

# Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center

## Annual Report • October 1, 2024

INSTITUTE on COMMUNITY INTEGRATION | UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

MINNESOTA  
**INCLUSIVE HIGHER EDUCATION**  
CONSORTIUM



Alec Willard with his college poster at the first MIHEC conference on September 25, 2024.

The Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center (the Center) is part of the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota Twin Cities. The Center offers advisory services and technical assistance to all Minnesota higher education institutions that are planning or currently offering inclusive higher education initiatives. Additionally, the Center monitors federal and state legislation related to inclusive higher education and communicates any changes in the law that may impact these initiatives.

The Center also disseminates information to students with intellectual and developmental

disabilities (IDD), their families, and local education agencies about available inclusive higher education options, training, professional development, and mentoring opportunities.

The primary goal of the Center is to expand access to high-quality, inclusive postsecondary education for individuals with IDD. We focus on achieving outcomes such as attending college, earning meaningful postsecondary credentials, securing integrated competitive employment, earning higher wages, and supporting individuals in leading self-determined lives.

This report is legislatively mandated.

### Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Technical Assistance Center

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### MN Statutory Requirements (2024 Legislative Session)

Amended and moved to Section 135A.161, clarifying the Center's responsibilities.

Subd. 7. Reporting. The Director must evaluate the development and implementation of Minnesota's inclusive higher education initiatives that are receiving grants under this section. An annual report on the progress in expanding inclusive higher education options for students with intellectual disabilities must be submitted by October 1 to the commissioner and chairs and the ranking minority members of legislative committees overseeing higher education policy and finance. The report must include statutory and budget recommendations.



Jose is in college. He is a conservationist and plans to study plants and vegetables. [Read Jose's profile on the MIHEC website.](#)



Addie is a freshman at North Dakota State University, which assigns a peer mentor to students with disabilities to help with classes and take notes. She will take entrepreneurship classes because she wants to open her own restaurant and become a cook. [Read Addie's profile on the MIHEC website.](#)

## Harnessing Momentum

Minnesota currently has three colleges and universities—Bethel University, Central Lakes College, and Ridgewater College—with the Comprehensive and Transition Postsecondary (CTP) designation. This designation allows accepted students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) to apply for and be considered for federal and state financial aid. Together, these institutions have the capacity to enroll 90 students with IDD.

Each year, approximately 1,000 Minnesota students with IDD graduate from twelfth grade. This means an estimated 5,000 college-age (18-22) Minnesotans with IDD could pursue postsecondary education. Additionally, many older Minnesotans with IDD are also seeking educational opportunities. However, limited options within the state create barriers, leading some to pursue higher education out of state.

## Building Capacity: Inclusive Higher Education Competitive Grants

In 2024, the first competitive grants for inclusive higher education were offered. The Request for Proposals (RFP) was released in June, and three colleges applied for funding. The review committee recommended Lake Superior College (LSC) for the first grant award, announced in September. LSC will use this funding for a planning year and aims to enroll students with IDD by fall 2025, thereby expanding postsecondary opportunities in northeastern Minnesota.

The second round of RFPs is anticipated in spring 2025. These grants provide initial funding for institutions to establish or expand inclusive higher education initiatives. Following feedback from the first RFP process, the Center is collaborating with the Minnesota Office of Higher Education to improve the application process. The Center will offer webinars and open office hours to support faculty and staff in preparation for the next round.

The Center recognizes that many Minnesota colleges face enrollment and budgeting challenges and remains mindful of these realities as they expand inclusive higher education opportunities for students with IDD.



Katie Parry and Mary Hauff

## Empowering Futures

The Center has made significant strides in establishing the infrastructure for inclusive higher education in Minnesota over the past year. Key accomplishments include:

- **Hiring Staff and Establishing an Advisory Committee:** The advisory committee has held four meetings to review Minnesota's inclusive higher education standards, the competitive grant RFP, and outreach plans.
- **Resource Development:**
  - » Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Standards: These standards, informed by research, align with national accreditation standards for inclusive higher education.
  - » Defining Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD): This resource helps bridge terminology differences across K-12 education, state and federal laws, and social services, ensuring clearer communication about who qualifies for inclusive higher education.

The Center has also embraced a broad definition of IDD, aligning with the Higher Education Opportunity Act definition to ensure that all students with IDD have the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education.

## Outreach and Awareness

The Center focused its outreach efforts on two key stakeholder groups: (1) students, families, educators, and (2) university faculty and staff. Given the low awareness of inclusive higher education opportunities, the Center works diligently to raise visibility and inform stakeholders that college is indeed an option for students with IDD.

- **Communication Tools and Resources:** From July 2023 to June 2024, the Center's website saw 4,755 visits and 9,381 page views. The Momentum newsletter was launched in September 2023, and the mailing list grew from 544 to 865 contacts over the past year.
- **Professional Development and Training:** The Center conducted twelve webinars, with six open to the public and six specifically for Minnesota faculty and staff. Over 160 faculty and staff from 42 Minnesota institutions participated in these sessions, a 14% increase from the previous year.
- **Community Presentations:** The Center presented at eight community events, including engagements with Lake Superior College, the Minnesota Governor's Developmental Disability Council, and Pacer Center. Staff also presented at the Minnesota Association of Financial Aid Administrators (MAFAA) conference, a Midwest Inclusive Postsecondary Alliance webinar, and to international delegations from India and Ghana.

In September 2024, the Center hosted its first annual conference, with over 100 attendees. The conference focused on student-centered inclusive higher education and Minnesota's growing momentum in this field. Prospective students, families, educators, faculty and staff members, state agencies, and disability advocacy organizations attended the conference.



Brynn started using American Sign Language when she was a young child as a communication tool and kept going. [Read Brynn's profile on the MIHEC website.](#)



Kellie is attending the University of Delaware. He looks forward to the classes, clubs, and career preparation. [Read Kellie's profile on the MIHEC website.](#)

## Technical Assistance

The Center provided technical assistance to families, faculty, and staff seeking information on inclusive higher education, application processes, and financial aid. Additionally, the Center supported the Minnesota Council on Disability during the legislative session, providing expertise on the Minnesota Rise Act, which was passed in 2024.

## Minnesota Statutory Recommendations

The Center suggests the following legislative updates for consideration in the 2025 session:

- **120B.125 & 120B.307:** Strengthen statutes to ensure that students with disabilities have access to initiatives connecting K-12 schools, higher education institutions, and workforce partnerships.
- **268A:** Amend Vocational Rehabilitation statutes to allow direct funding to colleges for employment-related services for students with IDD.
- **135A.012 Subd. 5:** Include disability-type disaggregation in reporting on higher education attainment goals.

- **136A.096:** Report on FAFSA filing rates for students with disabilities by disability type, ensuring inclusive data.
- **124D.09:** Review Postsecondary Enrollment Options to eliminate barriers for students with disabilities.

## Federal Legislation, Actions, and Court Rulings

The Center has been monitoring several key federal actions with implications for inclusive postsecondary education:

- The *Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability – National Technical Assistance & Dissemination (PPSID-NTAD)* grant extension was approved by the U.S. Department of Education.
- The *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Reauthorization*, passed by the U.S. House in 2024, has direct implications for inclusive higher education.
- The U.S. Department of Education's *RSA* guidance requires VR agencies to fund out-of-state postsecondary programs when in-state options are unavailable.

- The *Transformation to Competitive Integrated Employment Act (TCIEA)* legislation may be included in the WIOA reauthorization, phasing out subminimum wage payments over five years and aligning with inclusive higher education goals.
- The *Supreme Court ruling in Loper Bright Enterprises v. Raimondo* could affect federal regulations ensuring the rights of people with disabilities, including education-related issues.

Expanding Minnesota's inclusive higher education options aligns with the state's higher education attainment goals, emphasizing the need for all Minnesotans to access postsecondary education and pursue family-sustaining careers.

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The University of Minnesota stands on Miní Sóta Makhóčhe, the rightful homelands of the Dakhóta Oyáte. We recognize the U.S. did not uphold its end of these land treaties. It is the current and continued displacement of the Dakhóta Oyáte that allows the University to remain today.

Ongoing oppression and discrimination in the United States has led to significant trauma for many people of color, immigrants, people with disabilities, and other oppressed persons. At ICI, we affirm our commitment to address systemic racism, ableism and all other inequalities and forms of oppression to ensure inclusive communities.