

College Enrollment and Completion among Texas high School Graduates with a Disability

This study responds to concerns raised by Texas higher education stakeholders about the limited information available on college outcomes among students with a disability. While most colleges provide services and accommodations for students with self-identified disabilities, many students do not report their disabilities, and colleges have limited means to gauge the prevalence of students with disabilities because of student privacy protections. This creates uncertainties for higher education leaders about how well their colleges serve students with different types of disability, as designated in high school, and those students' progress toward attaining college credentials and degrees.

The Regional Educational Laboratory Southwest examined college enrollment and completion among four cohorts of Texas public high school graduates (2006/07 through 2009/10) by disability status in high school, student demographic characteristics, and primary disability type. The study provides new foundational evidence on college enrollment and completion for students with a disability. The findings can help secondary and postsecondary educators and administrators identify where students with different types of disability and different demographic characteristics might need additional support in the pipeline between high school graduation and college completion.

Key findings

The findings indicate leaks in the higher education pipeline for students with a disability, both in the transition from high school to college and in the period after initial enrollment in college.

- **College enrollment was substantially lower for high school graduates with a disability than for graduates without a disability, due primarily to differences in enrollment at four-year colleges.** About 31 percent of high school graduates with a disability enrolled in a Texas college within two years of graduation. Of those, 90 percent initially enrolled in a public two-year college. Enrollment in two-year colleges was 7 percentage points lower for high school graduates with a disability than for graduates without a disability, and enrollment in four-year colleges was 26 percentage points lower, a substantial difference (at least 0.25 standard deviation units).
- **Degree attainment was substantially lower for high school graduates with a disability than for graduates without a disability.** About 16 percent of high school graduates with a disability attained a baccalaureate degree within seven years of initial enrollment compared with 51 percent of graduates without a disability. Among high school graduates who initially enrolled in a two-year college, the percentage who attained a credential or degree or transferred to a four-year college within four years of enrollment was substantially lower for graduates with a disability (17 percent) than for graduates without a disability (34 percent).
- **College enrollment and degree attainment among high school graduates with a disability varied by eligibility for the national school lunch program, race/ethnicity, and disability type.** College enrollment and degree attainment were substantially lower for high school graduates with a disability who had been eligible for the national school lunch program in grade 12 than for graduates with a disability who had not been eligible. The percentages of Black and Hispanic high school graduates with a disability who attained a baccalaureate degree were substantially lower than the percentage of White graduates with a disability who did. College enrollment and degree attainment were generally higher for high school graduates with auditory, speech, visual, orthopedic, and other health impairments than for graduates with other types of disability.