received a 3.0 GPA or higher compared to 45% of full-time students. Overall, slightly more part-time students received higher GPAs.

Figure 20. First-Year GPAs of FTIC Students with Autism at a Texas Public Two-Year Institution, by Enrollment Status, FYs 2021-2024

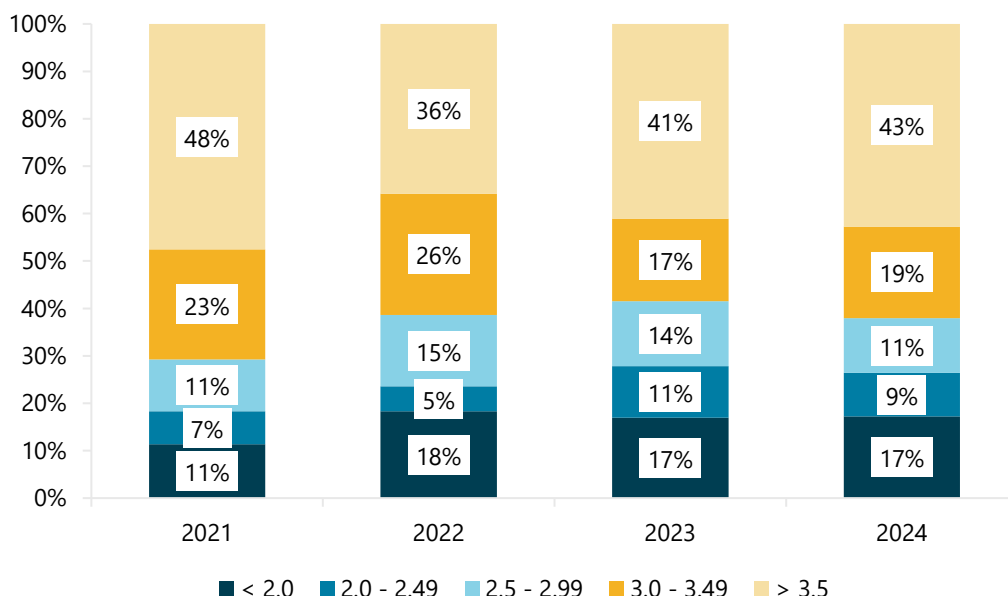


Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM00S

Public Universities, Statewide

Figure 21 shows the distribution of first-year GPAs of FTIC students with autism and/or IDD enrolled at public universities. Slight shifts in GPAs from 2022 to 2023 reflect some progress on the higher end of the GPA ranges, with fewer students being reported in the 2.0 to 2.99 range. In 2024, approximately 62% of students received a 3.0 GPA or higher, while 17% of students received lower than a 2.0 GPA. While a similar figure cannot be shown for the autism-only population due to small counts, it is worth noting the higher academic performance of students compared to the autism and/or IDD population, with around 13% of students receiving lower than a 2.0 GPA and about 72% of students received a 3.0 GPA or higher.

Figure 21. First-Year GPAs of FTIC Students with Autism and/or IDD at Texas Universities, FY 2021-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM00S

Public Universities, Student Characteristics

Unfortunately, breakouts by race/ethnicity, gender, and enrollment status cannot be provided across all GPA ranges due to small counts. However, some findings can still be shared across a few GPA ranges.

Most recently, in 2024, about 52% of FTIC African American students with autism and/or IDD attending a public university received a 3.0 GPA or higher at the end of their first year. This GPA was also earned by about 60% of Hispanic and 70% of White students. African American students had the highest rates of earning less than a 2.0 GPA, at around 22%, followed closely by Hispanic students at 20%, with significantly fewer White students at 12%. For the autism-only population, 21% of Hispanic students earned less than a 2.0 GPA, very similar to the autism and/or IDD population (20%). The autism-only population did have higher percentages at the 3.0 or higher range, with 77% of White students, 64% of Hispanic students, and 74% of African American students completing at that level at the end of their first year.

Most recently, in 2024, about 15% of female and 21% of male students earned less than a 2.0 GPA at the end of their first year. Similar rates were also found in 2022 and 2023. In contrast,

around 63% of female and 60% of male students earned a 3.0 GPA or higher. Though percentages at this range have varied across the four most recent years, the pattern of female students earning this GPA at higher rates than their male peers have remained consistent. Percentages for the autism-only population at the 3.0 GPA or higher range in 2024 were 71% for female students and 72% for male students, much higher than the autism and/or IDD population. Since 2023, male students in this population have slightly edged out their female counterparts at this GPA range.

For the past four years, among students with autism and/or IDD, more full-time students have earned less than a 2.0 GPA compared to their part-time peers. For context, in 2024, about 20% of full-time students fell into this range compared to only 7% of part-time students. Meanwhile, almost 88% of part-time students earned a 3.0 GPA or higher compared to 56% of their full-time peers. Interestingly, among the autism-only population, about 72% of full-time students and 70% of part-time students achieved a 3.0 GPA or higher.

Graduation Rates

Graduation rates, measured as three-, four-, and six-year rates for public two-year institutions and four-, five-, and six-year rates for public universities, can be found in the sections below with additional breakouts provided by sex and enrollment status. Graduation rates are reflective of degree-seeking students across each institution type.

Public Two-Year Institutions

Table 4 provides a comprehensive view of the three most recent years of graduation data with their corresponding graduation rates across each graduation length (i.e., three, four, and six years) for the autism and/or IDD population and the autism-only population. For both populations at the three-year graduation length, there was an increase in graduation rates from 2022 to 2023 and then a decrease from 2023 to 2024. Still, 2024 graduation rates surpassed those in 2022. Similarly, for both populations at the four-year graduation length, there was a decrease in graduation rates from 2022 to 2023 and then an increase from 2023 to 2024. At that length, the 2024 graduation rates surpassed both the 2022 and 2023 rates. While the six-year graduation rates for the autism and/or IDD population decreased by almost 4 percentage points in 2024, the autism-only population experienced a 0.6 percentage point increase in 2024. Apart from the six-year graduation rate in 2023, students in the autism-only population had higher graduation rates than the autism and/or IDD population.

Table 4. Statewide Public Two-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students

Graduation Length	Cohort Year	Graduation Year	Autism and/or IDD Graduation Rate	Autism Graduation Rate
3-Year	2019	2022	13.5%	18.5%
	2020	2023	23.1%	42.2%
	2021	2024	17.6%	27.3%
	2018	2022	26.3%	30.0%

4-Year	2019	2023	23.2%	26.1%
	2020	2024	34.7%	45.9%
6-Year	2017	2023	44.7%	40.7%
	2018	2024	40.9%	41.3%

Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Table 5 shows a comprehensive view of the three most recent years of graduation data with their corresponding graduation rates across each graduation length (i.e., three, four, and six years), disaggregated by sex and enrollment status for the autism and/or IDD population. Across most graduation lengths and years in the table, full-time students tend to have higher graduation rates than their part-time peers. In contrast, graduation rates by sex show much more variability, with male students having higher graduation rates at certain points and female students having higher graduation rates at other points. Still, female students outperformed their male peers at the six-year graduation length for the two most recent years.

Table 5. Statewide Public Two-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD by Sex and Enrollment Status

Graduation Length	Graduation Year	Sex		Enrollment Status	
		Female	Male	Part-Time	Full-Time
3-Year	2022	16.9%	11.5%	12.9%	14.0%
	2023	18.0%	26.3%	23.7%	22.7%
	2024	15.3%	19.0%	14.9%	20.1%
4-Year	2022	33.3%	22.3%	24.3%	27.9%
	2023	29.9%	19.3%	21.5%	24.7%
	2024	32.0%	36.4%	36.3%	33.5%
6-Year	2023	47.3%	43.1%	42.4%	46.6%
	2024	47.9%	36.9%	37.4%	43.6%

Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Table 6 shows a comprehensive view of the three most recent years of graduation data with their corresponding graduation rates across each graduation length (i.e., three, four, and six years), disaggregated by sex and enrollment status for the autism-only population. Across all graduation lengths and years, full-time students outperformed their part-time peers. In contrast, graduation rates by sex show similar variability as the autism and/or IDD population.

Table 6. Statewide Public Two-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism by Sex and Enrollment Status

Graduation Length	Graduation Year	Sex		Enrollment Status	
		Female	Male	Part-Time	Full-Time
3-Year	2022	32.3%	15.7%	16.7%	21.4%

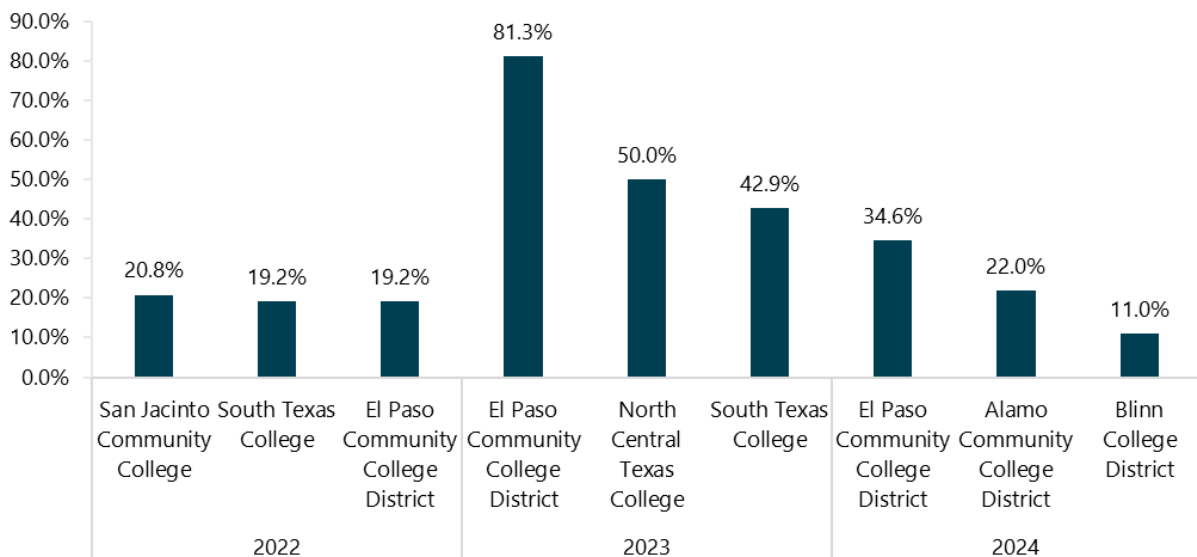
Graduation Length	Graduation Year	Sex		Enrollment Status	
		Female	Male	Part-Time	Full-Time
	2023	36.8%	43.3%	37.1%	48.9%
	2024	25.0%	28.0%	22.3%	36.2%
4-Year	2022	38.5%	28.4%	21.7%	39.0%
	2023	38.7%	23.5%	21.1%	34.4%
	2024	36.8%	47.8%	40.3%	53.2%
6-Year	2023	34.5%	42.1%	30.7%	54.8%
	2024	46.2%	40.3%	32.5%	50.6%

Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Figures 22-24 show the top three public two-year institutions with the highest graduation rates across three, four, and six years for students with autism and/or IDD. Recalling the findings from the enrollment section in this report, Blinn College and Alamo Community College District were among the top five public two-year institutions with the highest enrollments of students with autism and/or IDD, and they are among the institutions with some of the highest graduation rates across the three- and six-year graduation lengths.

At the three-year graduation length, El Paso Community College led the way in 2023 and 2024 with 81.3% and 34.6% graduation rates, respectively. Additionally, South Texas College appeared within the top institutions listed for 2022 and 2023 (Figure 22). At the four-year graduation length, South Texas College appeared once more within the top institutions for 2023 and 2024, as did San Jacinto Community College in 2022 and 2023 (Figure 23). Texas State Technical College appeared within the top three four-year graduation rates in 2022 (33.3%) and six-year graduation rates in 2023 (52.9%). Finally, Texarkana College had the highest four-year graduation rate in 2022, at 52.6%, and the highest six-year graduation rate in 2024, at 68.4%.

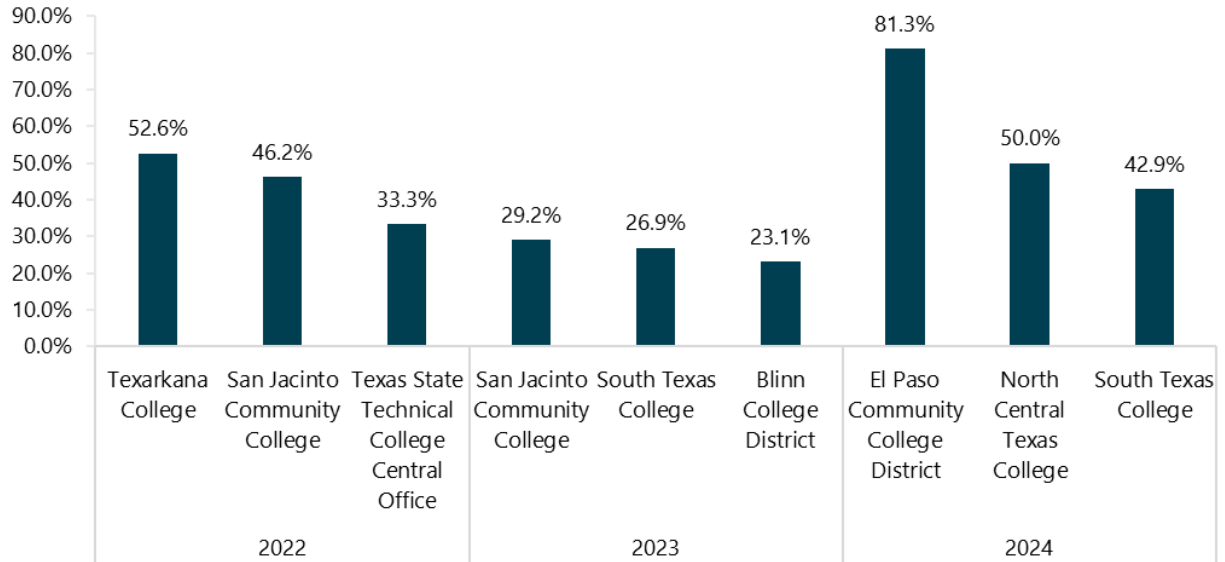
Figure 22. Top Texas Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Three-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2022 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2019. The 2023 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2020. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2021.

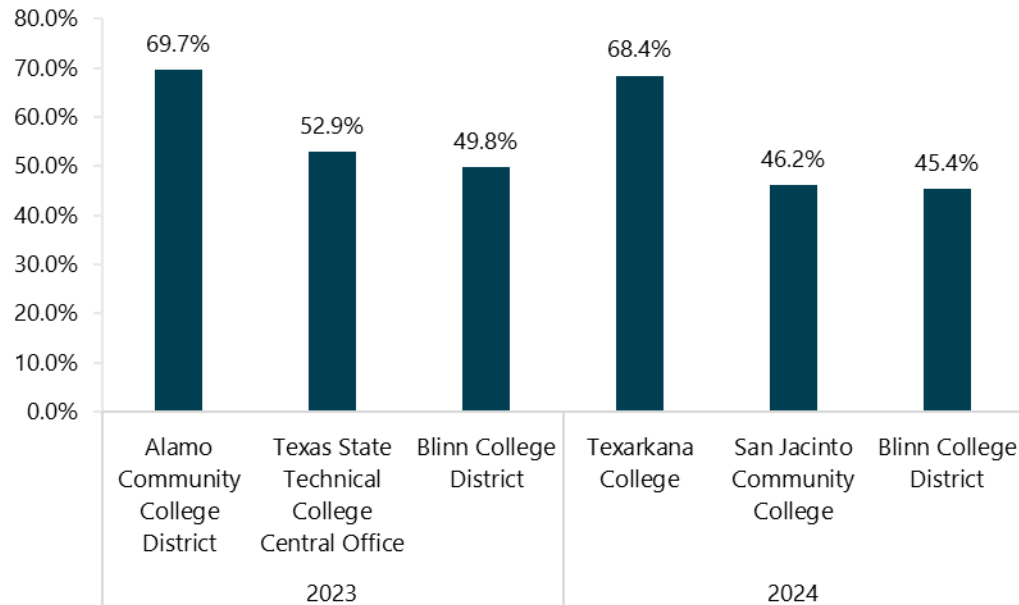
Figure 23. Top Texas Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Four-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2022 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2018. The 2023 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2019. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2020.

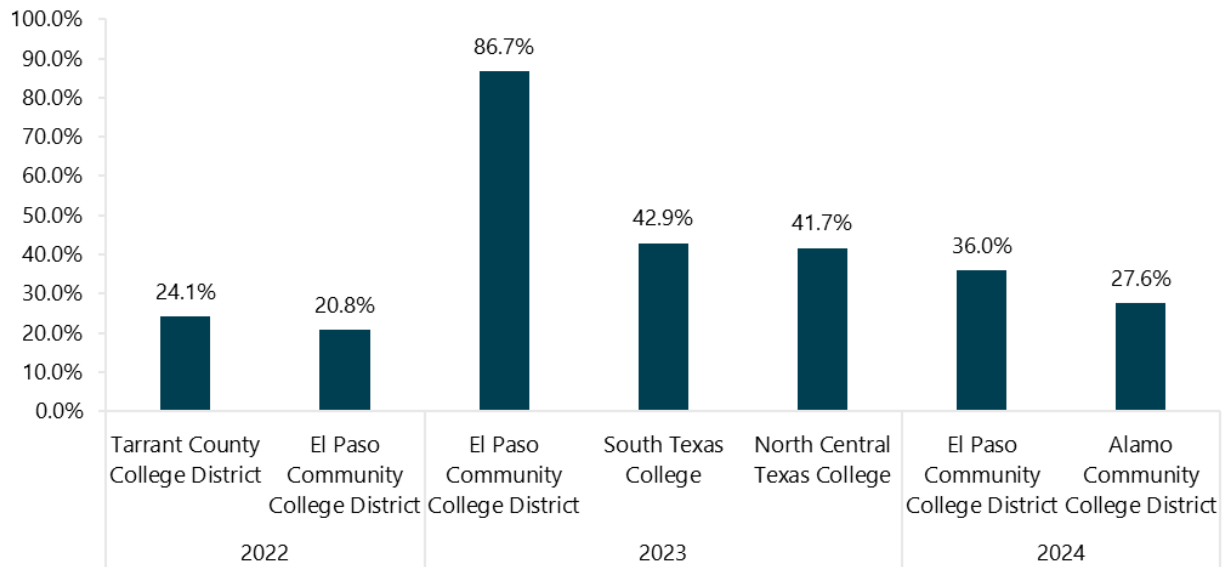
Figure 24. Top Texas Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Six-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024



Note: The 2023 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2017. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2018. Data for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities did not exist before fall 2017.

Figures 25-27 show the top two-year institutions with the highest graduation rates across three, four, and six years for degree-seeking students with autism. El Paso Community College led the way with the highest three-year graduation rate in 2023 and 2024 and the highest four-year graduation rate in 2024. Alamo Community College District and South Texas College make up other notable institutions in Figures 23 and 24. Additionally, Alamo Community College District led the way in six-year graduation rates in 2025 and 2026.

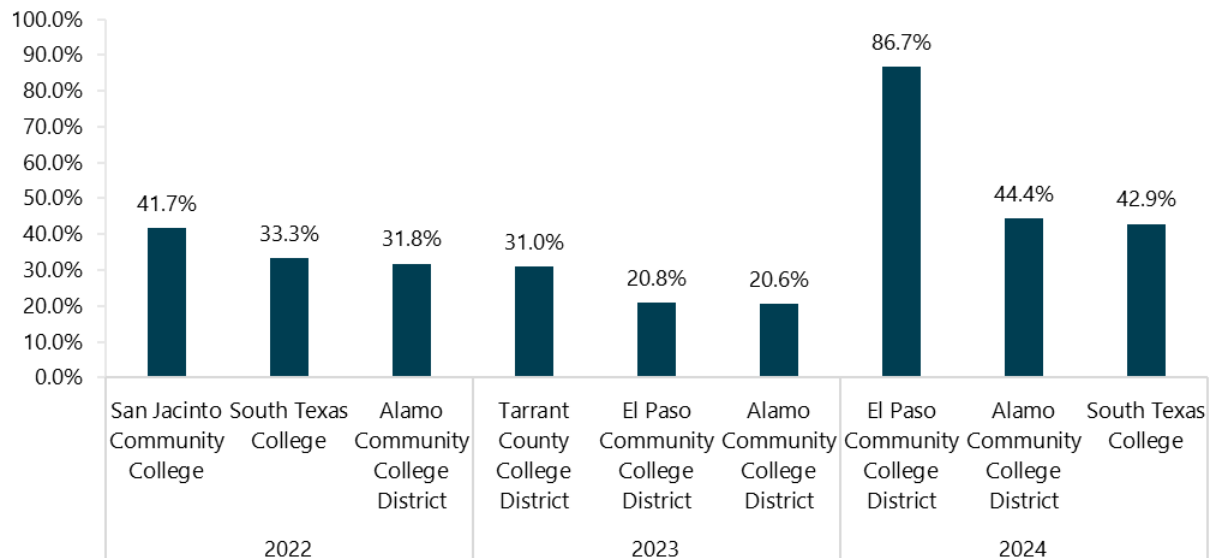
Figure 25. Top Texas Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Three-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2022-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2022 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2019. The 2023 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2020. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2021.

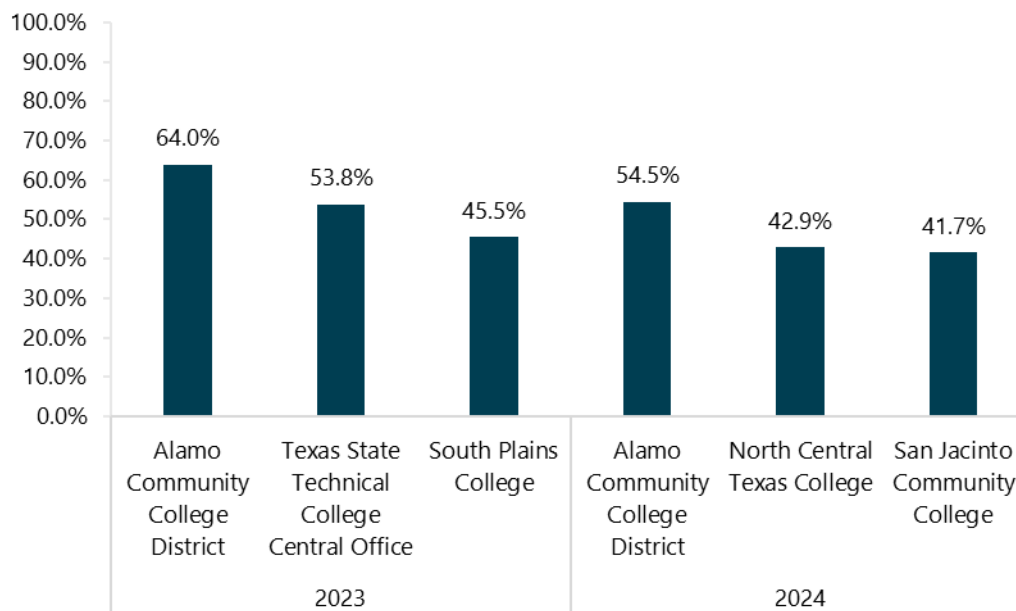
Figure 26. Top Texas Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Four-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2022-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2022 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2018. The 2023 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2019. The 2024 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2020.

Figure 27. Top Texas Public Two-Year Institutions with Highest Six-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2022-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2023 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2017. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2018. Data for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities did not exist before fall 2017.

Public Universities

Table 7 provides a comprehensive view of the three most recent years of graduation data with their corresponding graduation rates across each graduation length (i.e., four, five, and six years) for the autism and/or IDD population and the autism-only population. Across most of the graduation lengths and graduation years, graduation rates for the autism and/or IDD population outpaced the autism-only population.

Table 7. Statewide University Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students

Graduation Length	Cohort Year	Graduation Year	Autism and/or IDD Graduation Rate	Autism Graduation Rate
4-Year	2018	2022	30.9%	18.2%
	2019	2023	33.7%	29.9%
	2020	2024	37.1%	27.0%
5-Year	2017	2022	46.7%	51.0%
	2018	2023	53.9%	49.4%
	2019	2024	57.0%	55.2%
6-Year	2017	2023	62.0%	66.7%
	2018	2024	57.6%	51.9%

Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Table 8 shows a comprehensive view of the three most recent years of graduation data with their corresponding graduation rates across each graduation length (i.e., four, five, and six years), disaggregated by sex and enrollment status for the autism and/or IDD population. Due to small counts, graduation rates for part-time students were omitted. Except for the six-year graduation rate for 2024, graduation rates for full-time students have increased from year to year. Female students outpaced their male peers across most graduation lengths and graduation years with the biggest gap between the two occurring at the four-year mark.

Table 8. Statewide University Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD by Sex and Enrollment Status

Graduation Length	Graduation Year	Sex		Enrollment Status
		Female	Male	Full-Time
4-Year	2022	40.3%	24.5%	32.7%
	2023	37.5%	31.0%	33.7%
	2024	46.7%	28.1%	38.2%
5-Year	2022	43.3%	48.4%	46.6%
	2023	59.7%	50.0%	56.2%
	2024	61.1%	54.0%	57.1%
6-Year	2023	56.7%	64.5%	61.4%
	2024	64.2%	53.1%	59.5%

Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Table 9 shows a comprehensive view of the three most recent years of graduation data with their corresponding graduation rates across each graduation length (i.e., four, five, and six years), disaggregated by sex and enrollment status for the autism-only population. Due to small counts, graduation rates for part-time students were omitted. In 2024, female students in this population outpaced their male peers at every graduation length with the biggest gap seen at the six-year graduation length, with an almost 12 percentage point difference (61.5% vs. 50.0%).

Table 9. Statewide University Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism by Sex and Enrollment Status

Graduation Length	Graduation Year	Sex		Enrollment Status
		Female	Male	Full-Time
4-Year	2022	15.4%	18.8%	20.6%
	2023	29.4%	30.0%	28.8%
	2024	31.3%	25.5%	28.3%
5-Year	2022	25.0%	55.8%	50.0%
	2023	61.5%	46.9%	52.9%

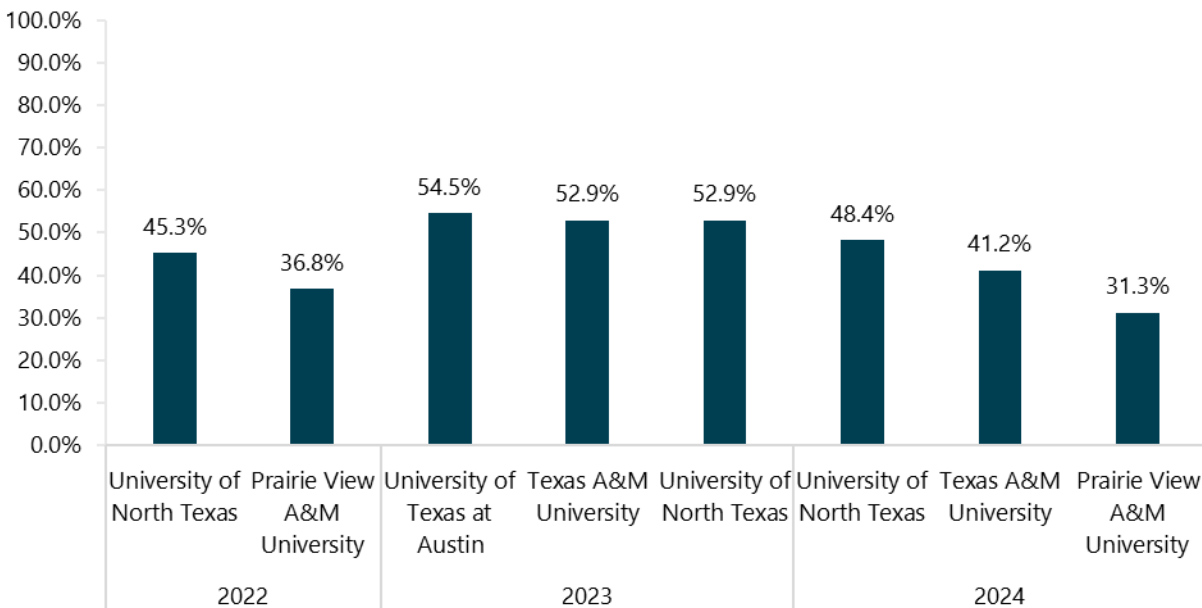
Graduation Length	Graduation Year	Sex		Enrollment Status
		Female	Male	Full-Time
	2024	58.8%	54.3%	53.8%
6-Year	2023	50.0%	69.8%	64.6%
	2024	61.5%	50.0%	55.9%

Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Figures 28-30 show the top three universities with the highest graduation rates across four, five, and six years for degree-seeking students with autism and/or IDD. While two-year institutions had several top institutions emerging across each graduation length, public universities saw the highest graduation rates at only a handful of schools.

Four institutions appeared across each graduation length: Prairie View A&M University, University of North Texas, Texas A&M University, and The University of Texas at Austin. In 2024, University of North Texas had the highest four-year graduation rate, at 48.4%; Texas A&M University had the highest five-year graduation rate, at 82.4%; and The University of Texas at Austin had the highest six-year graduation rate, at 100.0%. Other noteworthy 100% graduation rates include The University of Texas at Austin in 2023 at the five-year length and again in 2023 at the six-year length, followed by Texas A&M University in 2023 at the six-year length.

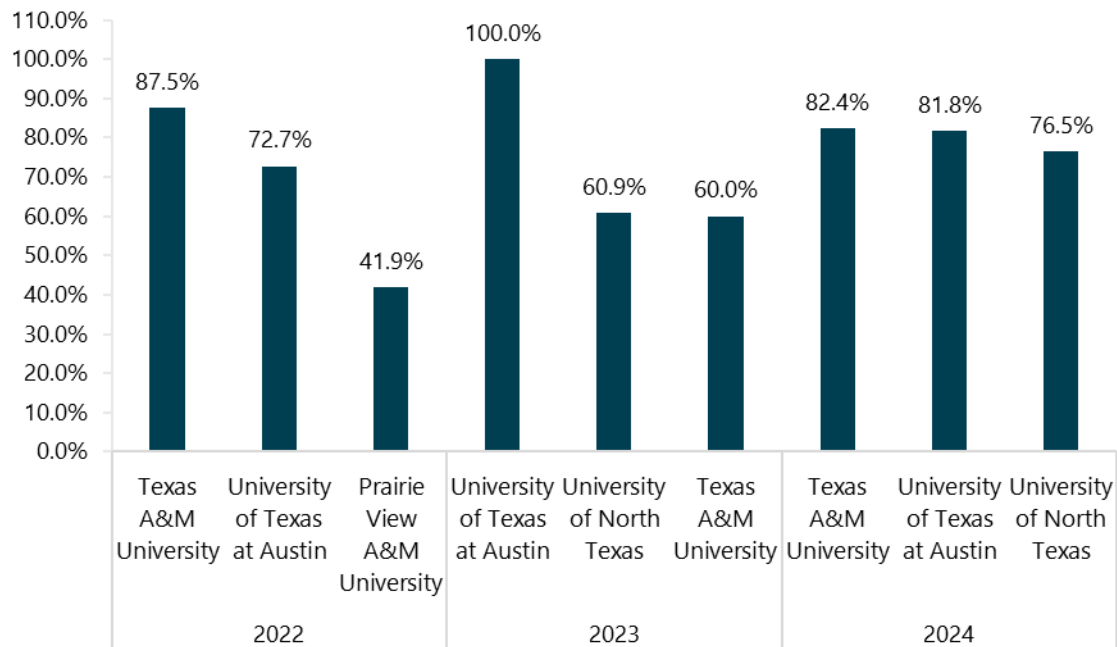
Figure 28. Texas Universities with Highest Four-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2022 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2018. The 2023 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2019. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2020.

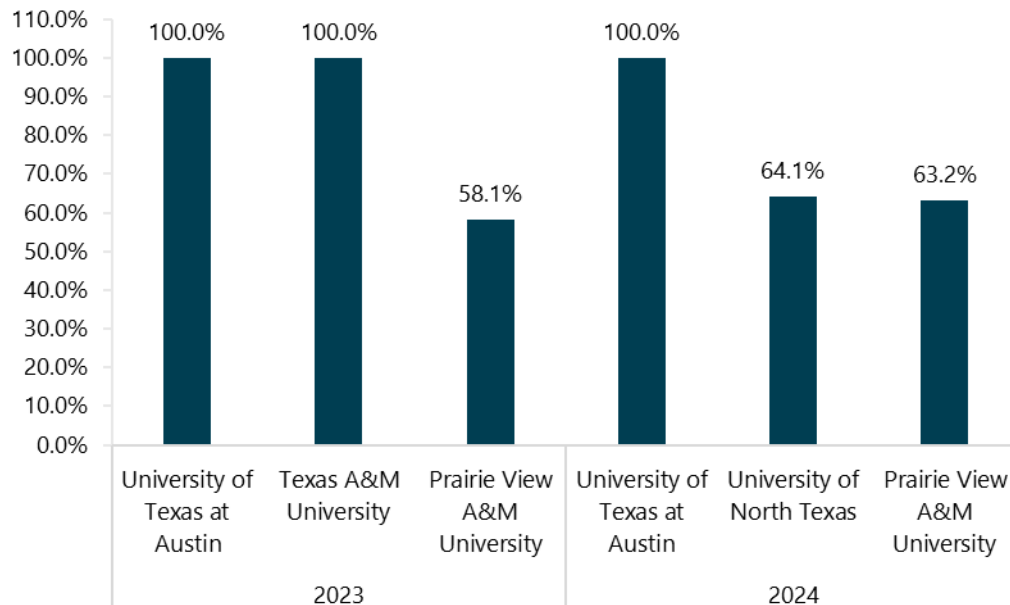
Figure 29. Texas Universities with Highest Five-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2022 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2017. The 2023 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2018. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2019.

Figure 30. Texas Universities with Highest Six-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism and/or IDD, FYs 2022-2024

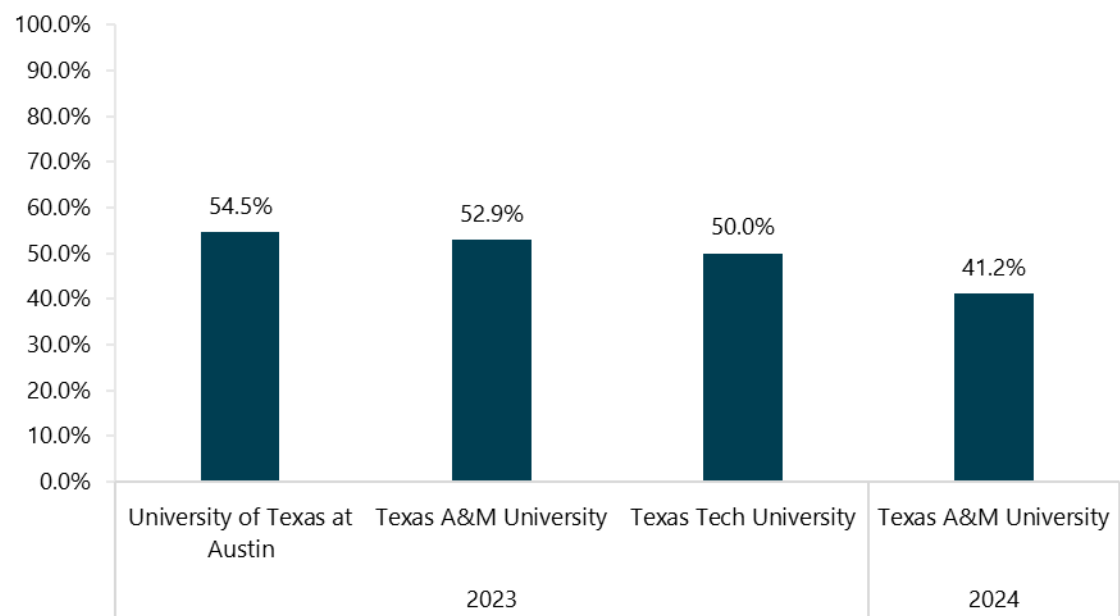


Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2023 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2017. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2018.

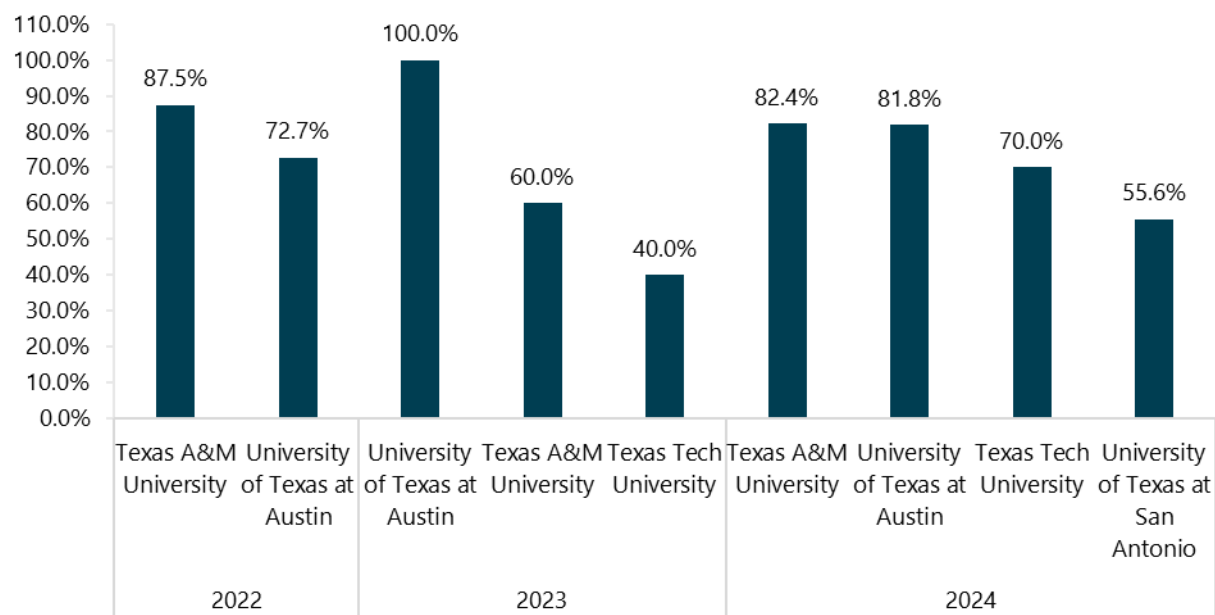
Figures 31-33 show the top universities with the highest graduation rates across four, five, and six years for degree-seeking students with autism and/or IDD. Three public universities consistently appeared across each graduation length: The University of Texas at Austin, Texas A&M University, and Texas Tech University. In 2024, Texas A&M University had the highest graduation rates at the four- and five-year graduation lengths, and The University of Texas at Austin had the highest six-year graduation rate, at 100%.

Figure 31. Texas Universities with Highest Four-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2023-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009
 Note: The 2023 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2019. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2020.

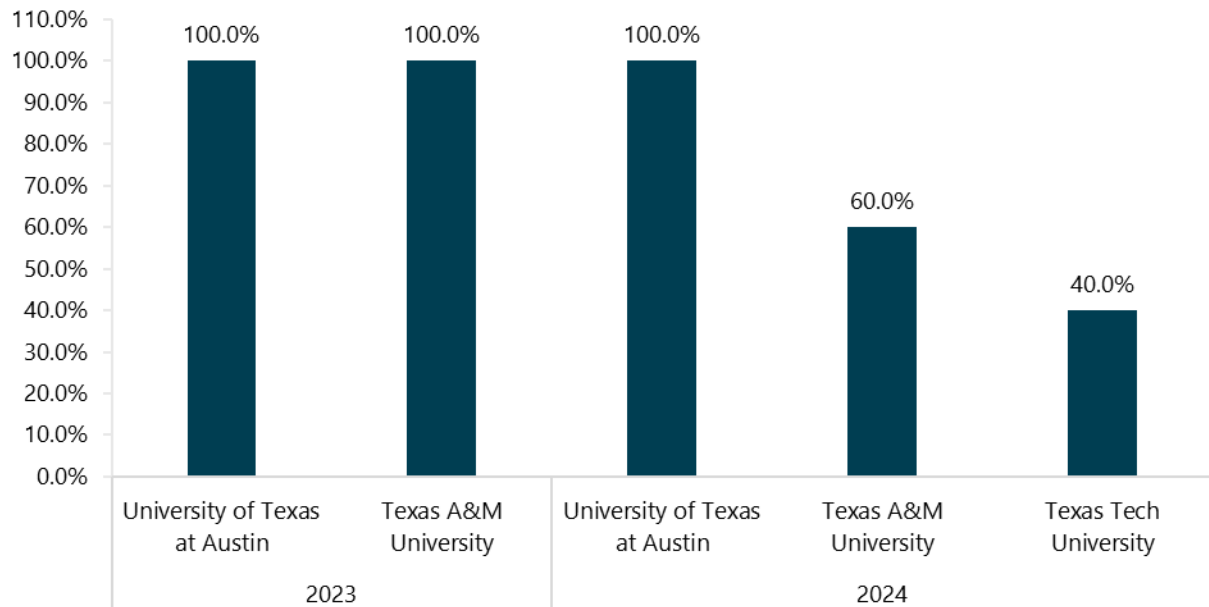
Figure 32. Texas Universities with Highest Five-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2022-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2022 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2017. The 2023 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2018. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2019.

Figure 33. Texas Universities with Highest Six-Year Graduation Rates for Degree-Seeking Students with Autism, FYs 2023-2024



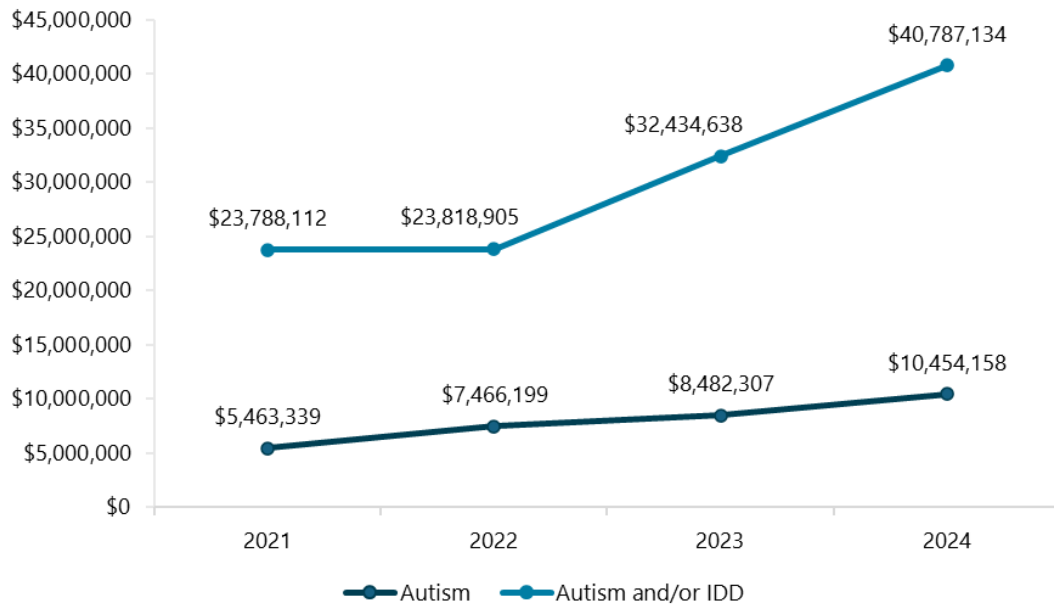
Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, CBM009

Note: The 2023 graduation rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2017. The 2024 rate corresponds to those who first enrolled in fall 2018.

Financial Aid

The amount of financial aid (i.e., institutional, state, other, and federal) that students with Autism and/or IDD are awarded has steadily increased over the past four years. With more federal, state, and institutional financial aid programs introduced over the years, along with general enrollment increases from students within these groups, it makes sense that financial aid has increased over the years. Figure 34 shows the amount of financial aid awarded to these two student populations over the past four years. Over \$10 million was awarded in financial aid to students with autism in 2024, with just over 50% of students receiving financial aid. Meanwhile, over \$40 million was awarded in financial aid to students with autism and or/IDD, with just over 60% of students receiving financial aid. For both student populations, at least 80% of aid came from federal (about 50%) and institutional (about 30%) sources.

Figure 34. Financial Aid Awarded, FY 2021-2024



Source: THECB CBM001/CBM0C1, Financial Aid Database

Students with disabilities have access to several forms of financial aid from various sources, which can greatly assist in covering the cost of their college education:

1. **Federal Financial Aid** - Students with disabilities attending a two-year or four-year college are eligible to apply for federal financial aid through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. This includes grants such as Pell Grants and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants. Students are strongly encouraged to visit their college's financial aid office for information on school-specific opportunities and to work with the institution's disability services office to explore additional resources and assistance.
2. **Comprehensive Transition Programs** - Students with disabilities enrolled in approved [Comprehensive Transition Programs](#) (CTPs) can access federal funding, including Pell Grants and Federal Work-Study opportunities. Texas currently offers [five CTPs](#), and students can find more details about CTPs in Texas through the Federal Student Aid website or the [Think College](#) website.
3. **Vocational Rehabilitation Services** - In Texas, Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS), administered by the TWC, provides support to individuals with disabilities in preparing for, finding, and maintaining employment. For students with disabilities, this program can cover tuition, books, and other related expenses. More information about youth services under VRS can be found on the [TWC website](#).
4. **Tuition Waivers and Fee Reductions** - Many students with disabilities can take advantage of tuition exemptions and fee reductions available in Texas. The THECB offers an overview of [available tuition waivers](#), and individual universities may also provide fee reductions, such as waiving application fees or offering discounted dormitory housing rates. Students should contact their institution's admissions or financial aid office to learn more about available waivers.

5. **Veterans' Benefits** - For students who are children of military veterans, there may be additional [educational benefits](#) available to help cover the cost of attending college. These benefits vary by state and eligibility criteria.
6. **Assistive Technology and Disability-Related Support** - Assistive technology (AT) can be an essential resource for students with disabilities to succeed in college. Students with autism or I/DD should collaborate with their special education team before transitioning out of public school to ensure they have the necessary AT for college or other postsecondary settings. Each state education department has their own policy regarding the [transfer of AT](#) upon graduation. States, including Texas, offer statewide AT programs, such as the [Texas Technology Access Program](#), which allows individuals to trial AT devices. Additionally, TWC may offer financial support or aid to cover the costs of AT, such as screen readers or other devices that help students with disabilities succeed academically to meet their employment goals. Furthermore, the office of disability support services at colleges may provide essential services, such as notetakers, ASL interpreters, live transcription, and more. To access these services, students must self-identify and complete the appropriate paperwork at their institution of choice.
7. **Texas ABE Program (Texas Achieving a Better Life Experience 529A Savings Accounts)** - 529 programs are tax-advantaged savings plans designed to help families save for future education costs. Funds from a 529 plan can be used to pay for tuition, fees, books, and other qualified expenses at colleges, universities, vocational schools, and some apprenticeship programs. Additionally, up to \$10,000 per year can be used for K-12 tuition, and recent changes allow limited use for student loan repayment.
8. **Private Loans** - Many students with autism and I/DD rely on a combination of personal savings, external support, and, in some cases, private loans to fill funding gaps. It is important to carefully evaluate loan terms and conditions to ensure the financial burden is manageable after graduation.

Scholarships

Several organizations, foundations, and nonprofits offer scholarships specifically for students with disabilities, including those with autism and IDD. Students and families can find these opportunities through online scholarship databases or by conducting searches using targeted keywords.

An extensive search conducted by THECB staff using terms such as "autism scholarships," "scholarships for ASD," "intellectual disability and scholarships," "developmental disability scholarships," and "disability scholarships for higher education" resulted in 21 relevant scholarships. A summary of these scholarships is included in Table 10, with an additional list of specialized scholarship databases shown in Table 11.

Table 10. Scholarship Opportunities for Students with Autism and IDD

Organization	Website
Organization for Autism Research	https://researchautism.org/self-advocates/postsecondary-scholarships/
Disabled Person Inc (501C3)	https://www.disabledperson.com/scholarships/37
Autism Research of Texas	https://www.autismresearchtexas.org/scholarships
Wells Fargo Stacy Millbern Scholarship	https://scholarshipamerica.org/scholarship/pwdscholarship/
Simmons Fletcher	https://www.simmonsandfletcher.com/students-disabilities-scholarship/
Allegra Ford	https://ncld.org/scholarships-awards/allegra-ford-thomas-scholarship/
Anne Ford Scholarship	https://accessscholarships.com/scholarship/anne-ford-and-allegra-ford-thomas-scholarships/
UT Austin Scholarships	https://disability.utexas.edu/scholarships/
Office of Autism Research	https://researchautism.org/self-advocates/postsecondary-scholarships/
Autism Can Do Scholarship	https://www.scholarships.com/scholarships/autism-can-do-scholarship
Thurgood Marshall College Fund	https://tmcf.org/open-scholarships/tmcf-sallie-mae-fund-completing-the-dream-gap-scholarship/
Lisa Higgins Hussman Scholarship	https://researchautism.smapply.org/prog/hussman_scholarship/
Microsoft Disability Scholarship	https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/diversity/programs/microsoftdisabilityscholarship?msckid=3c6573e448156f6a3cb06703497a6e05&oneroute=true
Buckfire & Buckfire Disability Scholarship Program	https://buckfirelaw.com/scholarships/disability/
BMO Capital Markets	https://limeconnect.com/

Organization	Website
Google Lime	https://www.pathwaystoscience.org/programhub.aspx?sort=FEL-Google-Lime
Sid Richardson Memorial Fund	https://sidrichardsonmemorialfund.org/
American Association on Health and Disability Scholarship	https://aahd.us/initiatives/scholarship/
KFM Making a Difference	https://kfmmakingadifference.org/scholarship-programs-for-adults-with-autism/

Source: Google search and Generative AI search

Table 11. Specialized Scholarship Databases

Database	Website
US News	https://www.usnews.com/education/scholarships/search
Comptroller Texas	https://comptroller.texas.gov/programs/education/msp/funding/aid/faidalpha.php
Career One Stop Scholarship finder	https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/Training/find-scholarships.aspx?curPage=1&pagesize=500
Big Future College Board	https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/scholarship-search?navId=gf-bff-ss
Scholarships.com	https://www.scholarships.com/
Fastweb	https://www.fastweb.com/college-scholarships
Bold.org	https://bold.org/scholarships/
University HQ	https://universityhq.org/paying-for-college/scholarships/
UT- Austin	https://utexas.scholarships.ngwebsolutions.com/CMXAdmin/CMX_Content.aspx?cpld=1564

Source: Google search and Generative AI search

Best Practices

Best Practices Survey

The rising number of students with autism seeking higher education has prompted many colleges and universities across the U.S. to create more welcoming environments, offering tailored support services that address the unique needs of students. The success of higher education programs is typically measured by persistence, retention, and completion rates; however, most colleges and universities do not collect or publicly report college persistence and completion rates specifically for students with autism.

In the absence of this data, the IDD Advisory Council created a survey (see [Appendix D](#)) and distributed it to top-ranking autism support schools in the U.S. To identify which schools to include, the council reviewed news reports, articles, and blogs by autism support groups that provided lists ranking the best colleges for providing support to autistic students. The six lists reviewed were: [19 Best Colleges for Autistic Students](#),³⁵ [20 Best Colleges for Autistic Students](#),³⁶ [20 Best Colleges for Autistic Students](#),³⁷ [The Best Colleges for Students with Autism](#),³⁸ [30 Best Colleges for Students on the Autism Spectrum](#),³⁹ and [Top-Ranked Colleges for Autistic Students](#).⁴⁰ In addition to Texas schools that made these national lists, Texas schools with programs that have a strong local reputation for supporting students with autism were also included.

Factors important to higher program ranking across lists included:

- Specialized programs and resources to support students with autism
- Overall autism friendliness with special events, housing accommodations, or a buddy system for students with autism
- Schools with special autism scholarships and innovative practices
- "The 'It' Factor," which included things like autism research programs, schools established specifically for students with learning differences, or courses on autism
- Training for faculty and staff
- Peer support programs
- Sensory-friendly campus spaces
- Community engagement and awareness
- Flexible academic policies
- Collaboration with autism organizations
- Inclusive extracurricular activities

³⁵ Zaudere, Steven. (2025, February 24). *19 Best Colleges for Autistic Students*. <https://www.crossrivertherapy.com/articles/best-colleges>

³⁶ April ABA. (2025, February 25). *20 Best Colleges For Autistic Students*. <https://www.aprilaba.com/resources/20-best-colleges-for-autistic-students>

³⁷ APEX ABA Therapy. (2024, June 16). *20 Best Colleges For Autistic Students*. <https://www.apexaba.com/blog/colleges-for-autistic-students>

³⁸ Great Value Colleges. (n.d.). *The Best Colleges for Students with Autism*. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.greatvaluecolleges.net/best-colleges-for-students-with-autism/>

³⁹ Applied Behavior Analysis Programs Guide. (n.d.). *30 Best Colleges for Students on the Autism Spectrum*. Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://www.appliedbehavioranalysisprograms.com/colleges-for-students-autism/>

⁴⁰ Yellow Bus ABA Autism Therapy Services. (2025, March 22). *Top-Ranked Colleges for Autistic Students*. Retrieved from <https://www.yellowbusaba.com/post/colleges-for-autistic-students>

- Transition support
- Regular assessment and improvement

Survey Results

The survey was emailed to a total of 57 colleges and universities. Because information was not readily available publicly, IDD Advisory Council subcommittee members followed up by phone or email to the institutions' disability services offices and the autism support programs to further inquire about their program components, enrollment, persistence and graduation/completion rates, and type of support services provided that contribute to the success of their students with autism.

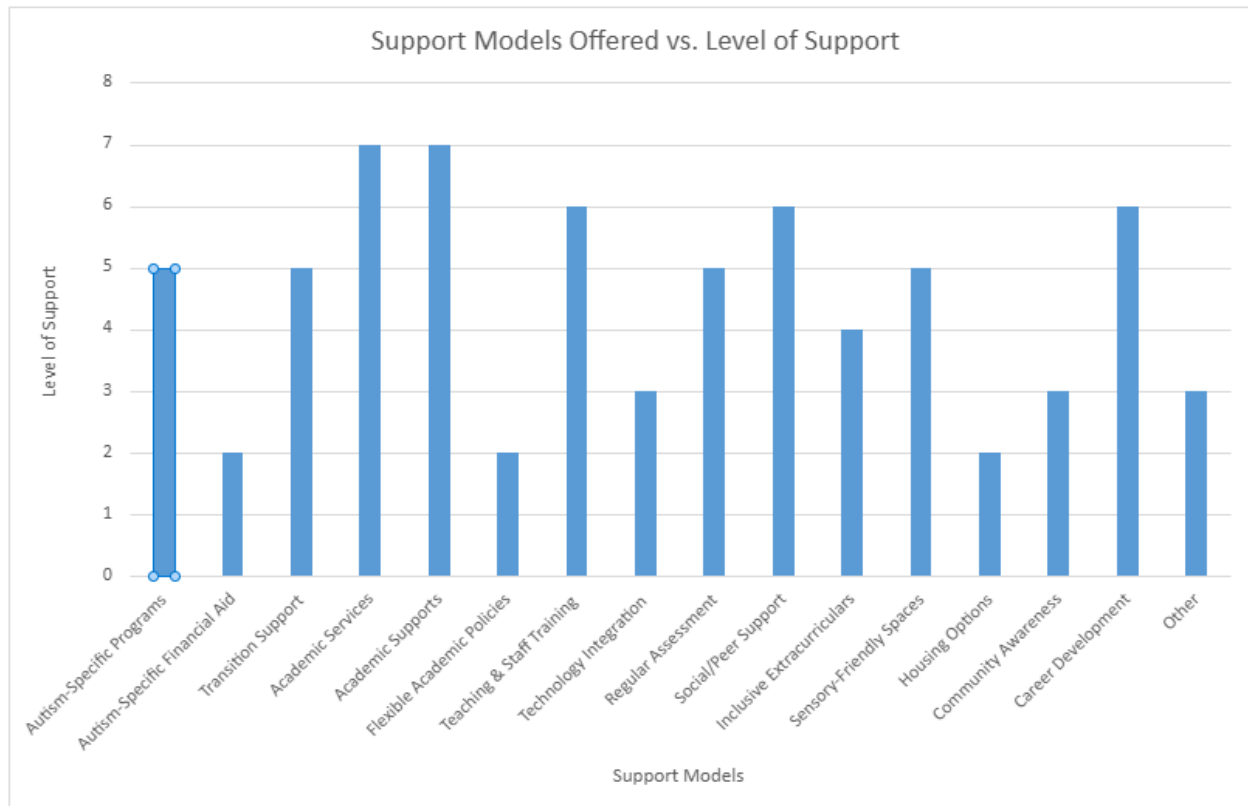
From eight university responses and six articles,^{35,36,37,38,39,40} which announced 58 Autism programs of note, plus from anecdotal reports from families, the committee arrived at several key observations:

- Qualitative analysis of salient themes across respondents indicated most programs used multiple supports, but very few reported special funding for their students, meaning schools are responding to the need, but funding is not.
- Of the colleges that provided cost data in this survey, two programs out of seven were free to students. One provided tiered support for students based on need, and another charged a higher cost for first- and second-year students, and lower costs for third- and fourth-year students. Paid programs averaged \$2070 per semester, with a semester being 16 weeks (costs ranged from \$0-\$4000 per semester).
- Success across autism-specific educational programs is often gauged through three key metrics—**enrollment, persistence, and graduation, as requested by SB 55**—but individual approaches vary significantly. Enrollment estimates range from 25 to 74 students, with at least one program differentiating 35 students with autism only and 15 with autism plus intellectual/developmental disability. Persistence rates also differ: Raven Scholars, a program developed by the University of Idaho, reports a strong 85%, while another program notes unknown persistence, and the rest offer wide-ranging or unclear data. Graduation figures show even greater inconsistency, from roughly 50.5% completion up to counts like “4 graduates last year.” Notably, some programs consider program completion—or completion of support services—as graduation, not strictly degree attainment.
- These discrepancies underscore a broader pattern: without standardized definitions or uniform reporting, it’s hard to compare or evaluate program effectiveness accurately. Studies suggest that autistic students may persist and succeed academically at rates closer to their neurotypical peers when provided appropriate accommodation and supports, though challenges often emerge in credit accumulation and degree completion years later. To truly measure success, programs should adopt consistent criteria (e.g., specifying whether “graduation” means degree earned or service completed) and establish clear benchmarks for persistence and retention.

Successful Support Models

This study found that there are key supports an institution can put in place that significantly impact the success of students with IDD/Autism. The support survey provided a list of 16 support models and asked respondents to indicate which supports their institution provides. Figure 35 shows the prevalence of the various support models at surveyed institutions.

Figure 35. Successful Support Models



The most frequently listed support models contributing to student success are:

1. **Academic Services:** Disability services, counseling, and accommodation processes for exams/assignments
2. **Academic Supports:** Tutoring, study skills workshops, executive function coaching, learning strategies, and assistive technology
3. **Teaching and Staff Training:** Ongoing training in autism awareness, inclusive practices, communication strategies, and universal design
4. **Social/Peer Support:** peer mentoring, social skills training, structured activities, and interest-based groups
5. **Career Development:** Tailored career support, internships, employer partnerships, and neurodiversity-focused job prep

Beyond the survey, when researching, the council found a few strategies that had significant impact but were not found within all programs: 1) the cohort model, 2) mental health counseling services, and 3) a tiered service model. The cohort model refers to a group of students that enter

a program together and move through the program together. This model has many benefits, including an increase in persistence rates and graduation rates. Rüeegg (2019) found that the cohort model graduation rate for graduate students enrolled in an online master's program in educational leadership was 42%, much higher than the graduation rate for graduate students who enrolled in a traditional non-cohort model program (20%). In addition, Rüeegg found that student-to-student engagement fosters more interpersonal relationships, which is a known hardship for students with autism and IDD. Rüeegg states that connection to peer groups plays a significant role in persistence rates for students in higher education.⁴¹ One respondent with a cohort model had a persistence rate of 89%.

Autism programs that emphasize peer mentorship show stronger reported outcomes. Peer support can help when a student receives sudden overwhelming news, such as an unexpected test score or a social breakup. Peer relationships can prevent a student from harming their own person or possessions. Several programs are noted for supporting autism by using peer support in some fashion: Michigan State University,³⁸ Carnegie Mellon University,³⁷ Kent State University,³⁶ and Rutgers University³⁵ all pair students with peers. Rutgers asks their peers to attend club meetings with the student.³⁹ Defiance College trains each student's resident assistant to offer peer support.³⁵ The University of Montana provides speech language therapy and pairs their students with peers from that program.³⁹ **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Western Kentucky University offers social support, and Michigan State's program is strong because of the frequency of peer meetings and social outings.³⁸

One of the colleges provided mental health services for students with autism and IDD. With the support of mental health services, students can be better prepared for transitions and struggles many college students face. These services focused on managing overwhelming emotions, time management, organization skills, and overall coping skills. The University of Alabama³⁶ now offers mental health services within their ASD College Transition and Support program.

Two of the colleges questioned had a multi-tier service model that allows students to customize the amount of support received based on their individual needs. This model allows students to increase and decrease support as needed. The goal of this model is that students receive support, but as they gain experience, they decrease the support and increase independence while on campus and after completion. The University of Arkansas³⁸ offers 20 hours of wraparound services per week and was recommended by five articles.

There are successful standalone autism support programs, similar to what the Think College model provides for students with intellectual disability. The Mansfield Hall program^{42,43} offers services in three U.S. college towns, limiting the population they serve to neurodiverse students: ASD1 (65%), ASD2 (15%), and ADHD (20%) at present. These degree-seeking students, living in the program's apartments and shared spaces, either enroll in the nearby flagship state

⁴¹ Ruegg, S. T. (2019). Comparing Cohort Model and Non-cohort Model Program Design as a Mechanism for Increasing Retention and Degree Completion [Doctoral dissertation, Northcentral University]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (ProQuest No. 27666345).

⁴² Mansfield Hall. (n.d.). *What Is Mansfield Hall?* Retrieved July 20, 2025, from <https://mansfieldhall.org/about/>

⁴³ Consolidated Planning Group. (2025, May 13). *Discover Mansfield Hall: A College Super Dorm for Neurodiverse Students* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fmY4MN0yiQ>

university, the nearby community college, or the nearby private university, taking three courses per semester. A few students in each location are not degree-seeking yet and take three college courses per semester to transfer for credit to another university, where they have been admitted but have deferred, in a gap year of sorts. These three sites provide housing and meals, individualized coaching (academics, writing, life skills, and community) plus study halls and social events. Fees are about \$80,000/year for the first two years and about \$41,000/year for the second two years, if needed, where the student lives on campus, instead of in the program's apartments, but retains some support. *Note: These costs do not include the college's tuition.*

Mansfield Hall's Canopy program⁴² and Saint Joseph's University's ASPIRE³⁸ program offer their support services remotely to any college student with autism across the nation, and ASPIRE has an 84% success rate. (Saint Joseph's on-campus program has an even higher success rate.) A few, such as Landmark College in Vermont and Beacon College in Florida, are entirely dedicated to serving neurodiverse students. Both are degree-granting institutions and provide not only pull-out supports but have infused their entire campuses with philosophies of universal design and focusing on student's unique strengths.³⁹

Responses show that Housing and Sensory Friendly Spaces are still limited. Eastern Illinois University,³⁹ Rutgers University,³⁹ and Western Kentucky University³⁹ offer single dorm rooms when arranged, and Adelphi University³⁸ created the first college sensory room.

Another emerging trend is incorporating employment experience during study. Rochester Institute of Technology³⁸ and Drexel University³⁸ are considered leaders in connecting a growing number of students with autism to participate in work experiences during study.

Programs and Cost Overview

The TEA does not maintain a statewide list of all specialized K-12 programs offered to students with autism across districts. However, between 2022 and 2024, TEA issued grants to promote innovative services for students with autism. The funding for these grants originated in the 87th Texas Legislature to help address the need for specialized services for students with autism ages 3-21. The Texas Legislature appropriated \$70,000,000 across the biennium in accordance with Texas Education Code Section 29.026. Grants were awarded to a total of 55 local educational agencies (LEAs) based on a competitive application process.

The following excerpts from TEA's 2025 report on its Innovative Services for Students with Autism Grant⁴⁴ highlights the program's features and outcomes. Grantees were required to incorporate evidence-based practices, meaningful integration, and the ability to replicate the program for students statewide. A comprehensive review of all grantees indicated the program components that had the greatest impact were: classroom environment, individualized student support, parent and community engagement, and staff training and professional development.

Classroom Environment

⁴⁴ Texas Education Agency. (2025). *Final Report for 2022-2024 & 2023-2024: Innovative Services for Students with Autism Grant*. <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/government-relations-and-legal/government-relations/final-report-2022-24-innovative-services-autism.pdf>

- Utilizing alternative learning tools like movement, sensory walls, and lighting that focused on the unique sensory needs of students with autism.
- Utilizing digital images and videos of model classrooms.
- Utilizing occupational therapists (OT) to assist with designing and implementing sensory strategies and environmental arrangements that take into account the unique sensory needs of students with autism.
- Providing designated physical spaces for emotional regulation.
- Training student peers on characteristics of autism.

Individualized Student Support

- Aligning skills from assessment to curriculum and instruction.
- Targeting interventions for significant grade-level transitions, such as elementary to middle, middle to high school, and high school to postsecondary programs.

Parental and Community Engagement

- Providing parents training on evidence-based practices for autism.
- Holding predictable, regularly scheduled meetings for families (e.g., monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly).
- Creating a database of recorded training and resources for parents to access (e.g., Google Drive shared with families, district website with page for training).
- Providing training options in languages other than English that match the demographic of the local community.
- Providing parent training that includes hands-on learning opportunities.
- Providing specialized childcare for students with autism during parent training.
- Collaborating between community agencies and local entities (e.g., having representatives and waitlist sign-ups from Texas Workforce Commission, Medicaid, etc. available at parent events).

Staff Training and Professional Development

- Meeting regularly to problem solve and align on implementation practices, including through structured Professional Learning Communities.
- Aligning and frequently collaborating between multidisciplinary teams of staff, such as speech-language pathologists, OTs, behavior specialists, general education teachers, special education teachers, families, and paraprofessionals.
- Training administrators and staff on basic characteristics of autism and focused training on specific evidence-based practices.
- Training substitute teachers and other LEA staff that interact and support students with autism, such as transportation staff, cafeteria staff, and school resource officers, on autism characteristics and evidence-based practices.
- Growing a Trainer of Trainer model to build capacity within specialized programs.
- Providing training to all staff on the use of augmentative and alternative communication devices to promote generalization and continuous access to communication for students.

- Implementing “Grow your own” programs for district specialists, such as Registered Behavior Technicians and Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs), who commit to working in Texas public schools.
- Training delivered through partnerships with local entities, such as Education Service Centers and colleges and universities.

Replicating Evidence-Based Practices in K-12 Programs

In promoting evidence-based practices⁴⁵ in Texas, the TEA uses a report from the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice Review Team at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute.⁴⁶ This team conducts a comprehensive review of literature to identify approaches that support autistic children and youth in being more independent and realizing outcomes that support their success.

The report outlines two classes of interventions—comprehensive treatment models and focused intervention practices. Comprehensive treatment models (CTMs) consist of a set of practices designed to achieve a broad learning or developmental impact on the core features of autism.⁴⁷ In their review, the team identified 10 to 30 CTMs. These programs were characterized by organization (i.e., around a conceptual framework), operationalization (i.e., manualized procedures), intensity (i.e., substantial number of hours per week), longevity (i.e., occur across one or more years), and breadth of outcome focus (i.e., multiple outcomes, such as communication, behavior, social competence targeted).

Strategies known as focused intervention practices are designed to address a single skill or developmental goal for learners with autism.⁴⁸ These practices are operationally defined, address specific learner outcomes, and tend to occur over a shorter time period than CTMs (i.e., until the individual goal is achieved). Examples include discrete trial teaching, visual support, prompting, and video modeling. Focused intervention practices could be considered the building blocks of educational programs for children and youth with autism, and they are key features of the CTMs.

Focused intervention practices examined in a study had to be behavioral, clinical, developmental, and/or educational in nature. Studies in which the interventions were only medications or nutritional supplements/special diets were excluded from the review. Interventions that could be implemented in typical educational, home, clinic, or community settings were included. The intervention should be able to be implemented by teachers, clinicians, related service providers, families, community providers, or others that would typically provide behavioral, clinical, developmental, or educational intervention.

⁴⁵ Smith, T. (2013). What is evidence-based behavior analysis?. *The Behavior Analyst*, 36(1), 7–33.

⁴⁶ Wong, C., Odom, S. L., Hume, K. Cox, A. W., Fettig, A., Kucharczyk, S., ... Schultz, T. R. (2013). Evidence-based practices for children, youth, and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Autism Evidence-Based Practice Review Group. <https://autism.unt.edu/images/2014-ebp-report-npdc.pdf>

⁴⁷ Odom, S. L., Boyd, B. A., Hall, L. J., & Hume, K. (2010). Evaluation of comprehensive treatment models for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 40(4), 425–436. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-009-0825-1>

⁴⁸ Odom, S. L., Collet-Klingenberg, L., Rogers, S. J., & Hatton, D. D. (2010). Evidence-based practices in interventions for children and youth with autism spectrum disorders. *Preventing School Failure*, 54(4), 275–282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10459881003785506>

A total of 28 practices met the criteria to be classified as evidence based. The authors do not recommend that a practitioner learn all 28 practices; rather they suggest using a more targeted approach based on the learning needs of autistic children and adolescents.

This report provides details on establishing a process for selecting specific evidence-based practices (EBPs) to address an autistic child's individual goals.⁴⁹ The matrix of EBPs, outcomes, and age categories is an important tool for beginning the EBP selection process and highlights the outcome areas in which specific EBPs have demonstrated effects for specific ages. The selection of intervention approaches depends on the practitioner's wisdom and knowledge about the specific goal, the characteristics of the child, priorities of the parents and child, and the practitioners' own capacity to implement the practice given their context and resources. UNC's Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM) website highlights just such a process.⁵⁰

Texas Legislation

Several states have already enacted legislation to create state-funded scholarships for students with disabilities. For example, in April 2024, Oklahoma passed Senate Bill 1624, establishing the Oklahoma Access and Achievement Program to provide scholarships for students with I/DD. Similarly, Arkansas enacted Senate Bill 58 in 2022, creating a \$2 million scholarship fund through the Department of Education's Division of Higher Education.

Bills proposed during the 89th Texas Legislature further demonstrate a commitment to increasing postsecondary education for individuals with autism and intellectual disabilities:

House Bill (HB) 2081 – Building Better Futures Program (Passed by the 89th Texas Legislature)

HB 2081 establishes the Building Better Futures Program, designed to support students with developmental disabilities (DD) in accessing inclusive postsecondary education and occupational training. Administered by the THECB, the program enables colleges and universities to offer academic, career, and independent living instruction in age-appropriate, inclusive settings. Key features include:

- Exemption from core curriculum and credit transfer rules, allowing institutions to tailor programs to student needs.
- Eligibility criteria for both institutions and students, prioritizing Texas residents.
- Funding flexibility, including legislative appropriations, grants, and donations.
- No requirement for prior THECB approval for new degree or certificate programs under this initiative.

⁴⁹ Wong, C., Odom, S. L., Hume, K. Cox, A. W., Fettig, A., Kucharczyk, S., ... Schultz, T. R. (2013). Evidence-based practices for children, youth, and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Autism Evidence-Based Practice Review Group. <https://autism.unt.edu/images/2014-ebp-report-npdc.pdf>

⁵⁰ Autism Focused Intervention Resources and Modules (AFIRM), University of North Carolina Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules/afirm/> Accessed August, 2025.

Senate Bill (SB) 769 – Report by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (Passed by the 89th Texas Legislature)

This bill seeks to improve data and reporting on enrollment and success in higher education for students with disabilities. The report must identify:

- The number and percentage of students with a disability who enroll in an institution of higher education.
- Barriers to enrollment in higher education for students with a disability.
- Policies of the institutions that promote enrollment and success in higher education for students with a disability.
- Services and accommodations for students with a disability that are provided for accessibility at the institutions.
- Efforts by the institutions to provide students with a disability sufficient and accurate information regarding the educational rights and protections for persons with a disability under state and federal law.
- Recommendations for legislative or other action.

The bill defines “student with a disability” more broadly as a student covered under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Under the bill terms, public higher education institutions would be required to provide, upon request, any information necessary for THECB to prepare the report. THECB would also be allowed to request information from private or independent higher education institutions. Those entities would not be required to respond.

Senate Bill (SB) 186 – Texas Students with Disabilities Scholarship Program (Not Passed, 89th Texas Legislature)

Although SB 186 did not pass, the bill proposed the Texas Students with Disabilities Scholarship Program, which would have provided financial aid to eligible students with disabilities attending public institutions of higher education. Highlights include:

- Scholarships are administered by the THECB.
- Awards are contingent on legislative appropriations and cannot begin before the 2024–2025 academic year.
- The program is intended to reduce financial barriers and promote access to higher education for students with disabilities

Recommendations for Action

1. **Improve systems in K–12 schools to better identify students with disabilities, especially those with developmental or learning differences.** Schools should improve early identification processes for students with developmental or learning differences, including autism. Early detection ensures students can access vital supports—such as special education services and behavioral interventions—when they need them most. To achieve this, schools should use screening tools at key educational stages and adopt a centralized, secure data system that allows authorized staff to track evaluations, services, and student progress as they move between schools and districts.
2. **The Texas Legislature should explore establishing clear reporting and data requirements for the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) to collect—and for institutions of higher education to report—data on the number of students with autism and/or intellectual disabilities enrolled in higher education programs to ensure consistent and accurate statewide data collection.**
 - a. THECB should seek consistent criteria and direction to capture enrollment of students in higher education programs full time, part time, and credit vs non-credit seeking.
 - b. The Texas Legislature and THECB should implement standardized definitions or uniform reporting to evaluate program effectiveness. Studies suggest that autistic students may persist and succeed academically at rates closer to their neurotypical peers when provided appropriate accommodation and supports, though challenges often emerge in credit accumulation and degree completion years later.
3. **Promote innovations and evidence-based programs for students in K-12 programs.** TEA's 2025 report on its Innovative Services for Students with Autism Grant⁵¹ outlines multiple barriers that need to be addressed to sustain and replicate innovative evidence-based practices in K-12 programs. Examples of solutions for overcoming barriers include:
 - Embedding best practices and parent training into district policies and training.
 - Improving recruitment and retention of specialized staff, particularly Board Certified Behavior Analysts and autism specialists.
 - Communicating consistently between central office special education staff, campus administrators, and campus-based staff to prevent uneven implementation.
 - Facilitating the development of student's self-advocacy skills.
 - Adapting purchased technology to individual student needs.
 - Developing robust monitoring systems to track student outcomes, teacher performance, and program effectiveness.

⁵¹ Texas Education Agency. (2025). *Final Report for 2022-2024 & 2023-2024: Innovative Services for Students with Autism Grant*. <https://tea.texas.gov/about-tea/government-relations-and-legal/government-relations/final-report-2022-24-innovative-services-autism.pdf>

4. **Enhance academic and career pathways for students with autism and IDD.** The Texas Legislature and educational agencies should ensure that students with autism and intellectual disabilities have access to academic and career focused courses that reflect their interests and long-term goals, including opportunities for advanced coursework, dual credit, and career and technical education. During the 18+ transition years, students should be provided with a range of programs that foster independent living skills, vocational training, and college readiness. These offerings should encompass accessible higher education programs, community college bridge initiatives, and supported employment training, ensuring that students are equipped for successful transitions into postsecondary education and the workforce.
5. **Build on evidence-based practices in postsecondary programs that promote successful student outcomes.** To improve outcomes for students with disabilities, education systems should build on proven, evidence-based practices that support academic, behavioral, and social development. Programs that promote peer support, mental health integration, remote learning adaptations, certified coaching, and progress monitoring tools provide a scalable model for delivering support. These evidence-based program components should be shared more broadly to guide families and students through transition and postsecondary planning.
6. **Expand peer-to-peer and self-advocacy programs in postsecondary settings.** Colleges and universities should expand peer-to-peer and self-advocacy programs to better support students. While some students may not have an official diagnosis of an intellectual or developmental disability—including autism—they may still face significant challenges completing coursework or meeting graduation requirements. Establishing early identification and support mechanisms is therefore essential. Programs that improve access to resources, foster self-advocacy, and empower students to articulate and address their unique educational needs are critical to student success. [The Mansfield Hall program](#) (described in the Successful Support Models section of this report) provides one example of how such supports can be implemented. By prioritizing these approaches, institutions can create stronger pathways to success, increasing opportunities and completion rates for all students who could benefit from additional resources.
7. **Establish dedicated, state-funded scholarships to support students with autism and IDD.** These scholarships should not require recipients to be enrolled full time in a degree-granting program, addressing the current limitations in both the number and dollar amount of existing awards. This approach aligns with recommendations from the 2024 THECB "Report on Access to Higher Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities" and could significantly expand access to higher education for this student population.

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

Jacquie Benestante

Executive Director
Autism Society of Texas
Austin

Kristi Watson Gibson

High School Teacher of IDD students
Groesbeck ISD
Groesbeck

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, Harlandale ISD
San Antonio

Leticia LaSota

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

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,
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
Austin

Lauryn Woolfolk

Student Representative
University of North Texas
Denton

Nina Zuna, PhD

University Centers for Excellence in Developmental
Disabilities Representative
University of Texas at Austin
Austin

Appendix B: Definitions

Autism – In this discussion, authors use a mixture of terminology when referring to autism and persons identified as autistic. A common form of description has been called “person-first,” in which the person (e.g., child) appears before the condition (e.g., autism), such as “child with autism.” Many autistic self-advocates and advocacy groups now prefer an identify-first form, such as “autistic child.” In addition, autistic advocates have spoken about the desirability of using the term “autism” rather than “autism spectrum disorder.”

Career and Technical Colleges – Higher education institutions that provide continuing education focused on practical skills and knowledge for specific careers or trades.

Completion – The number of students who finish their designated programs.

Enrollment – The number of students in a program; integrated postsecondary education programs often have significantly smaller enrollment rates than colleges to ensure proper supports are being added for each individual student.

Graduation – The number of students who not only complete programs but also complete a set of graduation requirements.

Inclusive Postsecondary Education Programs (IPSE) – Programs for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities that help expand students’ knowledge about employment, areas of interest, and living skills. IPSE programs can be both two- and four-year programs and may include on-campus living options.

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) – A group of conditions that begin during the developmental period—typically before the age of 18—and are characterized by significant limitations in both intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior. Intellectual disability involves challenges with reasoning, learning, and problem-solving. Developmental disabilities are a broader category that may include physical, learning, language, or behavioral impairments. The term IDD is commonly used when both intellectual and other developmental disabilities are present.

K-12 – All of the grades that make up primary and secondary education: Kindergarten through 12th grade.

Persistence – Refers to being the number of people enrolled in one year who return for the next year.

Public University – Refers to colleges that institution of higher education that are primarily funded by local or state governments.

Transition – Used to describe the change in environments going from secondary education to higher education.

Appendix C: Developmental Disabilities Definition

The federal definition of developmental disability is established under the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 (DD Act), codified at 42 U.S. Code, Title 42, Section 15001 et seq. and implemented through regulations such as Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 1325.

According to the DD Act, a developmental disability is defined as:

"A severe, chronic disability of an individual that:

1. Is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of both;
2. Is manifested before the individual attains age 22;
3. Is likely to continue indefinitely
4. Results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activity: Self-care, Receptive and expressive language, Learning, Mobility, Self-direction, Capacity for independent living, Economic self-sufficiency; and
5. Reflects the individual's need for a combination and sequence of special, interdisciplinary, or generic services, individualized supports, or other forms of assistance that are of lifelong or extended duration and are individually planned and coordinated."

This definition also includes individuals from birth to age 9 who have a substantial developmental delay or specific congenital or acquired condition, if the individual, without services and supports, has a high probability of meeting the above criteria later in life.^{52,53}

⁵² [Requirements Applicable to the Developmental Disabilities Program, 45 CFR Part 1325](#)

⁵³ https://acl.gov/sites/default/files/about-acl/2016-12/dd_act_2000.pdf

Appendix D: Autism Program Survey

Texas Higher Education Autism Program Survey

The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board and their Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Persons with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is currently researching top Autism colleges and university programs across the USA. Your program has been identified as one of the best! If available, please include Autism only data. If not, please note that students with Autism are included in your Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities data in your responses below.

* Required

Texas Higher Education Autism Program Survey

1. Name of Institution *

2. Name of Autism Program (skip if not applicable)

3. Program Contact Information (Name, Email, and Website Link, if available) *

4. Please indicate the type of your institution: *

- ☐ Public 2yr/Community College
- ☐ Public 4yr/University
- ☐ Private 2yr/Community College
- ☐ Private 4yr/University

5. How many students identified with ASD are enrolled in your program/institution?

Note: Please specify program or institutional enrollment, and indicate whether the data includes only students with Autism or if Autism is included with IDD.

6. What is the persistence rate for students with ASD at your institution?

Note: Please specify program or institutional persistence rate, and indicate whether the data includes only students with Autism or if Autism is included with IDD.

7. What would you attribute persistence to? (ex: summer bridge programs, academic coaches, special housing)

8. Graduation rate for students with ASD? (Feel free to include a % and # of students)

Note: Please specify program or institutional graduation rate, and indicate whether the data includes only students with Autism or if Autism is included with IDD.

9. What outcomes currently showcase the success of your Autism program? (ex: certificates earned, GPAs, degrees, job placement, continuation into graduate programs)

10. If available, please share any additional success data for students with ASD? (ex: type of certificates/degrees earned, avg. GPAs, job placements, continuation into graduate programs, time to completion, financial support)

Please check the services below that apply to your program.

11. Programs & Support List (Select all that apply.)

- ☐ **Autism-Specific Programs:** Tailored programs with academic support, social skills training, smaller classes, and transition assistance.
- ☐ **Autism-Specific Financial Aid:** Scholarships, grants, and workforce support for autistic students.
- ☐ **Transition Support:** Programs for college entry and post-grad life (e.g., bridge programs, orientation, life skills, and career planning).
- ☐ **Academic Services:** Disability services, counseling, and accommodation processes for exams and assignments.
- ☐ **Academic Supports:** Tutoring, study skills workshops, executive function coaching, learning strategies, and assistive tech.
- ☐ **Flexible Academic Policies:** Alternative assessment methods, extended deadlines, clear syllabi, and adaptable learning policies.
- ☐ **Teaching & Staff Training:** Ongoing training in autism awareness, inclusive practices, communication strategies, and universal design.
- ☐ **Technology Integration:** Use of assistive tech in learning and support, with training for students.

- ☐ **Regular Assessment:** Ongoing evaluation of services, incorporating student and family feedback for continuous improvement.
- ☐ **Social/Peer Support:** Peer mentoring, social skills training, structured activities, and interest-based groups.
- ☐ **Inclusive Extracurriculars:** Clubs and sports that welcome and include autistic students.
- ☐ **Sensory-Friendly Spaces:** Quiet, clearly marked areas for relaxation, studying, and socializing.
- ☐ **Housing Options:** Availability of autism-friendly housing, including single rooms, quiet floors, or specialized communities.
- ☐ **Community Awareness:** Campus-wide autism awareness through events, speakers, and inclusive programming to promote acceptance.
- ☐ **Career Development:** Tailored career support, internships, employer partnerships, and neurodiversity-focused job prep.
- ☐ **Other**

12. Please provide any additional details regarding your program, services, and support you provide to students with ASD.
(e.g. program costs, additional services, program model/framework)

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Microsoft. The data you submit will be sent to the form owner.

Texas Higher Education

COORDINATING BOARD

This document is available on the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board website:
<https://highered.texas.gov>.

For more information, contact:

Waylon Metoyer
Student Success Division
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
P.O. Box 12788
Austin, TX 78711
PHONE 512-427-6216
waylon.metoyer@highered.texas.gov