

Think College Nevada  
Strategic Planning Mini-Grant  
Final Report

Key Activities and Outcomes

*Activities:*

Currently, none of the colleges or universities in Nevada offers programs for students with intellectual disabilities (ID). There are some students with ID trying to navigate the community college system in Nevada with mixed outcomes due to lack of systematic support. Disability Resource Centers (DRCs) have the best intentions, but they have limited resources for this new student population who need considerable individualized supports in order to be successful.

At the onset of this grant, there was a necessity to educate Nevadans about postsecondary education (PSE) for students with ID. During the 11-month grant period<sup>1</sup>, DRCs at two community colleges acknowledged the existence of students and their need for resources to assist them, but outside of this small sampling and some families who were familiar, the concept of students with ID seeking PSE was unfamiliar to the majority of Nevadans.

In order to educate and inform stakeholders and get buy-in from potential funders, I met individually and with groups to explain the Think College Nevada project, postsecondary education opportunities for students with ID across the nation, Nevada's upcoming planning summit, etc. The following meetings and presentations took place prior to the statewide planning summit:

- 2/5/10 Nevada Commission on Services for Persons with Disabilities – This statewide group (of which I am a member) of 20 members is charged with advising the Governor and legislature on matters concerning services for people with disabilities in Nevada.
- 3/3/10 Interagency Transition Advisory Board – This 18-person statewide group looks at transition issues and includes representatives from school districts, Nevada Department of Education, families.
- 3/4/10 Developmental Disabilities Council – This 17 person statewide council (of which I was chairperson at the time) is funded by the Administration on Developmental Disabilities and works on systemic change in Nevada.
- 3/18/10 Meeting with the state director of the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR) to explain Think College Nevada. Since the NCED has a working relationship with BVR,

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<sup>1</sup> Grant period was extended in order to conduct several focus groups with self-advocates when the statewide survey did not draw sufficient self-advocate responses.

especially with the current Nevada Assistive Technology Resource Center (NATRC) project, the director is very accessible and open to new ideas from the NCED. She responded very favorably about possible collaborative funding and agreed to send representatives from each region to the statewide planning summit.

- 3/19/10 Meeting with the state director of the regional centers to explain Think College Nevada. The NCED has a long-standing working relationship with the regional centers and a personal relationship with the state director. She responded favorably about possible waiver funding and also agreed to send representatives from each region to the statewide planning summit.

Our original plan had called for a series of smaller regional planning meetings culminating in a statewide summit in July. This plan was amended, however, because the RFP for the TPSID grant was expected to be released in April or May and since Nevada intended to apply for the grant, it was decided to move the statewide strategic planning summit to April.

On April 28, the NCED hosted approximately 50 people for a statewide Think College Nevada statewide strategic planning summit. Debra Hart facilitated the day-long meeting. Participants included a variety of statewide stakeholders, including the Nevada System of Higher Education's (NSHE) (assistant vice-chancellor), university and community college disability resource centers, Nevada Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR-including the state director), Nevada's Disabilities Services Regional Centers (RC-including the state director), special education and transition specialists from several of the state's seventeen school districts and the Nevada Department of Education, People First, the Nevada Council on Developmental Disabilities, Nevada Disability Advocacy and Law Center (Protection and Advocacy), Nevada Parents Encouraging Parents (Nevada Parent Training Initiative), Northern Nevada Center for Independent Living, parents and students with intellectual disabilities, and other organizations that serve people with disabilities throughout Nevada. This group enthusiastically endorsed the concept of Think College Nevada and planned to go forward with inclusive postsecondary education opportunities for students with ID/DD, and to fund it in creative, sustainable ways. They embraced the research showing that students with intellectual disabilities who participated in dual enrollment programs in postsecondary education settings had a higher rate of paid employment.

As part of this meeting, a statewide strategic plan was developed, using the PATH process. Three to five year dreams were broken down into first year goals and the action steps needed to attain those goals. A smaller coalition was assigned to follow through on the action steps. One of our biggest and most welcome surprises at the planning summit was the positive attitude of the state

directors of BVR and the Regional Centers. Both verbalized that since money was already being spent on this population, they supported spending it in a way that promised better outcomes.

After the summit, we began in earnest to plan for our TPSID application. Without knowing exactly what would be required in the RFP, we began to plan for a collaboration with the Washoe County School District (WCSD) and Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) in Reno. The Student Support Services Department of WCSD was very enthusiastic and committed to funding a teacher and an aid position to coordinate the project for the school district. We met several times and came up with a plan to use an already existing dual enrollment mechanism. Knowing the president of TMCC, the director of WCSD Student Support Services set up a meeting for all of us to discuss the Think College project. Expecting the same positive attitude we had encountered from the TMCC DRC manager (who attended the Summit), we were surprised at the president's reaction. She explained that TMCC has the lowest completion rate in the state and has over 800 students taking remedial classes. She was very concerned with the current situation and about "one more group of remedial students." We explained the project, the potential positive outcomes for the students and the college and left her with materials to review. Because of our positive outlook on the project, we kept working on the TPSID grant, believing that she would come to understand the benefits to the students and to the college. When it came to submitting the grant, she would not write a letter of commitment. By that time, with the short turnaround of the grant, we were not able to submit for the TPSID grant.

In October, I met again with the state director of the regional centers. The state budget is in crisis and I was concerned that our earlier discussion about using Medicaid Waiver funds to support students with ID in school instead of sheltered workshops might be in jeopardy. While all funding is in jeopardy, she felt that we could still support people who are already on waiver funding in this manner. Waiting lists will increase so funding for new people is doubtful but using waiver funding for a postsecondary educational setting should still be possible for people on existing waiver funding.

In order to continue educating people in Nevada about PSE, we hosted the Think College/TASH webinars at four statewide locations. Each was held at an Institution of Higher Education (IHE): the University of Nevada Reno (UNR), Western Nevada College (WNC) in Carson City, College of Southern Nevada (CSN) in Las Vegas, and Great Basin College (GBC) in Elko. Participants were primarily parents and service professionals with some secondary ed and postsecondary ed instructors and self-advocates also attending. We had a good attendance for a lunchtime event:

- 9/15/10          22 participants
- 9/22/10          27 participants

- 9/27/10 28 participants
- 10/6/10 33 participants
- 10/13/10 32 participants

In October, the RFP for the Think College Implementation Mini-Grant was released. We again hoped that TMCC would be on board for a small project of three students over three semesters if the president more fully understood what resources the college would enjoy through the pilot project. I invited her to attend the State of the Art Conference on Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disabilities with me at the expense of the NCED. She declined the offer to attend the conference but agreed to send the TMCC DRC manager in her place, which I felt was a positive sign. He returned to TMCC with information and a positive recommendation about supporting the mini-grant, but again, she declined to participate. The NCED then contacted WNC, which was very interested, according to their DRC director. They currently serve students with ID and need additional resources, but due to the scarce resources and upcoming legislative session, the WNC administration was not able to commit to the project.

On November 18, a teleconference meeting was held of the Think College Nevada coalition. It was decided to continue the Think College Implementation mini-grant application without a firm college partner. We changed the narrative to reflect that we would work with the colleges to find supports and resources for their existing students with ID before bringing in a new population of transitioning students. We applied for the min-grant but did not receive the award due to not having a college partner.

*Outcomes:*

- Nevada has a Think College Coalition
- Nevada has a Strategic Plan for Postsecondary Education for Students with ID
- There has been an increase of knowledge and expectation about PSE on the part of parents of students with ID
- Self-determination curriculum is being taught in WCSD to all students with IEPs
- BVR and the Regional Centers are on board to braid funding

Surveys & Focus Groups

*Survey:*

A statewide survey about current knowledge, attitudes and interest in postsecondary education for students with ID was suggested at the summit in April. The UCEDD at the University of South Florida allowed the NCED to use their existing survey as a template. This template was edited to reflect the discussion at the summit and aimed at eliciting information regarding Think College Nevada goals. It was circulated for five months with 83 participants visiting the site and 54 completing it.

The survey link was emailed to the summit participants and disability organizations throughout Nevada. They were encouraged to forward it to colleagues and friends.

The survey questions were tailored for each category of respondent. For example: parents were asked to describe the educational services that their child receives, while public school educators were asked to describe the educational services delivered in the setting where they work.

A. Analysis of the results is as follows.

The largest group completing the survey was “Disability Professional” at the rate of 41%. Public School Educators were second in size at the rate of 28%, Parents 20%, Post Secondary Educators 9%, and finally one female Transition Age Youth Self-Advocate participated 2%. Of the parents 55% were male and 45% were female. Parents also reported the average age of their children to be 20.46 with a range between 12 and 29. Respondents identified residence locations that included: Reno, Las Vegas, Sparks, and Carson City.

The disability categories reported by parents were: Intellectual Disability (56%), Developmental Delay (56%), Down Syndrome (33%), Cerebral Palsy (11%), Autism (11%), Asperger Syndrome (0%), and others listed were Kyphosis and Hearing Impairment. Parents described the educational services received as: Fully Inclusive (22%), General Education Classes (67%), Community Based Instruction (22%), Segregated Special Classes (44%). Home based schooling and Work based schooling were not reported at all. When Parents were asked if their children liked school, 67% reported “a lot”, 33% reported “somewhat”, with 0% reporting “not at all”. Seventy-eight percent of parents expected that their child would complete an “adjusted diploma”, while 22% did not know what type of diploma to expect. The following table summarizes parental expectations after high school. It is notable for this study that 78% would like to enroll in a college program after school, yet only 22% an awareness of a college program available. In a follow up question, parents reported that 56% would be interested in an individualized program on a college campus, and 33% stated “maybe”, with 11% reporting “no”.

**21.** After High School:

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	No	Not sure	Yes
Has your child's education prepared them for life after high school?	2 22%	7 78%	0 0%
Does your child's IEP include a plan for the time immediately after high school?	4 44%	3 33%	2 22%
Have school staff encouraged your child to continue learning after high school?	3 33%	3 33%	3 33%
Would your child like to enroll in a college program after school?	0 0%	2 22%	7 78%
Does your child understand ALL of the educational opportunities that are available after high school?	1 11%	7 78%	1 11%
Do you know of a college program that your child can attend after high school?	4 44%	3 33%	2 22%

Another question asked parents to rate the importance of factors relative to college needs. The items rated as the most important (67%) are: social opportunities, and employment during or after completion. See the table below.

**23.** Please indicate the importance of the factors below when determining whether a college program would meet your child's needs.

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important
Cost	0 0%	4 44%	5 56%
Curriculum Supports	0 0%	1 11%	8 89%
Behavior Supports	3 33%	4 44%	2 22%
Safety	0 0%	5 56%	4 44%
Transportation	0 0%	5 56%	4 44%
Certificate or degree	2 22%	6 67%	1 11%
Social opportunities, connections, & friendships	0 0%	3 33%	6 67%
Housing on campus	4 50%	2 25%	2 25%
Employment during or after	0	3	6

completion	0%	33%	67%
Closeness to my/our home	1 11%	6 67%	2 22%

Curriculum support, social connections, and appropriate accommodations were the most common needs cited by parents for a child to attend college after high school.

Of the public school educators completing the survey, 53% indicated that the students with intellectual disability that they serve are between the ages of 15-17, 13% between 18-20, 7% between 20-23, and 27% over 24. These Educators represented a broad range of Nevada: Lovelock, Hawthorne, Vegas, Carson City, Elko, Reno, Fernley, Jackpot, Elko, Wendover, and Wells. This same group of educators reported that 60% of their students had intellectual disabilities, 33% had autism, 20% had developmental disabilities, and another 20% had Down syndrome. Cerebral Palsy was cited as representing 7% of the students served, and another 7% was attributed to Asperger syndrome. Various other disability categories were named in the “other” category (vision, learning disabilities, and multiple impairments) to account for 47% of students served.

Educators cited an overwhelming 73% of the students they serve as receiving some general education classes, while 53% had special segregated classes. Full inclusion classes were credited at the rate of 47%, home schooling 27%, and community-based instruction was 20%. When educators were asked how much their students liked school: 67% reported “somewhat” and 33% reported “a lot”. Eighty percent of students were reported as anticipating an adjusted diploma, while 20% were anticipating a regular diploma.








Half of the educators responded that their students’ education had not prepared them for life after high school (see table below). In addition, social and educational supports as well as costs were cited as the most important services needed for students to succeed in college.

**32.** After High School. Please answer these questions based on your understanding of the majority of the students you serve.






Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree completely
The education of the students I serve has prepared them for life after high school?	7 50%	5 36%	2 14%
The students I serve have an IEP that includes an individualized plan for the time immediately after high school?	5 33%	5 33%	5 33%
School staff encouraged the students I serve to continue their education after high school?	5 33%	5 33%	5 33%
Some of the students I serve would be interested in enrolling in a college program after school?	2 13%	5 33%	8 53%
The students I serve and their families understand all of the educational opportunities that are available after high school?	6 40%	9 60%	0 0%
There are currently inclusive college programs that students I serve can attend in Nevada.	5 33%	10 67%	0 0%

The disability professionals that participated in the survey represented an even larger portion of the state. Winnemucca and Spring Creek were added to all of the previously mentioned locations as the residence of these respondents. This group was also the largest with 22 disability professionals. Forty-three percent reported serving individuals from the 18-20 age range. The 15-17 and the 24 and over ranges, each represented the next level at 19%. The 12-14 and 20-23 ranges each represented 10% of the individuals served by this group of disability professionals. Further, 73% of these students are expected to graduate with an adjusted diploma, although 64% reported that these students would be interested in a Think College program. The following two tables describe the individuals served by these professionals.

**39.** Which of the following disabilities identify the majority of students that you serve? Please check all that apply

Intellectual disability Disability (Mental retardation)		16	73%
Developmental disability		15	68%
Down syndrome		8	36%
Cerebral Palsy		8	36%
Autism		10	45%
Asperger Syndrome		10	45%
Other, please specify <a href="#">View Responses</a>		5	23%

**40.** Please check all that describe the high school education of the students you serve?

Fully inclusive		11	50%
Some general education classes		16	73%
Home-School		5	23%
Work-based learning site		2	9%
Community-based instruction		7	32%
Segregated special classes		13	59%
Special residential		1	5%

It is notable that 100% of the disability professionals reported that their students “somewhat liked” high school, with 0% reporting that students liked high school “ a lot”. In the table below, 100% of disability professional somewhat agree or completely agree that some the students they serve would be interested in a college program after high school.

**43.** After High School. Please answer these questions based on your understanding of the majority of the students you serve.

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree completely
The education of the students I serve has prepared them for life after high school?	7 33%	13 62%	1 5%
The students I serve have an IEP that includes an individualized plan for the time immediately after high school?	5 23%	16 73%	1 5%
School staff encouraged the students I serve to continue their education after high school?	11 50%	7 32%	4 18%
Some of the students I serve would be interested in enrolling in a college program after school?	0 0%	11 50%	11 50%
The students I serve and their families understand all of the educational opportunities that are available after high school?	14 67%	7 33%	0 0%
There are currently inclusive college programs that students I serve can attend in Nevada.	11 50%	10 45%	1 5%

Of interest is that when disability professionals were asked to identify the most important factors in a college program for students with intellectual disabilities, they listed cost as the most important. Cost, although a consideration, did not rate as most important to parents and was very low in importance to postsecondary educators.

**45.**

Please indicate the importance of the factors below when determining whether a college program would meet the needs of the majority of students you serve.

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Not Important	Somewhat important	Very Important
Cost	0 0%	3 14%	19 86%
Curriculum Supports	1 5%	3 14%	18 82%
Behavior Supports	2 9%	4 18%	16 73%
Safety	0 0%	5 23%	17 77%
Transportation	0 0%	6 27%	16 73%
Certificate or degree	2 10%	15 71%	4 19%
Social opportunities, connections, & friendships	0 0%	4 18%	18 82%
Housing on campus	3 14%	18 86%	0 0%
Employment during or after completion	0 0%	5 23%	17 77%
Closeness to home	0 0%	12 55%	10 45%

When postsecondary educators were asked the same questions about the most important college services needed for students with intellectual disabilities, less emphasis was placed on cost, behavior supports, safety, transportation, and proximity to home (see table below). Most importance was placed on curriculum supports.

**50.** Please indicate the importance of the factors below when determining how to design a college program.

Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.	Not important	Somewhat important	Very important
Cost	1 20%	1 20%	3 60%
Curriculum Supports	0 0%	1 20%	4 80%
Behavior Supports	0 0%	4 80%	1 20%
Safety	0 0%	2 40%	3 60%
Transportation	0 0%	2 40%	3 60%
Certificate or degree	2 40%	1 20%	2 40%
Social opportunities, connections, & friendships	0 0%	1 25%	3 75%
Housing on campus	2 50%	1 25%	1 25%
Employment during or after completion	0 0%	1 25%	3 75%
Closeness to home	0 0%	5 100%	0 0%

In summary, all survey groups indicate that there is an interest in an inclusive postsecondary education programs for students with ID in Nevada. While each of the factors have importance to some of the members of the survey groups, curriculum supports; social opportunities, connections & friendships; and employment during and after completion were the overall top considerations.

*Focus Groups:*

Because the survey did not garner the number of self-advocate responses we had hoped for, we chose to hold informal focus groups with our statewide People First chapters. The NCED operates an AmeriCorps\*VISTA Youth Transition Project with 15 VISTA members, 5 of whom have intellectual/developmental disabilities and run the People First chapters throughout the state. As part of the November People First meetings, focus groups were held in Reno, Carson City, Elko, Fernley,

Fallon and Minden. Another focus group was held with a transition age group of students learning about self-determination at the Boys & Girls Club in Carson City.

Major findings included:

- The majority indicated they had an interest in attending college and felt that attending college would help them get a better job.
- Reasons heard most often about why people wanted to attend college were: making new friends, getting the skills for a better paying job, gaining self-confidence.
- The kind of supports people felt they needed to go to college were: financial aid, transportation, tutoring, note taking/aid, audiobooks, mentoring at the beginning to get to know campus, flexible accommodations for classes and test taking.
- There was a wide variety of areas of study that interested the participants. Some that were mentioned were: landscape design, airplane pilot, cooking, mechanics, learning to drive, music, math/money management, art, reading, working with kids/childcare, technology, exercise, photography, forklift operator, computer skills, SCUBA, Spanish.
- There was a wide variety of answers to the question regarding where they would like to attend college. While several answered that they would like to attend their local Nevada college or university, they began to really dream about college, as do many transition age youth: Princeton, Harvard, Julliard, Oklahoma State, Oregon State, Miami State University and University of Hawaii were among those named.

### Sustainability

As noted in our original grant proposal, the NCED will continue to support staff at .15 FTE to continue the planning/implementation process. Postsecondary education for students with ID is a priority to the NCED and will become part of its five-year plan.

The post-grant period will include the following activities:

1. Since WNC (Carson City) expressed an interested in the implementation grant, acknowledged the existence of students with ID and the need for resources, we will offer to work with their DRC and their students with IDD to braid funding (BVR, regional centers) for individual students currently attending WNC.
2. If this is successful, continue to the other community colleges.
3. Hold quarterly meetings of the Think College Nevada Coalition.
4. Create a Think College Nevada Facebook page.

In addition, we have applied for the National Service Inclusion Project (NSIP)/Think College Mini-Grant which, if awarded, will fund the NCED to support VISTA members with IDD to utilize their Education Award to attend college. Three colleges (TMCC, WNC and GBC) sent letters of support for this mini-grant. As noted in that application, our hope is that once we have some success with these students, the colleges be more open to other students with IDD.

### Done Differently?

There are several things I would have done differently.

- I would have depended on the Think College Coalition more, had more meetings, consulted with them more, and delegated more. I would have planned bi-monthly meetings, to keep people informed. People are very busy so I was reluctant to ask too much of them but I will in the future.
- I would have created a monthly electronic newsletter to go to all of the Summit participants, coalition, college administrations, DRC staff, families, etc. to keep the momentum and keep the pressure on. The electronic newsletter would have news about what's happening around the country, minutes from our meetings, etc.
- I would have created a Think College NV Facebook page earlier.

### Conclusion

Nevada is facing the task of re-inventing its economic structure. There is a \$3 billion deficit and an impending legislative battle about whether Nevada will impose new taxes or cut services to the state's most vulnerable citizens. Nevada has a new governor and it is not apparent whether education is one of his priorities.

In the midst of the budget crisis, the Nevada System of Higher Education is sending mixed messages to the state's community colleges. The Board of Regents is in the process of establishing an echelon of institutions of higher education, with more stringent entrance requirements for universities (UNR and UNLV) and lesser requirements for community colleges. But, community college presidents are also under increasing pressure to increase the completion/graduation rates of their students. The current open enrollment policies of the community colleges are contributing to the number of remedial students enrolling at the community colleges and therefore lower completion/graduation rates. Therefore, community college presidents are also looking at initiating more stringent entrance requirements. This will not encourage students with ID who want to enroll in

community college. It makes it extremely important that the college presidents understand that Think College NV students are not the typical “remedial” students who arrive at the community college without supports.

For a relatively small grant (monetarily), the Think College mini-grant had a huge impact on Nevada. Many people who had never thought about postsecondary education for students with ID are now “buzzing” about it. People have seen what is being done successfully around the country and want to have it available in Nevada. While that is good, we have our future work cut out for us. We learned a lot over the period of this grant about what to do and what we could have done more effectively. We now have a plan, a good coalition, some great partners, and a better understanding of what is standing in our way. We will continue until students with ID are able to participate in an inclusive college experience in Nevada.