

Introduction to AHEAD White Paper

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On behalf of the AHEAD Board of Directors, I am pleased to offer our full endorsement of *Advancing Inclusive Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disability*. This paper represents an important contribution to the work of ensuring that students with intellectual disability are welcomed, supported, and encouraged in going to college and in reaping the lifelong benefits of college education.

AHEAD's commitment to disability equity in postsecondary education invites us to reckon with educational systems that have long excluded intellectually disabled people, and to develop more flexible and inclusive approaches to learning. The research and recommendations introduced in this paper confirm what we already know: communities are strengthened when everyone has the opportunity to participate and to grow.

What becomes evident across research findings is this: when students with intellectual disability have access to inclusive academic programs, peer connections, advising, and meaningful employment experiences, they thrive. Outcomes are consistent and compelling: students complete programs at higher rates, gain workforce skills, participate in campus life, and maintain meaningful employment at rates far exceeding national averages. These successes are not exceptions; they are a manifestation of what is possible when institutions believe in people and invest in inclusive design.

As disability resource professionals, we play a key role in expanding opportunity and fueling achievement. Our respect for disabled people and their experiences, our deep and varied expertise, our relationships, and our leadership on matters of educational equity are vital to students' success and institutional transformation.

As President of AHEAD, I encourage you to dive into the paper and begin imagining not *whether* but *how* to engage in the worthwhile work of building a more inclusive future together. We thank the paper's authors for leading the way by creating a resource that will be useful to AHEAD's diverse community of professionals.