



**Statewide Advocates Influencing Leadership (SAIL) is a community-driven coalition and training project focused on fostering leadership and advocacy among people with disabilities across Pennsylvania. Our group is designed by and for individuals with disabilities, ensuring that the support we provide is both relevant and impactful.**

**Created in partnership with PA REV UP**



# **Post-Secondary Education for Pennsylvanians with Disabilities**

**According to the National Center for Education Statistics, 24% of undergraduate college students reported having a disability in the 2019-2020 academic year. However, only about 35% of these students completed a 4-year degree within six years. This highlights a significant challenge, as post-secondary education and training are often not sufficiently emphasized by IEP teams when planning for the futures of students with disabilities.**

## **Lack of Awareness of Student Loan Programs, Payment Programs, Loan Forgiveness Programs, Etc.**

- Many education professionals are unaware of local postsecondary options for students with disabilities and finding disability-related information on college or trade school websites can be challenging.
- Additionally, financial aid can be difficult to obtain, even with services from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation.

## **Unrecognized Certificates**

- Inclusive higher education programs may not offer credentials valued by employers.

## **Inadequate Disability Awareness And Accommodations In Higher Edu**

- College professors typically lack required training in education or disability support.
- IEP accommodations do not always align with college supports.

## **Barriers For Workers Who Need New Training**

- The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is charged with supporting individuals with the most significant disabilities in obtaining employment. This often includes paying for post high school degrees or training programs. However, there continues to be a lack of support for individuals who were initially supported by OVR but are no longer able to work in their original field due to disability progression.



# Post-Secondary Education for Pennsylvanians with Disabilities Recommendations

## **Increase education about student loan programs, payment programs, loan forgiveness programs, etc.**

- Although there are a lot of financial support programs for students with disabilities, it can be very difficult to locate this information which often prevents students from pursuing higher education.
- Funding and loan forgiveness opportunities should be shared widely among high schools, colleges, vocational programs, and centers for independent living.

## **Meaningful certifications**

- Incentivize the development and provision of training that leads to meaningful and useful certifications in all higher education training.

## **Support the changing needs and abilities of individuals to stay employed**

- Support additional educational degrees or remediation for individuals whose disabilities had progressed and are no longer able to work in the field they were trained for
- OVR should be encouraged to do periodic outreach to previous consumers to determine whether these individuals are still working within the area that they had received training in and supporting them if additional training is necessary.

## **Incentivize expansion of disability awareness and services on campus**

- Colleges should work with professors to offer work study programs for students to provide care for students with disabilities
- Professors should be encouraged to utilize universal design in their classrooms, ultimately minimizing the need for additional accommodations for students with disabilities.
- Mandate disability awareness and access training for all state college professors and staff.

## **Hope for the Future**

- There is a boom in Inclusive Higher Education Programs, with 18 such programs currently available in Pennsylvania according to Think College. Specialized certificate programs offer students access to high-skill training, leading to high-skill job opportunities.

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