

THE STATE OF

Learning Disabilities

Navigating the Transition to Adulthood

A Report by the National Center for Learning Disabilities





Citation

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A Note on Terminology

It's crucial to differentiate between the various terms used across education, medicine, and psychology disciplines to describe neurobiological differences that impact learning.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) refers to these differences as "specific learning disabilities," whereas the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5-Text Revision uses the term "specific learning disorders." Meanwhile, terms such as "neurodivergent," "learning difference," "learning issue," "learning divergent," and "thinking differently" have gained traction within the learning-disabled community.

While these terms are intended to reduce the stigma of disability labels, they can be unclear and may prevent individuals from legal protection and accessing the appropriate services they need.

To provide clarity, this report will use the term "learning disability," which indicates a legally protected status under IDEA (for ages 3–21) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, ensuring that individuals have access to the necessary services and support.



Introduction

Ensuring a sense of well-being for all is integral to building a productive workforce and a thriving society. When individuals experience positive physical, social, emotional, financial, and occupational well-being, there are numerous ripple effects that influence society more broadly. People with higher ratings on factors of well-being tend to be more economically engaged and productive,^{1,2,3} have fewer health-related issues,⁴ stronger community and civic engagement,⁵ higher levels of educational attainment,^{6,7} and are less likely to interact with the criminal justice system.⁸ When society invests in promoting well-being, the overall quality of life of individuals improves. This leads to healthier, engaged, and resilient communities as well as a more productive workforce, ultimately fostering a thriving society.

Approximately 1 in 4 adults are estimated to have some type of disability.⁹ For those in the school system, learning disabilities (LD) are the most common disability category. Nearly 5% of all U.S. public school students have LD as their primary disability,¹⁰ and many more may be unidentified.¹¹ It is critical to understand factors related to how individuals with

LD experience well-being, and identify bright spots and challenges on their journey to a thriving life. As individuals with LD transition from K-12 school settings to postsecondary education or the workforce, it is imperative to provide them with the supports they need to thrive, regardless of their decision to disclose their LD or not.

WHAT IS A LEARNING DISABILITY?

A learning disability (LD), also known as a specific learning disability, is a brain-based disorder affecting an individual's academic ability. These disabilities affect individuals differently but most often affect reading, writing, and mathematical skills (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia).

The transition to adulthood is a pivotal time for all individuals, bringing opportunities and challenges that can shape their well-being and potential for living a thriving life. These opportunities and challenges are even more pronounced for young adults with LD. In school, students with LD can achieve at the same level as their non-disabled peers if given

1 Oswald et al., (2015)
2 Witters & Agrawal, (2015)
3 World Health Organization, (2024)
4 Diener & Chan, (2011)
5 Fenn et al., (2024)
6 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, (2019)
7 Reynolds et al., (2018)
8 Prins, S. J. (2014).
9 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2024)
10 NCES, (2024b)
11 Colvin et al.,(2022)



appropriate instruction and supports.^{12,13,14,15,16} However, students and young adults with LD often do not receive the supports they deserve, creating barriers that may hinder their development of literacy and numeracy skills. Low literacy and numeracy skills are associated with an increased likelihood of being involved in the juvenile justice system,¹⁷ experiencing negative socioemotional impacts,^{18,19} facing unemployment or underemployment,²⁰ and other challenging outcomes. Setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic present further barriers in the transition to adulthood. Across the country, declines in mental health and well-being often occurred as a result of disruptions to education and employment.^{21,22} Students with disabilities faced disruptions to special education supports and services, including transition planning, potentially affecting their successful transition to employment or postsecondary settings after high school.²³

We must understand the evolving challenges and successes faced by young adults with LD in order to create policies and systems-level change that fosters an equitable, inclusive, innovative, and productive society for all. However, there is a pressing need for updated national data and research on

the experiences and outcomes of young adults with LD as they transition into early adulthood and enter the workforce.²⁴ Current federal and nationally representative datasets do not capture information on the lived experiences of young adults with LD. Data exist for individuals with disabilities (e.g., U.S. Census), but use a broad definition of disability,²⁵ report data for a wide range of ages²⁶ (i.e., 18–64 years), or are not disaggregated by disability type.^{27,28,29,30} Still other data exist for individuals with LD but are outdated^{31,32} (i.e., National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 [NLTS-2]; NLTS-2012).

To address this critical knowledge gap, NCLD and WestEd developed and administered a survey to a national sample of young adults (ages 18–24) with LD, focusing on whether aspects of self and family, school climate, and society relate to the following outcomes for young adults with LD:

- High school graduation
- Postsecondary enrollment
- Employment status
- Dimensions of well-being

¹² Berkeley et al., (2010)

¹³ Dennis et al., (2016)

¹⁴ Fuchs et al., (2017)

¹⁵ Gersten et al., (2008)

¹⁶ Gillespie et al., (2014)

¹⁷ Mallett et al., (2022)

¹⁸ Nelson & Harwood, (2011)

¹⁹ Maag & Reid (2006)

²⁰ Office of Disability Employment Policy, (2023)

²¹ Smallwood et al., (2021)

²² Tasso et al., (2021)

²³ Stelitano et al., (2022)

²⁴ Wood et al., (2017)

²⁵ United States Census Bureau, (2021)

²⁶ United States Census Bureau, (2023)

²⁷ Ingels & Dalton, (2013).

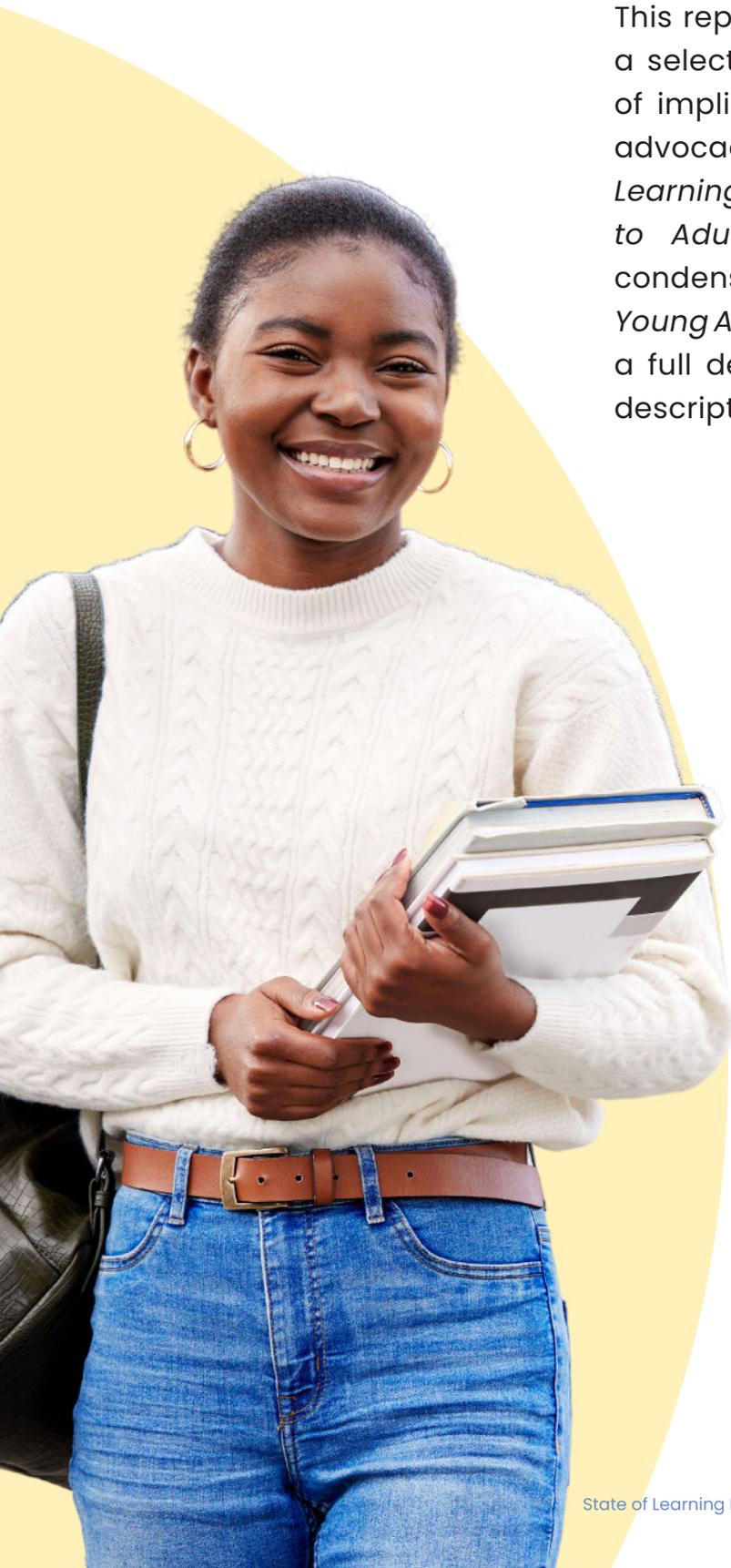
²⁸ National Center for Education Statistics, (2024c)

²⁹ Cameron et al., (2023)

³⁰ Ingels & Dalton, (2013)

³¹ Institute of Education Sciences, (2012)

³² Institute of Education Sciences, (n.d.)



This report provides an overview of the study, a selection of key findings, and a discussion of implications for current and future policy, advocacy, and research initiatives. The *State of Learning Disabilities: Navigating the Transition to Adulthood, Snapshot* provides a more condensed version of survey findings, and the *Young Adult Survey: Technical Report* provides a full description of survey design, methods, descriptive data results, and data analyses.

Setting the Stage

This section defines a central outcome of interest for this study—well-being—and examines its relationship with related outcomes such as education and employment. It highlights what is known about these outcomes for young adults with LD while identifying gaps in knowledge that warrant further investigation.

Well-Being

Well-being is a broad concept encompassing various aspects of a person's life, including physical, mental, emotional, and social health. Some frameworks expand this definition to include financial, occupational, spiritual, intellectual, and environmental wellness,³³ while others include elements such as agency, self-esteem, belonging, and self-actualization.³⁴ In many fields, terms like "quality of life," "life satisfaction," and "wellness" are used interchangeably with well-being. These terms sometimes focus on measurable aspects of life or subjective experiences felt by the individual. For example, the World Health Organization uses "quality of life" instead of "well-being" to discuss how well someone is doing by looking at things like physical health, mental health, social connections, and the environment around them.³⁵

Overall, well-being reflects how well a person can manage daily tasks, maintain healthy relationships, feel a sense of purpose, and handle stress. Even though different models of well-being highlight different areas, these dimensions of well-being are all connected (see Figure 1). Ignoring any part can lower someone's overall quality of life, whether they have a disability or not.

In this report, well-being refers to an overall sense of thriving and agency in an individual's physical, emotional, social, financial, and occupational areas³⁶ of life that is sustainable and culminates in self-esteem, life satisfaction, and excitement for their future. Well-being carries different meanings for different individuals and is informed by someone's culture, community, and life experience. Within this definition of well-being, NCLD acknowledges and respects that every individual may desire, possess, and have access to opportunities for well-being at various levels and that individuals with LD have the agency to define what well-being means for them.

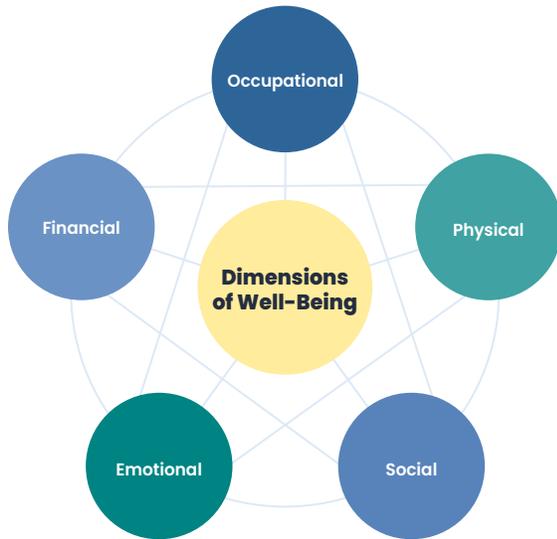
³³ Stoewen, (2017)

³⁴ Maslow, (1943)

³⁵ World Health Organization, (2012)

³⁶ Nikunen & Korvajärvi, (2022)

FIGURE 1. DIMENSIONS OF WELL-BEING³⁷



Research suggests individuals with disabilities experience unique challenges across multiple dimensions of well-being, including physical,³⁸ social,³⁹ emotional,^{40,41,42} financial,⁴³ and occupational⁴⁴ dimensions (see Figure 1), which may serve as barriers to thriving for individuals with LD. These challenges may be more pronounced during the transition into young adulthood. The years between high school graduation and the late twenties, known as “emerging adulthood,” is a period of profound and foundational development.⁴⁵ During this period, individuals explore aspects of their identity and

further develop their executive functioning, both of which are imperative for successfully navigating the responsibilities of adulthood.^{46,47} Societies and communities often expect young adults to become increasingly independent and self-sufficient during this time, while access to resources and family and social supports varies widely.

Education and Employment as Pathways to Well-Being

There are many pathways available to young adults as they transition from high school to adulthood, such as enrolling in postsecondary education or entering the workforce. While no single pathway guarantees a thriving life, experiences during and after high school can substantially influence young adults’ well-being, as well as their decisions and opportunities in adulthood. Below, we describe the connections between key outcomes young adults often experience in their transition to adulthood, including high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and employment. For each outcome we provide a brief overview of what is known about the experiences of individuals with LD.

³⁷ University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, (n.d.)
³⁸ Krahn et al., (2015)
³⁹ Newman et al., (2009)
⁴⁰ Zarei et al., (2021)
⁴¹ Berg et al., (2019)
⁴² Ullman et al., (2022)
⁴³ Kim et al., (2024)
⁴⁴ Teborg et al., (2024)
⁴⁵ Lindsay et al., (2018a)
⁴⁶ Ibid.
⁴⁷ Arnett, (2014)

High School Graduation

Having a high school diploma is linked to higher lifetime earnings,^{48,49} a lower probability of incarceration and arrest, better health outcomes, and greater life satisfaction.⁵⁰ However, students with disabilities consistently graduate from high school at lower rates than their peers without disabilities—a gap that has persisted over time. During the 2021–22 school year, 82% of students with disabilities graduated high school compared to 87% of students without disabilities.⁵¹

Postsecondary Enrollment

Nearly 75% of the fastest-growing occupations require more than a high school diploma,^{52,53} making postsecondary education critical for securing jobs in fast-growing, high-paying industries. Studies consistently show a positive correlation between education levels and improved health⁵⁴ outcomes, as well as increased financial earnings.⁵⁵ Postsecondary education can also be a critical developmental milestone in the journey toward independence and well-being for young adults as they build essential life skills,⁵⁶ self-esteem,⁵⁷ friendships,⁵⁸

and independence.⁵⁹ However, these opportunities are often less accessible to young adults with LD. For example, young adults with LD are less likely to enroll in four-year institutions compared to their peers without disabilities.⁶⁰ Data from the NLTS-2 indicates that four years after high school, 24% of students with disabilities were enrolled in a postsecondary institution, compared to 41% of students without disabilities.⁶¹

Employment

Competitive integrated employment ensures equitable access to job opportunities for individuals with disabilities, including equal pay for equal work and equitable advancement opportunities.⁶² Competitive integrated employment positively impacts well-being. Individuals who work full-time are less likely to live in poverty than those who work part-time, have inequitable pay or opportunity, or be unemployed.⁶³ Along with the financial and fringe benefits associated with employment (e.g., health insurance, retirement), employment can increase life satisfaction and positive health outcomes.^{64 65} Additionally, employment can provide social status, structure to

⁴⁸ Day & Newburger, (2002)

⁴⁹ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2023)

⁵⁰ Ou, S.R. (2008)

⁵¹ NCES, (2024a)

⁵² U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2024)

⁵³ Ressa & Andrews, (2022)

⁵⁴ Hahn & Truman, (2015)

⁵⁵ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2020)

⁵⁶ Rivera et al., (2019)

⁵⁷ Baum et al., (2010)

⁵⁸ O'Donnell et al., (2018)

⁵⁹ Shogren et al., (2017)

⁶⁰ NCES, (2011)

⁶¹ Newman et al., (2009)

⁶² Office of Disability Employment Policy, (n.d.)

⁶³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2020)

⁶⁴ Gedikli et al., (2023)

⁶⁵ Bellet et al., (2019)

the day, socialization, and a sense of purpose.⁶⁶ Nationally, employment rates are reported by disability status but not disaggregated by disability type, making it difficult to identify the status of employment specifically for adults with LD. Nonetheless, adults with disabilities are employed at far lower rates than non-disabled adults. According to the Department of Labor, 38% of adults with disabilities were employed compared to 75% of adults without disabilities.⁶⁷ The NLTS-2, which examined outcomes for young adults with disabilities up to four years after high school, found that young adults with disabilities were more likely

to work part-time and in lower-wage jobs than young adults without disabilities.⁶⁸ Ensuring that young adults with LD receive the supports they need during key educational milestones and their transition to adulthood is essential for shaping our nation's growth and building a positive future for generations to come. However, the persistent disparities in high school graduation, postsecondary enrollment, and employment outcomes for young adults with LD highlight the barriers they face. Gaining a better understanding of the factors that influence their success in the transition to adulthood is critical.



⁶⁶ Fryer, (1992)

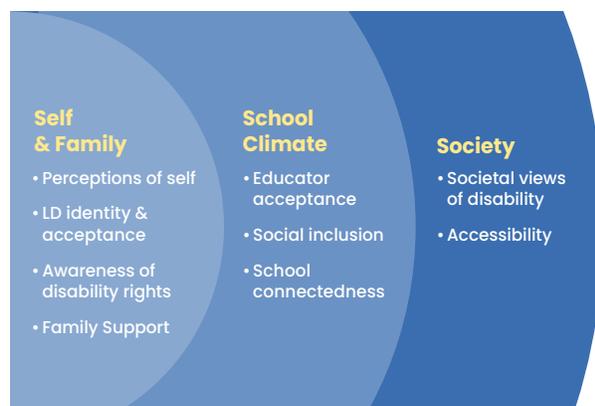
⁶⁷ U.S. Department of Labor, Disability Employment Statistics, (2023)

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Overview of Survey Topics

This section overviews the factors theorized to influence young adults' well-being during their transition to adulthood. These factors formed the foundation of the survey and addressed elements of self and family, school climate, and society (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2. FACTORS INFLUENCING EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, AND WELL-BEING⁶⁹



Self and Family

Perceptions of Self

Perceptions of self, or self-concept refers to the traits and attributes that individuals use to describe themselves. This may include physical appearance, academic abilities, social skills, behaviors, and how a person views themselves in

relation to others⁷⁰ (e.g., social self-concept). A strong, positive self-concept is associated with higher self-esteem, better mental health, higher academic achievement, and higher self-efficacy.^{71,72} When individuals with LD report positive perceptions of themselves, they are more likely to be academically engaged and experience success in postsecondary and employment.⁷³

LD Identity and Acceptance

Self-concept may also include acceptance of disability and disability identity. An individual's identity is an understanding and expression of one's self and independence, but also the social and community connections they identify and engage with.⁷⁴ Disability identity refers to how individuals with disabilities integrate their experiences with disability, including how they relate to or integrate into the disability community, into their sense of self.⁷⁵ Positive disability identity is associated with positive psychosocial outcomes,⁷⁶ such as life satisfaction and increased self-advocacy. When individuals with disabilities engage and utilize self-advocacy skills and practices, research shows that they have better life outcomes, including areas of life such as employment and postsecondary experiences.⁷⁷

⁶⁹ Bronfenbrenner, (1979)
⁷⁰ Bear et al., (2002)
⁷¹ Heiman & Olenik-Shemesh, (2020)
⁷² Zheng et al., (2012)
⁷³ Ibid.
⁷⁴ Dunn et al., (2013)
⁷⁵ Ibid.
⁷⁶ Zapata & Worrell, (2024)
⁷⁷ Roberts et al., (2016)

Awareness of Disability Rights

Awareness and understanding of disability rights is essential for young adults with LD to advocate for equitable access to education and employment opportunities. Recognizing when an environment or interaction infringes upon an individual's legal rights and seeking the appropriate legal or non-legal recourse are crucial for ensuring positive educational, professional, and well-being outcomes. Evidence suggests that individuals with disabilities experience better long-term outcomes, such as improved self-efficacy and self-esteem,⁷⁸ when they are taught self-advocacy skills during their K-12 education. Advocacy efforts and activism require deep knowledge of disability laws and protections, along with allies willing to collaborate with their community to advance the rights of all individuals with disabilities.

Family Support

Family support is pivotal for emotional, social, and cognitive development. By providing emotional stability and support (including early mental health intervention, if needed), families can bolster resilience.⁷⁹ Family involvement also offers the infrastructure for social development by planning and facilitating opportunities for children and adoles-

cents to engage with their peers both formally (e.g., through clubs, teams, and programs) and informally. Supporting academic development can also improve individuals' cognitive growth. Parents' and caregivers' engagement in the educational process boosts motivation and perseverance in children and adolescents,^{80,81} especially when facing school-related challenges. During the transition to adulthood, family support is vital for young adults with LD, serving as a safe environment for developing confidence with daily living skills.

High School Climate

School climate is recognized as a complex construct with multiple dimensions,⁸² encapsulating the overall social environment of a school.⁸³ This climate influences how students, teachers, families, and the wider community interact with one another.^{84,85} Broadly, when students experience a sense of belonging, value, safety, and connection to their school (i.e., when there is a positive school climate), they tend to be more academically engaged,⁸⁶ have improved academic performance⁸⁷ and higher rates of high school graduation.⁸⁸ We focus on three aspects of school climate: (a) educator acceptance, (b) social inclusion, and (c) school connectedness.

⁷⁸ Tilley et al., (2020)

⁷⁹ Kennison & Spooner, (2023)

⁸⁰ Fan & Chen, (2001)

⁸¹ Gonzalez-DeHass et al., (2005)

⁸² Wang et al., (2020)

⁸³ Konishi et al., (2017)

⁸⁴ Berkowitz et al., (2016)

⁸⁵ Durlak et al., (2011)

⁸⁶ Noble et al., (2021)

⁸⁷ Daily et al., (2020)

⁸⁸ Buckman et al., (2021)

Educator Acceptance

Educator acceptance encompasses teacher and student relationships,⁸⁹ where teachers provide both academic⁹⁰ and emotional support.⁹¹ Students who feel supported and motivated by their teachers tend to show higher levels of engagement, better self-esteem, and greater academic success.^{92,93,94} Quality teacher-student relationships are particularly important for students with LD as high-quality relationships with teachers⁹⁵ and mentors⁹⁶ in school is strongly associated with high school completion.⁹⁷

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion reflects the quality of relationships among peers, teachers, and the broader school setting. Typically, negative interactions with peers and teachers are examined through bullying — deliberate and hostile behavior that persists over time⁹⁸ — and often stems from a lack of openness to or acceptance of diversity^{99,100} (e.g., race/ethnicity, disability). Students with LD are more likely to experience social isolation, have fewer friends, and

feel disliked at school.¹⁰¹ Critically, poor interactions (including teasing and bullying) are negatively correlated with graduating high school.^{102,103,104}

School Connectedness

School connectedness often refers to: (a) students' feeling of belonging, (b) students' commitment to school (e.g., whether they view school as valuable for their future), and (c) students' commitment to academic work.^{105,106} Students who feel a strong link to their school often have higher grades, consistent attendance, and enhanced self-esteem and psychological wellness.¹⁰⁷ Further, for students with disabilities, a strong sense of school belonging and connectedness is linked to higher graduation rates.¹⁰⁸

Society

Societal Views of Disability

How individuals with disabilities feel society views them, especially during emerging adulthood, can dramatically affect their well-being. Fear of discrimination and other negative interactions fosters anxiety and hypervigilance, potentially contributing

- ⁸⁹ Reschly & Christenson, (2012)
- ⁹⁰ Foreman-Murray et al., (2022)
- ⁹¹ Quin, D. (2017)
- ⁹² Daily et al., (2020)
- ⁹³ Foreman-Murray et al., (2022)
- ⁹⁴ Jia et al., (2009)
- ⁹⁵ Zablocki & Krezmien, (2013)
- ⁹⁶ Ahrens et al., (2010)
- ⁹⁷ Doren et al., (2014)
- ⁹⁸ Smith et al., (2002)
- ⁹⁹ Konishi et al., (2017)
- ¹⁰⁰ Thapa et al., (2013)
- ¹⁰¹ Bruefach & Reynolds, (2022)
- ¹⁰² Cornell et al., (2013)
- ¹⁰³ Doren et al., (2014)
- ¹⁰⁴ Foreman-Murray et al., (2022)
- ¹⁰⁵ Smerdon, (2002)
- ¹⁰⁶ Wehlage et al., (1989)
- ¹⁰⁷ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, (2009)
- ¹⁰⁸ Reschly & Christenson, (2006)

to chronic mental health difficulties such as anxiety and depression.¹⁰⁹ The belief that society has a negative mindset about disability can contribute to lower levels of self-efficacy and self-esteem and lead to a psychological phenomenon known as stereotype threat – a fear-based psychological response in which individuals from minority or marginalized groups experience intense anxiety and fear of reinforcing or "proving" negative stereotypes, stigmas, or discriminatory beliefs about their community.¹¹⁰ This can dramatically affect performance within the education system and workforce, potentially impacting an individual's professional and educational development during and after emerging adulthood.

Accessibility

Accessibility, or when products, services, and facilities are designed or modified to meet the needs of people with disabilities,¹¹¹ can also affect dimensions of well-being. Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)¹¹² and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,¹¹³ postsecondary institutions and workplaces are legally required to provide appropriate supports via reasonable accommodations to individuals that have elected to disclose their disabilities. This disclosure process often involves an individual with a disability providing official documentation of

disability to their postsecondary institution or workplace, then engaging in conversations with human resources or a disability resource office to determine reasonable accommodations.¹¹⁴ Notably, formal services and supports are only available if an individual has elected to disclose their disability to their postsecondary institution or workplace, knows the process for disclosing a disability, has the appropriate documentation, and is willing to advocate for their accommodations.^{115,116}

When young adults and individuals with LD receive the supports and accommodations they need, they are more likely to experience positive outcomes. For example, research suggests the use of postsecondary-based supports are associated with higher rates of program or degree completion,¹¹⁷ a finding that is particularly salient for postsecondary students with disabilities.¹¹⁸

Despite the positive effects of accessibility, there are often barriers to receiving adequate supports at the postsecondary level and in the workplace. Many individuals with disabilities do not disclose their disabilities, and only a subset receive accommodations in postsecondary education and the workforce.¹¹⁹ Even among those who do disclose, many do not receive the requested supports,¹²⁰ often due

¹⁰⁹ Haft et al., (2023)

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Center for Disease Control, (2020)

¹¹² U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. (n.d.)

¹¹³ U.S. Department of Labor, (n.d.)

¹¹⁴ U.S. Government Accountability Office, (2009)

¹¹⁵ USDOE, OCR, (2011)

¹¹⁶ U.S. Government Accountability Office, (2009)

¹¹⁷ Deacon et al., (2017)

¹¹⁸ Reinheimer & McKenzie, (2011)

¹¹⁹ Lindsay et al., (2018b)

¹²⁰ Newman et al., (2009)

to institutional barriers,¹²¹ such as complex or difficult disability disclosure processes or instructor resistance to implementing accommodations.^{122,123} Eliminating these barriers to disability disclosure and accessing accommodations is essential to helping young adults with LD thrive in postsecondary education and the workplace.

LD AND DISCRIMINATION

Despite federal protections, individuals with LD may experience discrimination and stigma in postsecondary institutions and the workplace. Young adults with LD may experience several obstacles on their path to competitive integrated employment, especially if an employer fails to correctly identify someone's strengths due to prejudice against disabilities. Individuals with LD can have healthy and fulfilling professional careers by leveraging their strengths and advocating for themselves.

The interconnected facets of individuals, schools, and society lay the foundation for well-being in early adulthood that can set young adults with LD up for success. Experiences in the K-12 environment—educator acceptance, social inclusion, and school connectedness—are hypothesized to have long-term positive effects on pathways to education and employment. Positive experiences in these areas also likely positively influence well-being. Experiences with negative societal perceptions of disability and inaccessibility may magnify challenges. However, family support, a positive sense of disability identity, self-advocacy, and awareness of disability rights may buffer against adverse experiences, helping to build resilience. The present study investigated how these factors affect young adults' experiences during emerging adulthood.



¹²¹ NCES, (2011)
¹²² Bettencourt et al., (2018)
¹²³ Friedensen et al., (2021)

Methods

Below is a brief description of the survey design and data analyses. Additional details, including the full survey, can be found in the *Young Adult Survey: Technical Report*.

Survey Design

NCLD and WestEd designed the *State of Learning Disabilities: Young Adult Survey* based on relevant literature and existing surveys and measures (e.g., NLTS-2, California Healthy Kids Study, QoL Scoping Study, WHO QoL). We examined existing literature on the factors known to influence the transition to adulthood for young adults, with LD as described in the previous section. We also engaged in ongoing conversations with NCLD’s Professional Advisory Board and their Young Adult Leadership Council to further refine the specific survey topics and factors to explore within the survey. We then drafted survey questions for each topic (see “Themes Addressed in the Young Adult Survey”), reviewed the survey for content and clarity, and incorporated proactive strategies to prevent bots from accessing the survey (e.g., CAPTCHAs).

To improve the clarity, content relevance, and effectiveness of the questions, the team conducted cognitive interviews with five young adults with LD. Cognitive interviews are a qualitative method used in survey development to ensure that survey questions are understood by respondents as

intended. The interviewer asked the participant to think aloud while taking the survey and asked structured questions before, during, and after survey completion. We analyzed the feedback using thematic analysis and modified the structure of the survey and the content of questions according to the feedback. We made syntax changes and semantic clarifications to aid in readability and promote comprehension. We also added additional instructions, moved question block descriptors to new pages, and broke question blocks down into smaller groups to reduce cognitive load. Additional changes were made to the survey content including adding questions regarding self-advocacy, mental health, disability pride, disability identity, and relationships. We used criteria for removing participants who did not meet the inclusion criteria or did not take the survey in good faith.

We administered the survey online from January 2024 to May 2024. Participants were primarily recruited through targeted social media. NCLD and WestEd—along with postsecondary institutions, Facebook groups, and national organizations that connect with young adults—posted about the Young Adult Survey on Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and LinkedIn or emailed the survey to their constituents. Young adults who met all inclusion criteria and completed the survey received a \$20.00 Amazon.com gift card.

THEMES ADDRESSED IN THE YOUNG ADULT SURVEY

- High School Climate: Educator Acceptance
- High School Climate: Social Inclusion
- High School Climate: School Connectedness and Supports
- Family Support
- Societal View of Disability
- LD Identity and Acceptance
- Awareness of Disability Rights
- Confidence with Daily Living Skills
- Supports in Postsecondary
- Supports in Employment
- Dimensions of Well-Being

Data Analyses

WestEd analyzed the survey data using quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative analyses allow researchers to analyze and examine patterns and statistical differences in numerical data, while qualitative analyses allow researchers to explore participants' lived experiences, perspectives, meaning-making, and motivations as they relate to a topic of interest. In this study, the qualitative data analysis provided depth and contextualization to the quantitative analyses.

Quantitative analyses included structural equation modeling (SEM), logistic regression, and generalized linear modeling. Qualitative analyses of participants' responses to open response survey questions included conventional content analysis and a deductive approach using *a priori* codes developed from the SEM.

SEM, a statistical method that allows researchers to examine how different topics are connected,¹²⁴ allowed us to investigate factors related to (a) graduating high school, (b) enrolling at a postsecondary institution, (c) being employed or seeking employment, and (d) dimensions of well-being. We used logistic regression and generalized linear modeling to examine subgroup differences.

We report on four SEMs (see *Table 1*). Note results do not imply causality.



124 Kline, (2016)

TABLE 1. SEM MODELS

OUTCOME(S)	FACTORS
Graduating high school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High school climate:
Enrolling at a postsecondary institution	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◊ Educator acceptance ◊ Social inclusion ◊ School connectedness
Being employed or seeking employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family support
Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confidence in daily living skills • Societal views of disability • LD identity and acceptance • Awareness of disability rights

Results

There were 22,000 survey responses. Approximately 7,600 individuals did not meet inclusion criteria and approximately 12,400 were removed due to evidence of fraudulent response (e.g., IP address outside of the United States, evidence of using an AI chatbot in open response questions). The final sample included 1,283 young adults that were then weighted by gender, race/ethnicity, and geographic region to approximate a nationally representative sample of young adults ages 18-24 with LD. We required all survey questions to be answered so there was no missing data.

This report presents a selection of key findings from the 2024 State of Learning Disabilities Young Adult Survey and discusses implications for policy, advocacy, and research initiatives. For a full description of survey design, methods, and results, see the *Young Adult Survey: Technical Report*.

We include quotes from young-adults responding to open-ended survey questions to help contextualize results. Quotes begin with “In their own words” and have been lightly edited for clarity, punctuation, and spelling. We honor and celebrate the strengths, successes, and resilience of young adults with LD, while acknowledging their challenges and negative experiences.

foundation for flourishing, connectedness, and vision for oneself.

- “Is there anything else about your experiences with your learning disability that you think we should know?”
 - ◊ Themes: disability identity, well-being, resilience, networks of supports, discrimination, accommodations and supports, feeling different, mental health, societal change, school experiences, personality, quality of life, thinking about one’s future, and employment.

Note: Respondents must have entered at least two characters to be included in analyses. For more detailed information regarding the qualitative analysis and comprehensive definitions of the thematic codes, see the *Young Adult Survey: Technical Report*.



Survey Findings

Most respondents were White (42%), male (60%), and living in urban areas (64%) (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

VARIABLE	WEIGHTED %
Gender ^a	
Female	40%
Male	60%
Race/ Ethnicity	
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	2%
Asian	2%
Black	19%
Hispanic	32%
White	42%
Other ^b	4%
Geographic Location	
Rural	9%
Suburban	26%
Urban	64%

Note: Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD (n = 1,283). Each variable or survey item may not total to 100% due to rounding. This table presents a selection of demographic data from the survey. See the *Young Adult Survey: Technical Report* for all demographic items.

^a Does not include other gender options provided in this survey item (i.e., nonbinary, transgender, other, prefer not to answer).

^b ‘Other’ represents the sum of those that selected Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Two or more, Other, and Prefer not to answer.

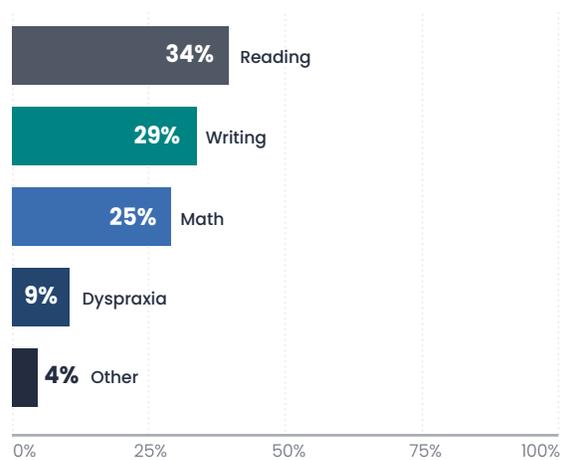
IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“It’s vital to recognize the diversity among individuals with learning disabilities: achievements, challenges faced, and the varying strategies employed to navigate daily tasks and long-term goals. Understanding and supporting these unique aspects can significantly enhance their experiences and successes.”

Characteristics of LD

The majority of respondents reported being formally identified with a LD (70%). Respondents were most commonly identified during elementary school (42%). Of those formally identified, reading (34%) was the most prevalent LD subtype, followed by writing (29%) and math (25%; see Figure 3); 26% reported LD in more than one area. In combination with LD, nearly half of respondents reported having an additional diagnosis (48%; see Figure 4).

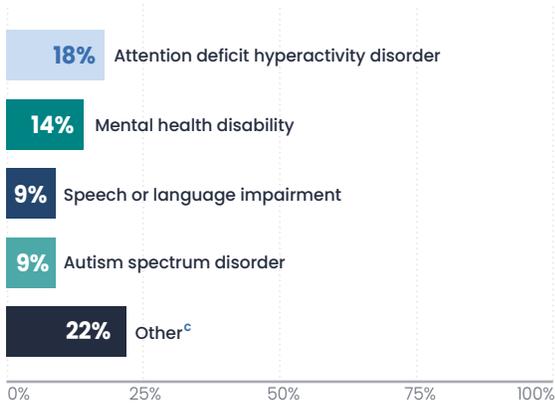
FIGURE 3. TYPES OF LD



Note: Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD (n = 1,283). This item was select-all-that-apply and may not total to 100%. Additionally, may not total to 100% due to rounding.

FIGURE 4. ADDITIONAL DIAGNOSES

48% reported having additional diagnoses:



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD (n = 1,283). This item was select-all-that-apply and may not total to 100%. Additionally, percentages may not total to 100% due to rounding.

^c ‘Other’ represents Hearing impairment, deafness, deaf-blindness, visual impairment, or blindness, Physical or orthopedic impairment (e.g., cerebral palsy), Traumatic brain injury, Gifted or twice exceptional, and Other medical condition (e.g., diabetes, asthma, sickle cell anemia).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“My experience is not universal, but it shows even though kids are young, they can figure out they are different and feel alienated and strange because of it. Being diagnosed gave a name for my experience, demystified it, and provided steps for how to improve my situation. The diagnosis and label of ‘different’ is not what made me feel different; I already felt that way. It is important to help kids understand what is happening and why they have different experiences from their classmates.”

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

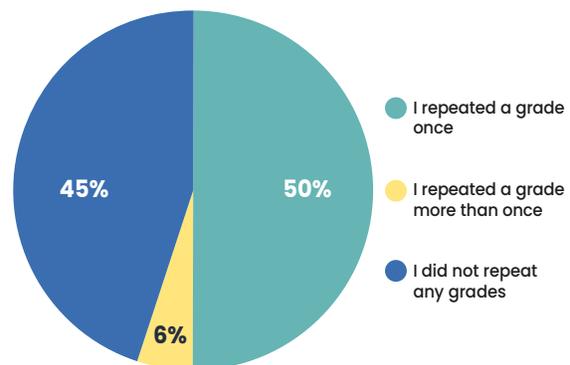
“Disabilities are often overlooked when a student is excelling, but that doesn’t mean they aren’t compensating for some struggle behind the scenes.”

Experiences in K-12

Special Education Services and Grade Retention

Almost two-thirds (63%) of respondents reported receiving special education services for an LD during their K-12 school experience, 34% reported not receiving services, and 4% were unsure. **Half (50%) reported repeating a grade once** (see Figure 5), most commonly in middle school.

FIGURE 5. GRADE RETENTION



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 (n = 1,283). Each variable or survey item may not total to 100% due to rounding.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

'It was very hard coping with a learning disability in high school, repeating grades, and scaling through high school, because my pace was slower than my mates. But with the support I got, I felt I was no less of a person and could do anything I set my mind to do, though it might take time.'

Experiences in High School

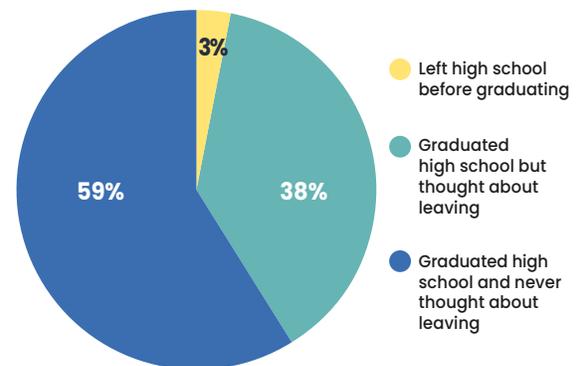
High School Attendance

Approximately 11% of respondents reported not attending high school. When asked why, 16% reported that school was too difficult, 16% needed money, 14% didn't like school, 13% did not feel supported by their high school, 10% had concerns with school safety, and 10% did not receive needed disability services.

High School Graduation

Of those who attended high school, **38% of respondents thought about leaving before graduating**, and 3% left before graduating (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION



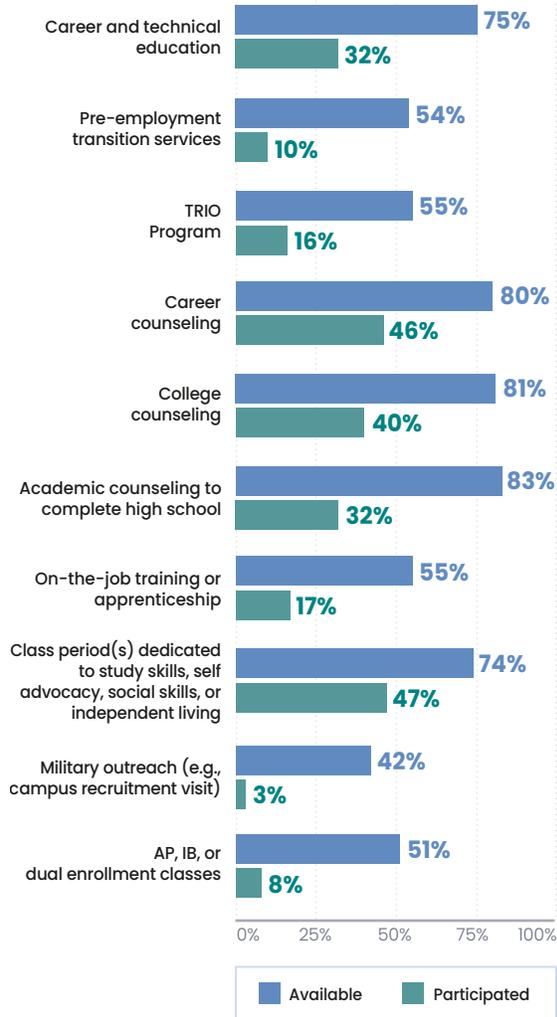
Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 who attended high school (n = 1,133). Each variable or survey item may not total to 100% due to rounding.

High School Services, Supports, and Programs

Figure 7 depicts the transition services, supports, and programs that respondents reported having access to in high school against the percentage of those that reported participating in them. While **many respondents reported having access to these programs, services, or supports at their high school, most reported that they did not participate in them** (see Figure 7).

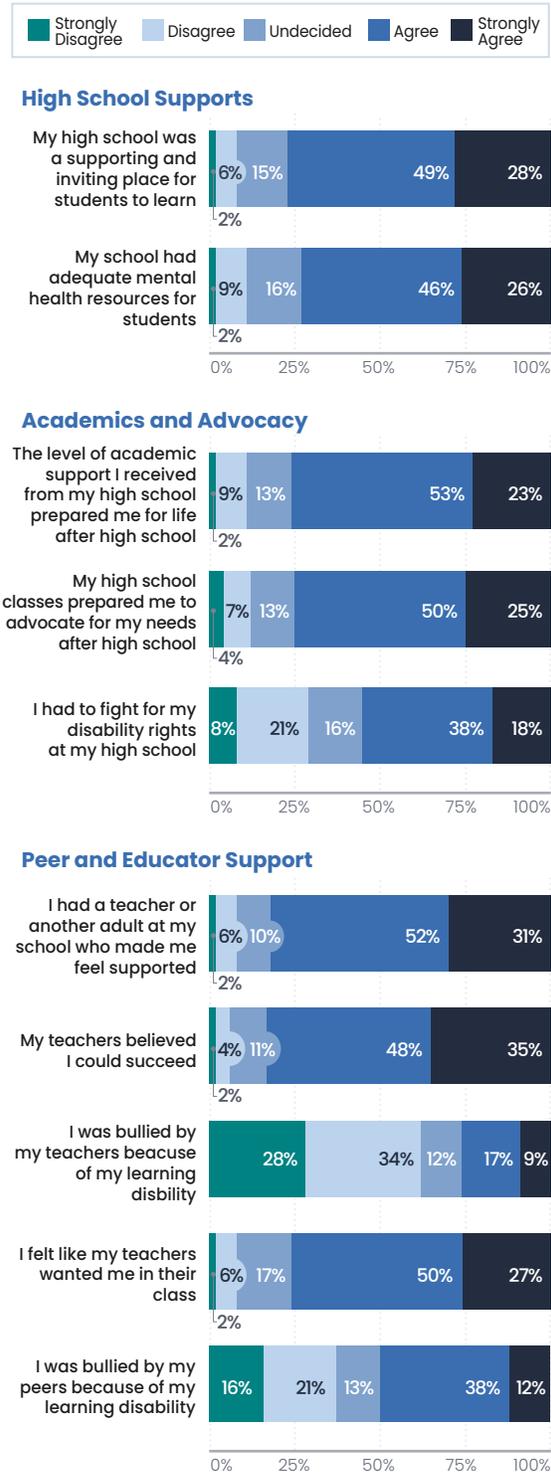


FIGURE 7. AVAILABILITY VS. PARTICIPATION IN HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION SUPPORTS



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD who went to high school (n = 1,133). These items were select-all-that-apply and may not total to 100%.

FIGURE 8. PERCEPTIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL EXPERIENCES



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD who went to high school (n = 1,133). Not all items may total to 100% due to rounding.

Perceptions of High School Climate

Most respondents who attended high school agreed or strongly agreed their high school was a supportive and inviting place to learn (77%), and that their high school had adequate mental health resources (72%). When asked about the adults at their high school, most agreed or strongly agreed they had a supportive adult at their school (83%), had a teacher who believed that they could succeed (83%), and felt like their teachers wanted them in their classes (76%).

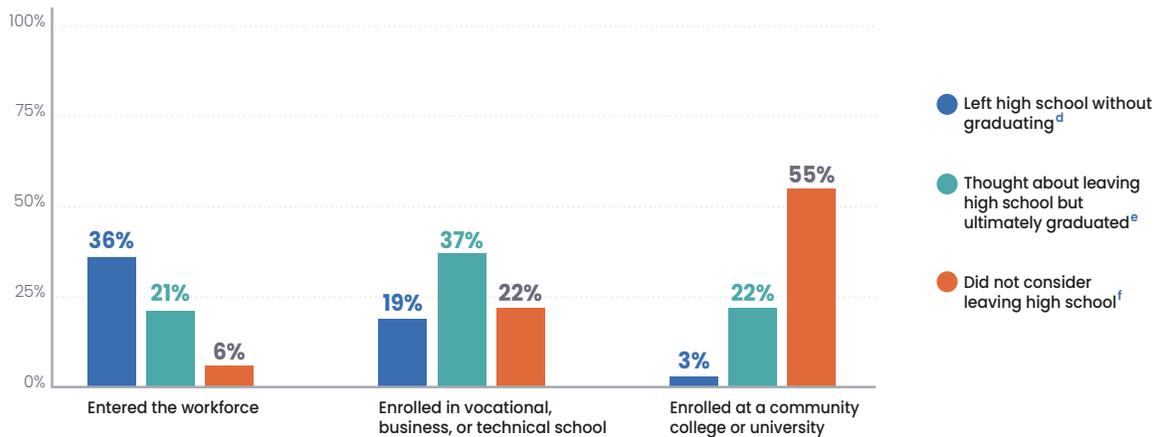
Despite positive perceptions of their high school climate, **50% of young adults agreed or strongly agreed that they were bullied by their peers**

because of their LD and 55% agreed or strongly agreed that they had to fight for their disability rights at their high school. Further, 26% of young adults who attended high school agreed or strongly agreed they were bullied by their teachers because of their LD (see Figure 8).

Path After High School

Respondents' paths after high school varied, depending on whether they attended high school but left before graduating, thought about leaving high school but ultimately graduated, or attended and graduated high school and did not think about leaving (see Figure 9).

FIGURE 9. POST-HIGH SCHOOL PATHWAYS BY GRADUATION STATUS



Note. This figure shows only a selection of survey response options. Additionally, percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

^dPercentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD who attended but left high school before graduating ($n = 31$).

^ePercentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD who thought about leaving high school but ultimately graduated ($n = 439$).

^fPercentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD who attended and did not consider leaving high school ($n = 663$).

Experiences in Postsecondary

Of the full sample, 45% of respondents reported they are currently enrolled in a postsecondary institution (e.g., college; university; graduate school; vocational, business, or technical school), 27% reported graduating from a postsecondary institution, 21% reported they have never attended a postsecondary institution, and 7% reported they attended a postsecondary institution but left without finishing.

Of those who attended a postsecondary program but left before graduating, the most common reasons they reported leaving before graduating were that school was too hard (39%), or they didn't like school (26%). **1 in 5 reported leaving their postsecondary program because they did not receive the disability services that they needed**, and 17% reported that they didn't feel supported by their instructors.

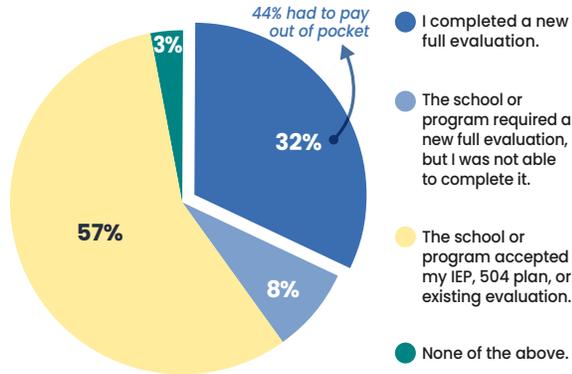
Of the young adult respondents currently enrolled in postsecondary institutions, 80% are full-time students. Half attend four-year colleges or universities, 37% attend vocational, business, or technical school, and 14% attend community college. Degree programs varied, with 53% reporting working towards a bachelor's degree, and 30% working towards a vocational certificate, trade certificate, or license (e.g., mechanics, cosmetology, culinary arts, medical assistant). College majors and courses of study also varied widely, with the most commonly reported majors being trade-related courses of study (14%; e.g., culinary arts, cosmetology, or to become an electrician), business (14%), or computers, mathematics, and statistics (11%).

Disability Disclosure to Postsecondary Institution

Of those currently enrolled in a postsecondary institution, 78% reported disclosing their LD to their school or program. Reasons for disclosure varied from wanting a safety net if they needed help (44%), to being encouraged by family member(s) to do so (37%), to feeling that their disability identity is a strong part of their self-identity (32%). About half of those who disclosed their disability found the disclosure process very easy or easy to navigate (54%), with 57% reporting that their school or program accepted their existing Individualized Education Program documentation, 504 plan, or evaluation as documentation of their disability (see Figure 10). Others reported having to complete a new full evaluation as part of their school's disability disclosure process (40%), of whom 8% reported being unable to complete the evaluation process. Of those who paid for a new, full evaluation, nearly half reported having to pay out of pocket (44%).

Of those who disclosed their disability to their postsecondary program, 23% did not request any accommodations from their instructors (see Figure 11). Of those who requested accommodations, about half reported receiving the supports they needed without feeling like a burden (see Figure 12). Accommodation requests occurred most often in math (39%) or science (36%) courses. About 85% reported that the accommodations they received were implemented well or very well.

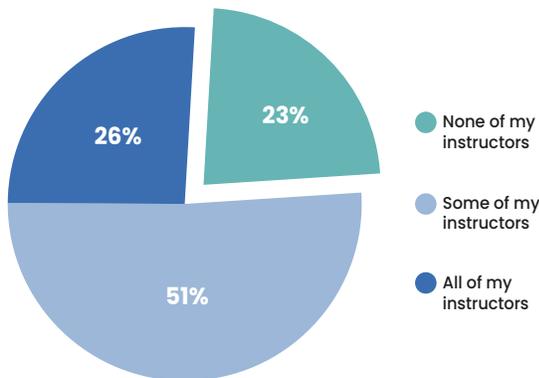
FIGURE 10. DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS FOR POSTSECONDARY PROGRAMS



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults who are currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution and who disclosed their LD to their current postsecondary institution (n = 445). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and may not total to 100%.

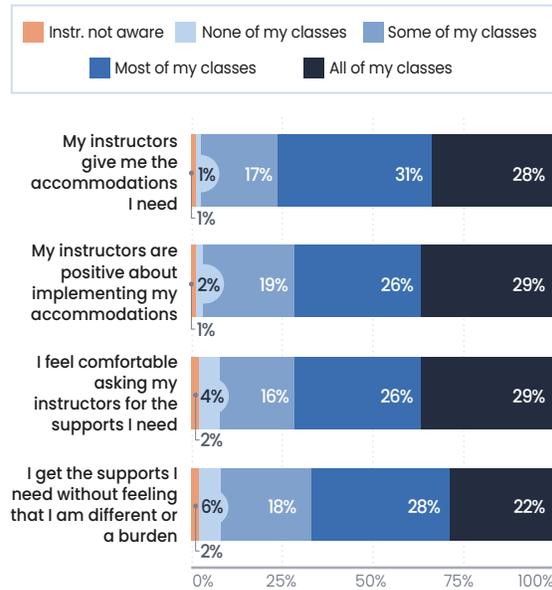
FIGURE 11. REQUESTS FOR POSTSECONDARY ACCOMMODATIONS

Have you requested accommodations from any of your instructors?



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults who are currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution and who disclosed their LD to their current postsecondary institution (n = 445). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and may not total to 100%.

FIGURE 12. IMPLEMENTATION OF POSTSECONDARY ACCOMMODATIONS



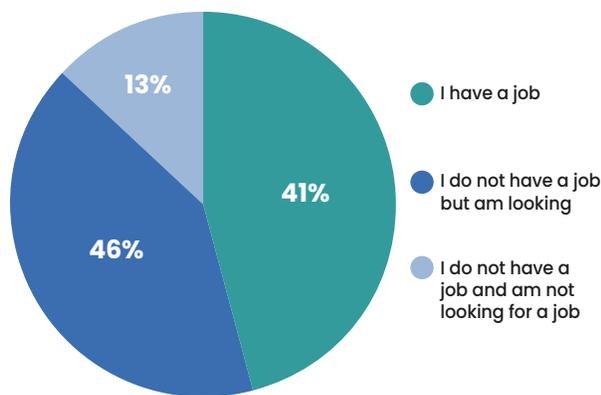
Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults who are currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution and who disclosed their LD to their current postsecondary institution (n = 445). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and may not total to 100%.



Experiences with Employment

Respondents who were not currently enrolled in a postsecondary institution and instead received employment-related questions. Of this group, 41% were currently employed, 46% do not have a job and are currently looking, and 13% do not have a job and are not looking for a job (see Figure 13).

FIGURE 13. EMPLOYMENT STATUS



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults who are not currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution (n = 713). Not all items may total to 100% due to rounding.

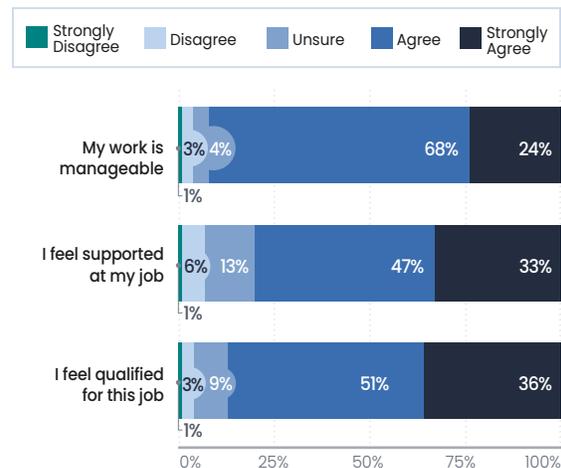
Current Unemployment

Of the 59% reporting unemployment (comprised of 41% who are looking for a job plus 13% who are not looking), **22% reported that disability discrimination was their primary reason for unemployment**, and 44% had been looking for work for two to six months.

Current Employment

Of those currently employed, the majority reported working in salaried positions (64%) and about half worked at jobs that aligned with their future goals (52%). Job titles and positions varied widely, with the most commonly reported fields being food preparation and serving (13%), sales (11%), personal care and service (11%), and management (10%). When asked about their workplace experiences, a large majority agreed or strongly agreed that their work was manageable (92%) and feeling qualified for their job (87%), with a smaller majority feeling supported at their job (80%; see Figure 14).

FIGURE 14. WORKPLACE EXPERIENCES

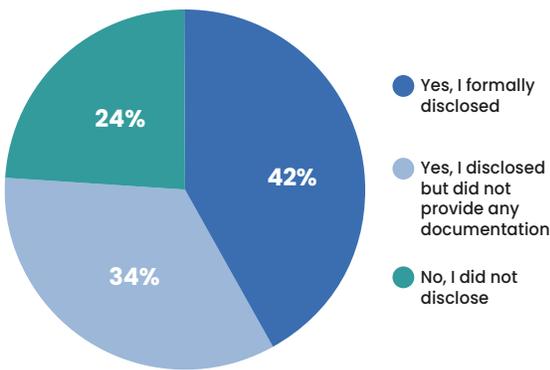


Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults who are not currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution and are currently employed (n = 292). Not all items may total to 100% due to rounding.

Disability Disclosure to Employer

Over three-quarters of respondents disclosed their LD to their employer (76%). Of those who disclosed their LD, nearly half disclosed but did not provide formal documentation (see Figure 15).

FIGURE 15. DISABILITY DISCLOSURE IN THE WORKPLACE



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults who are not currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution and are currently employed (n = 292). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Of those who formally disclosed their LD, most used a formal evaluation from a licensed practitioner to disclose their LD (45%), followed by doctor's note (32%). When asked about accommodations, 40% of those that formally disclosed reported receiving accommodations in the workplace and 83% found these accommodations to be very useful. Of those who disclosed their LD but did not receive accommodations, 25% did not believe they needed accommodations, 18% reported not asking for accommodations due to possible discrimination and 12% reported feeling accommodations may burden their colleagues (see Figure 16).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

"I have advocated for accommodations at work but been denied. I have a really great job overall and understand my rights but am afraid to ask for more because of the fear of being fired. I think this is common in the disability community- knowing how to advocate for yourself but being unable to do so because of the potential consequences."

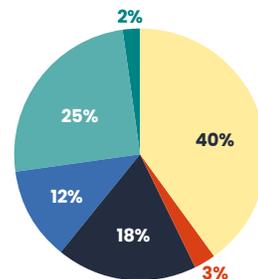
"My learning disability did have a certain negative impact on my work and life at some point, but it didn't stop me from pursuing a good life."



FIGURE 16. REQUESTING AND RECEIVING ACCOMMODATIONS AT WORK

Have you received any formal or informal accommodations for you LD?

- Yes, I receive formal or informal accommodations
- No, I asked but was denied all accommodations
- No, I didn't ask for accommodations due to possible discrimination
- No, I didn't ask for accommodations because I thought it would burden the people I work with
- No, I don't think I need accommodations
- No, I didn't know I could receive accommodations

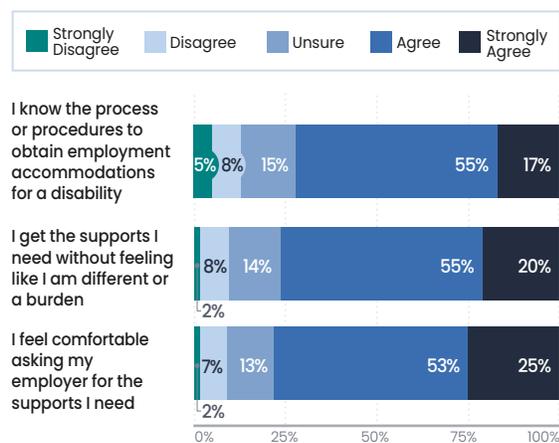


Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults who are not currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution and are currently employed (n = 292). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and may not total to 100%.

Experiences with Workplace Supports and Accommodations

Most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they know the process for obtaining employment accommodations for disabilities (72%), that they get the supports they need without feeling like a burden (75%), and that they feel comfortable asking their employers for the supports they need (78%). Nearly 1 in 4 were not sure or disagreed that they knew the process of obtaining employment accommodations and that they could get the supports they needed without feeling like a burden (see Figure 17). Notably, of all the young adults who reported receiving formal or informal accommodations in the workplace, all (100%) agreed or strongly agreed that their employer gives them the accommodations they need.

FIGURE 17. EXPERIENCES WITH WORKPLACE SUPPORTS AND ACCOMMODATIONS



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults who are not currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution and are currently employed ($n = 292$). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and may not total to 100%.



IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

"I have never looked at my learning differences in a negative way. I have always stood up for myself and took a stand for others when needed. My learning differences don't define me, they make me stronger."

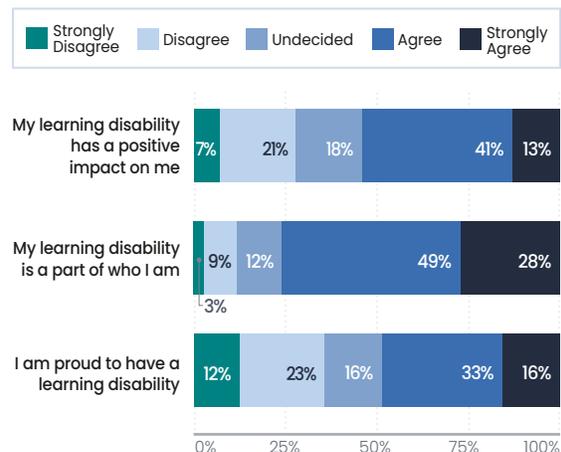
Life Today

Self

LD Identity and Supports

A majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that their LD is a part of who they are (76%). Young adults were divided regarding having a positive LD identity. Approximately 54% of young adults strongly agreed or agreed that their LD has a positive impact on them, and 49% strongly agreed or agreed that they were proud to have a learning disability (see Figure 18).

FIGURE 18. LD IDENTITY



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD ($n = 1,283$). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

"Well, I think it's important to understand that learning disabilities are not always visible or obvious. Just because I don't 'look' like I have a learning disability doesn't mean I don't have one. It can be really frustrating when people make assumptions about my abilities based on how I look or talk. I also think it's important to know that having a learning disability doesn't mean I'm not intelligent or capable. It just means I have a different way of learning and processing information."

"Despite my learning disability, I am exceptional at creative thinking and problem-solving."

Mental Health

When asked about their mental health, 25% reported they have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder, where the most commonly self-reported diagnoses included anxiety (16%) and depression (15%). Further, **44% reported that their LD had a negative impact on their mental health.**

When asked about their mental health over the past year, 38% reported a loss of interest in people or activities they used to enjoy, and 33% reported feeling sad or hopeless for long periods of time. Approximately 30% reported using drugs or alcohol at least once a week to cope with mental health challenges.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

"It's essential to recognize the emotional impact of living with a learning disability. There have been moments of frustration, self-doubt, and even anxiety about how others perceive my abilities."

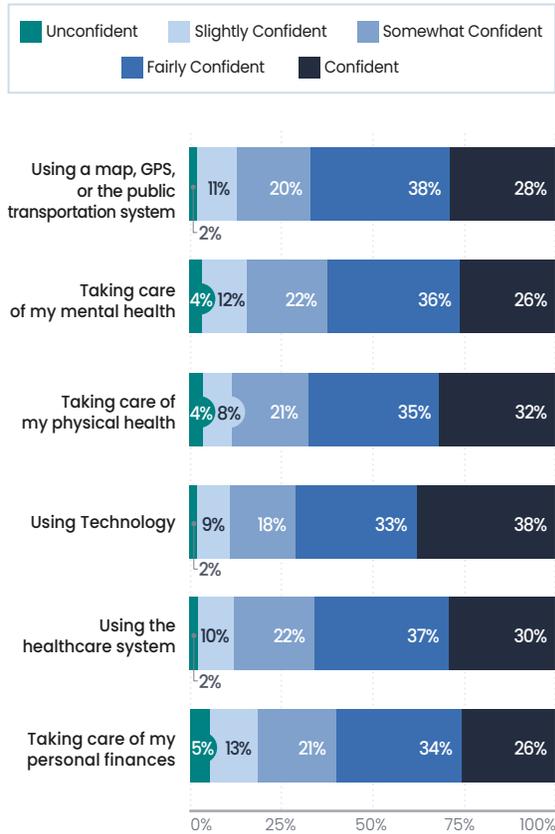
"I am very intelligent and drive[n] despite my learning disabilities, but it is still hard to feel good about myself because I struggle in school."

Adaptive and Daily Living Skills

Most respondents were confident or fairly confident in their ability to complete everyday tasks. However, they reported relatively less confidence with taking care of their personal finances and taking care of their mental health (see Figure 19).



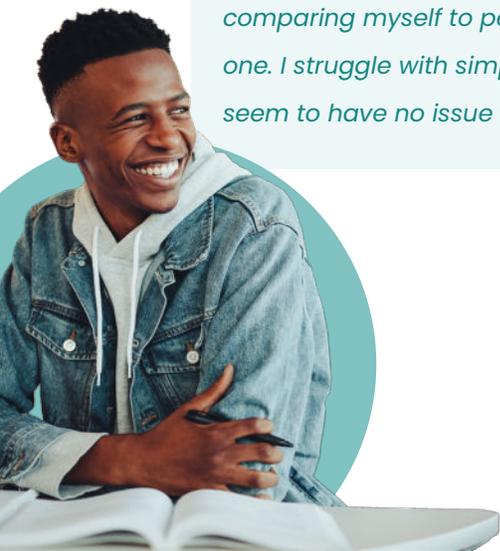
FIGURE 19. CONFIDENCE IN COMPLETING DAILY ACTIVITIES



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD (n = 1,283). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“Having a learning disability, I am constantly comparing myself to people who don’t have one. I struggle with simple tasks that others seem to have no issue with.”

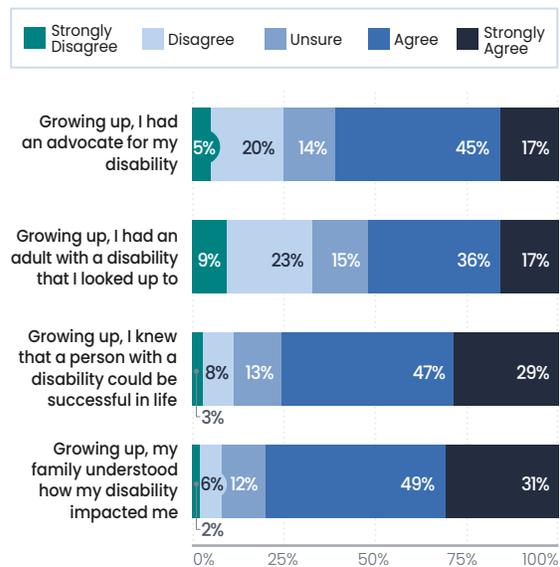


Peers, Family, and Relationships

Relationships and Family

A majority of young adults agreed or strongly agreed that when growing up they knew that a person with a disability could be successful in life (76%) and that they had an advocate for their disability (62%). Just over half agreed or strongly agreed that they had an adult with a disability that they looked up to (53%). Further, most agreed or strongly agreed their family currently understands them as a person (80%), currently understands how their disability impacts them today (82%), and understood the impacts of their LD when they were growing up (80%; see Figure 20).

FIGURE 20. EXPERIENCES GROWING UP



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD (n = 1,283). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“My life was so frustrating at first [because] of the obstacles I faced, but I have been able to get myself together through resilience and determination. My family and peers have been my backbone, they gave me a platform to navigate the world on my own terms and through that I have learnt to embrace my unique abilities.”

Peers and Partners

Many respondents agreed or strongly agreed they felt comfortable telling their friends or partners about their LD (65%), connected to people in their age group (70%), connected to their peers with (76%) and without (72%) disabilities, and that their friends understood how their disability impacts them (70%). Most respondents (65%) reported being single and 28% reported that they are currently dating. A majority (96%) did not have children.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“Telling friends about my learning disability helps me a lot. I get the support I need without feeling like it’s a burden.”

Society

Financial Stability and Housing

A little over half of respondents reported being able to afford their cell phone bill (56%), internet (58%), and groceries (53%) without public or private help, compared to 29% that can afford housing and 11% that can afford car insurance without assistance. When asked about public and private aid, 19% re-

ported they have used Medicaid, SNAP, or EBT benefits since turning 18 years old, followed by federal or state disability aid (19%) and financial aid from a religious or community organization (17%). When asked about their current housing situation, most reported living with their family (46%), followed by living with a roommate (22%) or by themselves (21%). Additionally, **14% reported having experienced homelessness.**

Perceptions of How Society Views Disability

Regarding perceptions of how society views disability, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed that disability is a natural part of life (76%) and that it has a huge impact on a person’s life (81%). Several reported negative feelings about society’s perceptions of and responses to disability, where **young adults with LD agreed or strongly agreed that:**

- **people without disabilities ignore people with disabilities (57%),**
- **people become impatient with people with disabilities (68%),**
- **society fails to accommodate people with disabilities (57%), and**
- **people with disabilities are discriminated against (68%).**

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“People with learning disabilities are part of the community and should be as valuable as people without disabilities.”

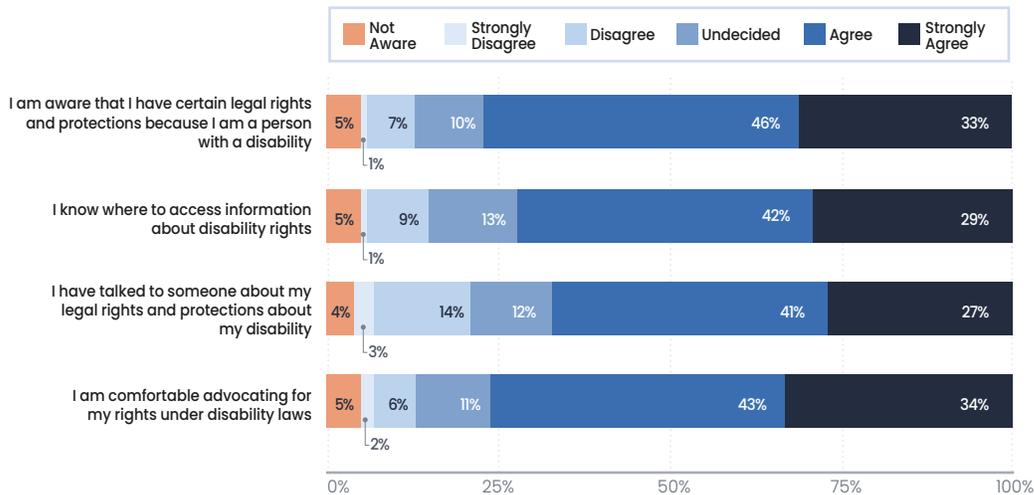
Legal Awareness and Discrimination

When it came to legal awareness, most respondents agreed or strongly agreed they are aware they have legal rights and protections as a person with a disability (79%), know where to access information about disability rights (72%), and feel comfortable advocating for their rights under disability laws (77%). Approximately 2 in 3 have talked to someone about their rights and protections (67%; see Figure 21).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

"The misconceptions about learning disabilities can be more hindering than the condition itself. awareness is key."

FIGURE 21. LEGAL AWARENESS



Note. Percentages represent weighted population estimates based on our survey sample of young adults ages 18–24 with LD (n = 1,283). Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Over half (54%) reported experiencing some form of discrimination. **Of those who experienced discrimination, most reported discrimination on the basis of disability (78%),** followed by race or ethnicity (30%) and sexuality (11%).

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

"It's really hard trying to exist in a society where disabilities are viewed as a bad thing."

In terms of discrimination setting, 41% reported they experienced discrimination on the basis of their LD at school, 27% in their communities, and 21% at the workplace.



Thriving/Surviving

In terms of satisfaction across a range of topics, many respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with who they are (72%), level of personal independence (67%), and mental health (62%). While most reported feeling satisfied or very satisfied with their family relationships (81%), friendships (76%), and connection to community (65%), **nearly 1 in 4 reported feeling dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their personal finances (23%) and employment (24%).**

In terms of excitement for their future, 68% reported feeling good about their lives most or all of the time, 72% agreed or strongly agreed they are excited about their career, and 78% agreed or strongly agreed they are excited about their future.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“Living with learning disabilities has taught me resilience and creativity in problem solving. It’s important to recognize that everyone’s experience is unique, but with understanding and support, individuals with learning disabilities can thrive and contribute in meaningful ways.”

Young adults respondents also reported barriers to thriving. **About half (54%) agreed or strongly agreed they have experienced difficulties getting a job because of their LD or experienced difficulties keeping a job because of their LD (48%).** Respondents also reported difficulties managing their emotions (38%), staying focused (32%), staying motivated (31%), and staying organized (31%).



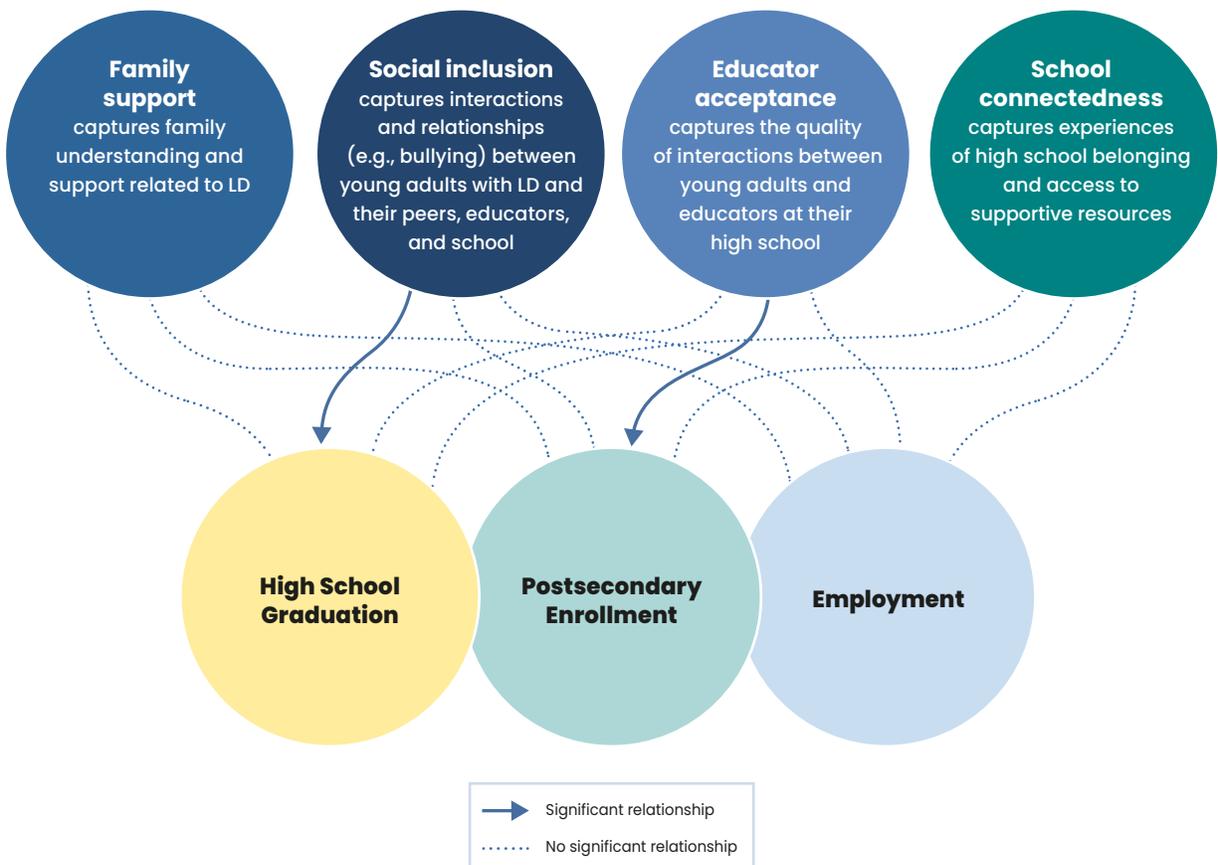
Data Analyses: Logistic Regression

We used logistic regression models to examine whether our outcomes of interest, including (a) graduating from high school, (b) enrolling at a post-secondary institution, and (c) being employed or seeking employment, differed across subgroups. Subgroups included race/ethnicity, gender, ADHD status, mental health status, formal identification of LD, and subtype of LD (e.g., reading, writing, math). In this report, we only include subgroup analyses for individuals formally identified with LD because these are most relevant to recommendations for future research and advocacy efforts. All other sub-

group analyses can be found in the *Young Adult Survey: Technical Report*.

Young adults who were formally identified with LD were 2.32 times more likely to graduate high school, 1.97 times more likely to enroll at a post-secondary institution, and 0.62 times less likely to be employed or seek employment, compared to young adults that were not formally identified with LD. Note that employment should be interpreted with caution as the model only included young adults currently employed or seeking employment and not currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution (even if they were employed while pursuing a degree).

FIGURE 22. FACTORS EXPLORED FOR SUPPORTING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION, POSTSECONDARY ENROLLMENT, AND EMPLOYMENT



Data Analyses: Structural Equation Modeling

We examined whether factors of family support and high-school experiences of social inclusion, educator acceptance, and school connectedness are related to (a) graduating from high school, (b) enrolling at a postsecondary institution, and (c) being employed or seeking employment (see Figure 22). We also examined whether young adults' (a) confidence with daily living skills, (b) societal views on disability, (c) LD identity and acceptance, and (d) awareness of disability rights were related to well-being (see Figure 23).

Importance of Social Inclusion for High School Graduation

Experiences of social inclusion in high school (or feeling a sense of belonging in high school) **was significantly related to graduating high school for young adults with LD.** Those who graduated high school reported significantly more social inclusion than those who left high school before graduating. In other words, individuals who graduated from high school—even if they thought about leaving high school before graduating—felt more accepted by their peers and teachers than individuals who left high school without graduating.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS...

“My family and peers have been my backbone; they gave me a platform to navigate the world on my own terms and through that I have learned to embrace my unique abilities.”

Importance of Educator Acceptance for Postsecondary Enrollment

Experiences of educator acceptance in high school were significantly related to enrolling in a postsecondary institution for young adults with LD. Young adults with LD currently enrolled at a postsecondary institution (including university, community college, or vocational, business, or technical school) reported higher educator acceptance during high school. That is, feeling supported by high school educators, having educators believe you can succeed, and feeling like educators want you in their class is positively related to enrolling in a postsecondary institution. Young adults with LD who have never enrolled in a postsecondary institution reported significantly lower levels of educator acceptance during high school.

Multiple Paths to Employment

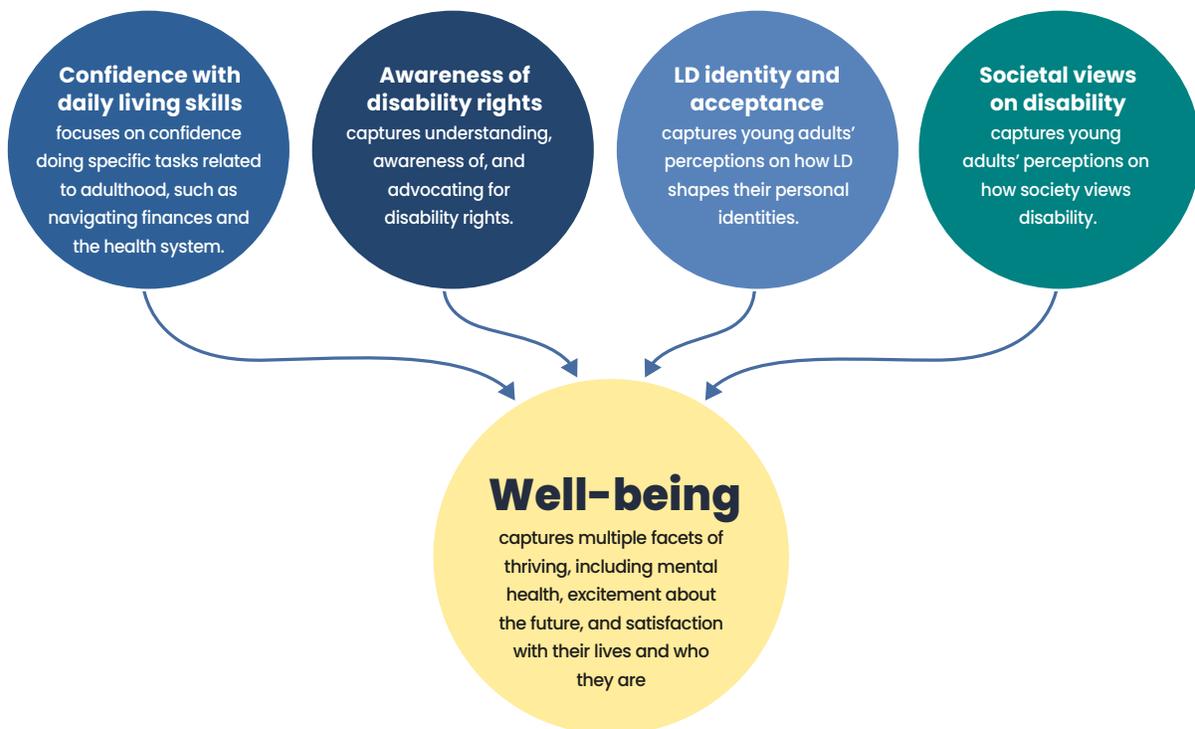
Family support and high-school experiences of social inclusion, educator acceptance, and school connectedness were not significantly related to employment. The factors that are thought to be critical for shaping experiences in high school were not related to employment status. As such, other factors may be more critical in shaping pathways to employment for young adults with LD, such as access to desirable jobs near affordable housing or their current location, appropriate qualifications, high competition, confidence in applying for aspirational positions, and accessible job applications. This study did not explore these factors.

Importance of Confidence with Daily Living Skills, Societal Views of Disability, LD Identity and Acceptance, and Awareness of Disability Rights for Well-Being

Each of the factors examined were significantly related to the well-being of young adults with LD. Young adults who were confident in their daily living skills, reported positive perceptions of how society views disability, had a strong LD identity and acceptance for their LD, and awareness of their disability rights reported a stronger sense of well-being compared to those who had negative experiences in one or more of these factors. When young adults with LD have negative perceptions or experiences in one of these areas, their overall well-being may suffer.



FIGURE 23. FACTORS EXPLORED FOR SUPPORTING WELL-BEING



Discussion

Young adults take a variety of paths in their transition to adulthood and to thriving lives. Identifying barriers and protective factors during this transition period from high school into adulthood can help young adults with LD, advocates, researchers, policy makers, families, and practitioners advocate for policies that can remove barriers so that individuals with LD can lead a thriving life.

This study examined key factors related to graduating from high school, enrolling in postsecondary education, being employed or seeking employment, and perceptions of well-being. Our results highlight the importance of creating inclusive environments that foster a sense of belonging and acceptance in schools, postsecondary institutions, and workplaces.

High School Experiences and Graduation Outcomes

High school graduation is a critical milestone for shaping the opportunities young adults are able to pursue later in life.¹²⁵ We asked young adults with LD to reflect on their high school experiences across a variety of areas. We then examined whether family support and high school experiences of social inclusion, educator acceptance, and school con-

nectedness were related to high school graduation. Feeling socially included by peers and educators, above and beyond the other factors examined, was critical for whether young adults with LD graduated high school. While many of the young adults with LD recalled their high school as a supportive learning environment, half reported they were bullied by their peers, and one in four reported they were bullied by their educators. This may have influenced the 38% of respondents who reported considering leaving high school before graduating and the 3% of respondents who left high school before graduating, as poor school climates (e.g., higher rates of bullying) are linked to lower graduation rates.¹²⁶

These findings highlight the importance of building school environments that cultivate a sense of social inclusion and belonging to support students with LD persisting to high school graduation. Prior research reports similar patterns of disability-related victimization from peers and adults while in high school.¹²⁷ Support from family, peers (especially peers with disabilities), and educators appears to be critical for protecting students from the long-term effects of such victimization.¹²⁸ Specific classroom or school-wide interventions, such as peer-to-peer programs,¹²⁹ can be effective in promoting a sense of social connection by ensuring that individuals

¹²⁵ National Center for Education Statistics, (2024d)

¹²⁶ Duckyfeld & Reynolds, (2013)

¹²⁷ McNicholas et al., (2020)

¹²⁸ Wood & Orpinas, (2020)

¹²⁹ Zeigler et al., (2020)

with and without disabilities can build relationships effectively. Importantly, these programs should focus on building equitable and authentic friendships where all individuals involved feel valued.

It is important that all school personnel—not just special educators—undertake this work. Teacher practice can positively shape student interactions with peers and student self-perceptions.¹³⁰ Students with LD are most often taught in general education classrooms,¹³¹ yet general educators often feel unsupported and unprepared to support students with LD.¹³² Preparing both pre-service and current educators to improve their practice for students with LD is critical, but first and foremost, shifting their mindsets and reducing stigma related to disabilities is essential.

While many reported that their high school offered transition planning services and postsecondary and workforce readiness programs, most young adults with LD reported they did not participate in these opportunities. The low participation in transition-planning services among young adults with LD should be further investigated. While hurdles relating to social stigma and poor self-advocacy skills might play a part in young adults' initiation and engagement in transition planning, it is possible that young adults with LD may be unfamiliar with how these services can support them. It could also be that these services may not take

into account the current trends and issues relating to young adults with LD and their transition into adulthood, making these programs inaccessible and irrelevant.

Postsecondary Enrollment and Experiences

Beyond high school graduation, earning a postsecondary degree further enhances young adults' dimension of well-being, where higher levels of education are associated with better-paying jobs,¹³³ better physical and mental health,¹³⁴ and higher lifetime earnings.¹³⁵ We asked young adults with LD to reflect on their postsecondary education experiences, including details of their enrollment (e.g., school type, major, or course of study) and access to accommodations and supports. We then examined whether family support, social inclusion, educator acceptance, and school connectedness were related to enrolling at a postsecondary institution. Feeling accepted by educators, above and beyond the other factors examined, was most critical to whether young adults with LD enrolled at a postsecondary institution.

Until recently, little has been known about the factors that support postsecondary enrollment specifically for young adults with LD. A recent analysis of NLTS-2 data found that parent involvement and student self-determination predict postsecondary enrollment,¹³⁶ but these data are outdated. Our

¹³⁰ Farmer et al., (2018)

¹³¹ National Center for Education Statistics, (2024b)

¹³² Stelitano et al., (2022)

¹³³ U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, (2020)

¹³⁴ Center on Society and Health, (2015)

¹³⁵ Social Security Administration, (2015)

¹³⁶ Zeng et al., (2024)

findings contribute to this knowledge base by highlighting the importance of strong and supportive relationships between students with LD and their educators while in high school. When educator actions result in students with disabilities feeling unwanted or unsupported (whether intentionally or unintentionally), their outcomes suffer.

We also explored the experiences of young adults with LD once enrolled in postsecondary education settings. The process of disclosing their LD may be presenting barriers to accessibility for many young adults. Approximately 2 in 5 young adults with LD were required to complete a new, full evaluation as part of their institution's disclosure process, and nearly half of those who ultimately completed a new evaluation paid for it out of pocket. While many young adults chose to disclose their LD to their postsecondary institution, a subset did not request accommodations. When young adults disclosed their LD, only about a quarter requested accommodations from all of their instructors, and nearly the same percentage did not request accommodations from any of their instructors. This trend indicates that even after navigating the sometimes cumbersome process of disclosing disability in postsecondary education, further barriers may be preventing young adults with LD from fully utilizing accommodations that could otherwise support their success.

Our findings resonate with previous research, which has highlighted the barriers and discomfort students with disabilities face when requesting accommodations in postsecondary settings.¹³⁷

A study of college students with disabilities from two universities found that a lack of opportunity for students to privately disclose their disability and request accommodations increased their discomfort. This discomfort was particularly salient for students with non-apparent disabilities such as LD.¹³⁸ It is clear that young adults with disabilities continue to face barriers that prevent them from disclosing and/or fully utilizing accommodations in their postsecondary education. Institutes of higher education should pay close attention to their process for disability disclosure and requesting accommodations. These processes should not be burdensome. Rather, they must be accessible, streamlined, supportive, and designed to empower students to access the support they need to thrive in their postsecondary journey.

Employment Status and Experiences

We used statistical modeling to examine how factors of family support, and high school experiences of social inclusion, educator acceptance, and school connectedness related to employment status for young adults with LD. These factors, thought to be critical for shaping young adults' experiences in high school, were *not* related to the employment status of the young adults we surveyed. More research is needed to identify the factors that shape their employment. Historically, postsecondary education has been viewed as the primary lever for successful job opportunities, where higher levels of education are related to higher rates of gainful

¹³⁷ Smith et al., (2021)

¹³⁸ Ibid.

employment.¹³⁹ However, we found the relationship between postsecondary education and employment status was not always clear: the young adults with LD in our sample took different paths to enter the workforce, and their trajectories to employment were diverse.

While more research is needed on the factors that support young adults with LD as they navigate the job market, it is clear that many are facing barriers to entering the job market — approximately half of survey respondents reported difficulty getting or keeping a job because of their LD. This study also provides valuable insights into the experiences of young adults who have entered the workforce. Overall, their experiences show that most young adults with LD are excited about their future careers even though nearly 1 in 4 have not disclosed their LD to their employer. Many are reluctant to request and utilize accommodations, which could hinder their prospects for success and growth at their jobs. Less than half reported receiving formal or informal accommodations at work, and those who did not named fear of possible discrimination and fear of being a burden to their co-workers as their primary reason for not requesting accommodations. Of those who did ask for accommodations, a majority felt that the accommodations they received were helpful.

These results are further supported by pre-existing literature. It is currently estimated that individuals with disabilities, especially young adults with disabilities, are at risk of not receiving the appropriate and needed accommodations within the workplace. Approximately 68% of individuals who received accommodations within the K-12 school system received accommodations in the workplace.¹⁴⁰ However, studies have shown that low or no-cost accommodations for employees with and without disabilities can function as “productivity enhancers.”¹⁴¹ For example, one study found that accommodations within the workplace increased employee productivity by 53%,¹⁴² overall company productivity by 22%,¹⁴³ and increased employee attendance by 48%.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, other business benefits include employee retention and thus avoid additional recruitment and hiring costs caused by employee attrition.¹⁴⁵ There are numerous psychosocial benefits to providing accommodations for individuals with disabilities, including a sense of increased safety within the workplace for all staff.¹⁴⁶

To support employees with LD in the workplace, employers should establish clear, consistent, and formal policies and procedures for how employees can request and obtain accommodations in the workplace.¹⁴⁷ Workplaces should appoint a central employee who manages the accommodation request process, receives and responds to accom-

¹³⁹ Vilorio, (2016)

¹⁴⁰ Lindsay et al., (2018b)

¹⁴¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. (n.d.)

¹⁴² Job Accommodations Network, (2024)

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Job Accommodations Network, (2010)

modation questions, and trains supervisors and managers on the accommodation procedures.¹⁴⁸ All organizations would benefit from establishing points of contact for accessibility in their human resources office. This would ensure consistency across departments and supervisors, while also showing a commitment to ensure the appropriate implementation of accommodations.¹⁴⁹ Workforces could consider providing temporary accommodations for employees during the review process, especially for new employees or individuals whose long-term accommodations may take some time to establish.¹⁵⁰ Collaborating with each employee to ensure that the barriers they are experiencing, or may experience, are being appropriately addressed is vital in showing support and fostering an inclusive environment.

Well-Being

We also examined well-being, comprising multiple areas in which young adults may thrive including mental health, excitement for the future, and overall personal/life satisfaction. We explored how confidence with daily living skills, awareness of disability rights, LD identity and acceptance, and societal views on disability influenced well-being. Each factor matters when it comes to the overall well-being of young adults with LD. When young adults have negative perceptions or experiences in one of these areas, such as a negative perception of their LD or lack awareness of their disability rights, their overall well-being may suffer.

Our findings indicate that young adults with LD may benefit from support related to improving their confidence in daily living skills, bolstering their awareness of disability rights and self-advocacy, and developing a positive and integrated identity that includes their LD. Having an awareness of disability rights and protections is particularly critical for young adults' overall sense of well-being. While young adult survey respondents generally felt confident in knowing their rights, they may benefit from more support in knowing how to use this knowledge to advocate for themselves when their needs are not fully met or when they believe they are facing discrimination.

It is important to note that disability rights awareness and addressing societal stigma is a community responsibility. Notably, young adults cannot fully thrive and enjoy a positive sense of well-being while a societal stigma around disability persists within communities. Schools, postsecondary institutions, and workplaces alike must become educated in the value of neurodiversity and the costs of discrimination and embody these principles in their design and actions.

Promoting neurodiversity in the workplace has important implications for building a dynamic and productive workforce. A diverse and inclusive workforce contributes to greater economic success and increased well-being for employees.¹⁵¹ For example, improving cognitive diversity in the workplace is related to improved problem-solving and increased

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Lindsay et al., (2018)

productivity.¹⁵² Different problem-solving processes and perspectives lead to greater efficiency and richness of discussion, likely because diversity leverages unique strengths that drive innovation. Inclusive work cultures improve engagement¹⁵³ and employee retention.¹⁵⁴

The benefits of inclusive school environments have also been demonstrated in research. When schools are designed to be accessible and inclusive for students with disabilities and a range of learning needs, all students benefit.^{155,156} Inclusive classroom settings bring social and emotional benefits for both disabled and non-disabled students.¹⁵⁷

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. For a full description of limitations, please see the *Young Adult Survey: Technical Report*.

First, all data were self-reported. Importantly, respondents reported whether they were formally identified with LD or struggled with reading, math, or

writing in ways that affected their daily lives. While this limitation raises the possibility that respondents may not actually have LD, NCLD acknowledges the barriers that exist to equitable and timely access to identification for LD across the country and believes that allowing for self-identification is critical for understanding the range of experiences among young adults with LD.

Second, the sampling strategy involved recruiting participants largely from social media – including parent advocacy groups or organizations whose members are involved in disability-related organizations or associations – as well as postsecondary institutions. Thus, our sample is likely biased toward young adults with LD with families who have access to supports, who are engaged in the disability community themselves, and/or who are enrolled in postsecondary education.

Despite these limitations, results from this survey are a critical first step in exploring relationships among high school experiences and postsecondary and employment outcomes.

¹⁵² Harvard Business Journal, (2017)
¹⁵³ Smith & Turner, (2015)
¹⁵⁴ Neurodiversity in the Workplace, (2024)
¹⁵⁵ Cole et al., (2004)
¹⁵⁶ Cosier et al.,(2013)
¹⁵⁷ Hehir et al., (2016)

Recommendations

Policy and Practice Recommendations

Enhancing Success in K-12 Systems

Our results highlight the importance of feeling a sense of belonging during high school. Young adults who graduated from high school reported significantly more social inclusion than those who did not graduate from high school. We offer the following policy recommendations that target creating more inclusive academic and social environments for students with LD during high school.

Community and Practitioner Recommendations

Create inclusive academic and social environments, focusing on school climate to foster inclusion and sense of belonging among students.

- Create inclusive, school-wide academic and social environments in high school. Efforts may include “visible” changes, such as policy changes that ensure well-implemented support systems, or “invisible” changes that make everyone feel seen and appreciated (e.g., intentionally including examples of individuals with disabilities in teaching contexts).

- Use academic and social interventions that support student and adult relationships and cultivate feelings of belonging and acceptance in classrooms (e.g., Peer Assisted Learning Strategies).

Improve pre-service and in-service training for educators related to disability stigma, disability rights, IDEA regulations, and evidence-based practices to support students with LD in the classroom.

- Training should focus on shared distributive leadership among administrators, general educators, and special educators to create more inclusive classrooms and schools.
- Pre-service and in-service training for administrators and general and special educators should emphasize building a strengths-based mindset, especially among students with disabilities, and combating negative stigma about disabilities in education settings.

Normalize inclusive practices and combat stigma and misconceptions about disability.

- Leverage the value of self-advocacy, accommodations, and the benefits of Universal Design for Learning. Teach and encourage students with and without disabilities to advocate for themselves and their learning needs. Encourage educators to consider



the specific needs of their students with and without disabilities to promote inclusivity and better equip them to thrive.

- Educate families on how best to support and advocate for and alongside their children with LD. Provide learning opportunities for individuals without disabilities, their families, K-12 and postsecondary educators, and employers to combat misconceptions and stigma associated with disability.

Set ambitious goals and monitor progress related to supports and outcomes for students and young adults with disabilities.

- In both school-level and district-level goal setting and monitoring, including those required for accountability systems, leaders must establish rigorous graduation rate goals and measures of college and career readiness, specifically among students with disabilities.

Federal and State Policy Recommendations:

Federal | Strengthen regulations of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

- The U.S. Department of Education should update regulations for Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act to support best practices that empower students with disabilities in their transition planning from K-12 systems into postsecondary settings. All aspects of Section 504, including ensuring a free appropriate public education (FAPE), addressing inequitable discipline, and educating families about the complaint process, are powerful regulation

tools. Such regulations may be in coordination with the Department of Justice and the requirements of institutions under the ADA.

Federal and State | Invest in and prioritize robust policies to enhance pre-service educator preparation and in-service educator professional development.

- Invest in federal programs and funding streams that enhance educator preparation, support, and retention.
- Enact certification and licensure policies that require the knowledge necessary to meet the needs of students with LD and that promote meaningful systems of support, evaluation, mentoring, and coaching for teacher leaders and principals.
- Enact policies that require all teachers to have specific training and practical experience in teaching diverse learners before entering the classroom, incentivizing innovation in teacher preparation programs such as training general and special education teachers candidates together.
- Collect data on key school- and district-level personnel and resources linked to special education and related services.

Federal and State | Advance policies that set high expectations for all students, eliminate barriers, and promote inclusion.

- Increase advanced coursework opportunities such as dual enrollment and AP/IB coursework programs for students with disabilities.



- Expand transition programs so more eligible students receive services, leveraging available resources from state Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies.

Federal and State | Invest in systems of support for schools and communities.

- Invest in federal funding streams, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Titles I-IV. These include:
 - ◊ Increasing the federal investment in large programs, including IDEA Part B and ESSA Title I, enables schools to provide services and supports.
 - ◊ Increasing funding for programs like the Parent Training and Information Centers (IDEA Part D, supporting families of children with disabilities access resources, tools, and training.)
 - ◊ Investing in School Based Mental Services grants (ESSA Title IV) enable school mental and behavioral health service delivery systems to promote wellness, resiliency, motivation and engagement, skill-building, and self-advocacy skills.
- Examine resources and any disparities in special education funding, particularly in districts with limited revenue-generating resources.

Improving Access to and Success in Postsecondary Educational Systems

Results highlight the importance of feeling accepted and supported during high school. Young adults enrolled in a postsecondary institution reported significantly more acceptance and support from the educators at their high school than young adults who have not enrolled in a postsecondary institution. Results also highlighted barriers young adults faced to accessing and fully utilizing accommodations in postsecondary institutions. We offer the following policy recommendations that target creating more inclusive academic and social environments for students with LD during postsecondary education.

Community and Practitioner Recommendations

Invest in human and knowledge capital and develop inclusive policies at institutions of higher education to ensure accessibility.

- Provide resources to fully staff disability services offices, ensuring expertise in accessible technology and remediation, compliance with laws and regulations including ADA Title II and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Develop and implement policies to improve access to accommodations, including reducing documentation barriers.

- Institutions should accept a wide range of documentation, including documents from K-12, such as an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan.



- Institutions should clearly communicate their processes and requirements for requesting academic accommodations and any supporting documentation required in accessible formats, including print resources and websites.

Federal and State Policy Recommendations

Federal and State | Improve technical assistance for colleges to support students with disabilities, including a focus on universal strategies (i.e., universal design for learning).

- Investing in resources and training for inclusive accessibility and accommodations policies in higher education, such as the National Center for College Students with Disabilities

Federal and State | Advance legislation that removes barriers to access in postsecondary education.

- Pass legislation that requires institutions to accept certain documentation as evidence of a disability, including individualized education programs (IEPs) and 504 Plans, instead of requiring a new psychoeducational evaluation.
- Ensure that students with disabilities who receive accommodations for their pace of study (i.e., reduced credit course load) are eligible for financial aid grants.

Federal and State | Improve data on students with disabilities in higher education, including data on retention and graduation outcomes.

- Collect and publish key data related to students with disabilities in federal and state-level postsecondary data systems.

Promoting Inclusive Workforce Development and Employment

While acceptance and support during high school were directly related to graduating from high school and enrolling in postsecondary, they were not related to current employment status. Our results highlight the practical importance of additional factors that may play a role in shaping employment pathways. Young adults with LD in our sample reported difficulties in entering the workforce and in accessing and receiving accommodations, with many having experienced workplace discrimination related to their LD. We offer the following policy recommendations that target creating more inclusive workplaces for individuals with LD.

Community and Practitioner Recommendations

Adopt supportive workplace policies, including leveraging manager and employee training opportunities.

- Develop and promote accommodation policies within organizations and companies that enhance easy access, equitable opportunities, and move beyond compliance and toward the spirit of meaningful inclusion for workers who have learning disabilities.
- Train managers on accommodations and universal supports, common barriers and misconceptions about individuals with LD, and strategies to foster a more inclusive workplace.
- Include disability in all workplace DEI training and professional development opportunities.

Develop and promote employer and employee resources focused on disability inclusion.

- Convene perspectives from different sectors to discuss barriers and opportunities to support workers with learning disabilities.
- Invest in toolkits and resources for employers that promote moving beyond compliance and toward cultures of inclusion for workers with disabilities.
- Identify gaps and resources needed for both employers and employees on a variety of topics related to accessibility, including accommodations.
- Leverage employee resource groups to promote a sense of belonging and inclusivity.

Federal and State Policy Recommendations

Federal and State | Ensure workforce development and training programs are designed so that students with learning disabilities are able to take advantage of services and program offerings.

- Require embedded supports and training on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for program providers.
- Ensure access to reasonable accommodations and disability-related supports and services within workforce development, apprenticeship, and other training programs.
- Enable disability representation on state and local workforce development boards to promote greater access and reduce silos and prioritize competitive integrated employment.

Federal, State, and Local | Require more robust intentional planning, data collection and accountability for program access and outcomes for specific populations, including people with disabilities.

- Improve fidelity in reporting for disability-related data in workforce development services, including labor and employment outcomes.
- Ensure workforce development program providers can sufficiently serve people with disabilities.

Federal and State | Ensure state VR agencies have sufficient funding and are using resources responsibly.

- The federal government should invest in VR state grants, including providing the statutorily mandated annual inflationary increase.
- State legislative bodies should ensure there is a sufficient fiscal match so that no funds are relinquished.

Research Recommendations

Explore the barriers to accessibility in postsecondary education and the workforce.

Results show that even when young adults with LD disclose their disability in postsecondary settings and the workplace, they are not always requesting and accessing accommodations. Further, when they do request accommodations, they are not always provided. Fear of discrimination or of being a burden were two commonly reported reasons for not disclosing. More research is needed to un-

Understand the barriers young adults with LD face to accessibility in postsecondary education and the workforce, including resistance from postsecondary instructors as well as managers/supervisors. For example, how do formal policies or informal practices influence the comfort level of young adults with LD when asking for and using accommodations in the workplace? Answering this question is critical for informing policies at institutes of higher education and employer policies and practice.

Explore the impact of high quality instruction and supports.

Previous research¹⁵⁸ shows that high-quality instruction and supports are critical factors related to positive student outcomes, yet less is known about the role these factors play in supporting young adults with LD in their transition to adulthood. For students and young adults with LD, the quality of their IEPs and transition plans are particularly important for shaping their post-high school outcomes and experiences. More research is needed to understand the connection between high-quality instruction and transition plans and post-school outcomes and experiences. Future research that examines and validates measures of high quality IEPs and transition plans for students with LD is critical for equipping the field with effective practices.

Examine young adults' participation and experiences in workforce training programs.

Additional research is needed to examine the experiences of young adults with LD in employment training and preparation programs. Results indicate that even when such programs are available (e.g., career and technical education, pre-employment transition services, and on-the-job training or apprenticeships), only small percentages of students with LD participated. It is critical to understand the factors that shape young adults' participation in VR programs. Recent research shows that participation in VR training in college and university settings is positively related to employment outcomes for young adults with LD.¹⁵⁹ However, misconceptions of such programs or other unknown factors may be hindering young adults' participation. Future research should also examine the extent to which such programs are designed with the needs of students with LD in mind.

Understand young adults' experiences entering the workforce.

Additional research is needed to gain a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of young adults with LD as they enter the workforce. Factors that were beyond the scope of this study, including experiences of underemployment, regional impact on employment, and the pathways through which young adults enter the workforce, are critical for shaping supportive institutional, state, and federal policies.

¹⁵⁸ Nilsen, (2016)

¹⁵⁹ Li et al., 2023

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