

THE PATHWAY FROM EDUCATION TO EMPLOYMENT: RESULTS FROM STUDY 1.1 OF THE FROM COLLEGE TO CAREER (FCTC) PROJECT

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The purpose of the *From College to Career: Strengthening Employment Outcomes after Postsecondary Education for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (FCTC)* project is to strengthen the evidence base on how postsecondary education (PSE) can support competitive integrated employment (CIE) outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).

In 2024, only 37.4% of working-age people with disabilities were employed compared to 74.9% of people without a disability (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025). PSE is widely recognized as a key factor associated with employment outcomes in the general population (Carnevale et al., 2011). In 2024, individuals with some college (25.2%) or a bachelor's degree or higher (31.7%) were more likely to be employed than individuals with less than a high school diploma (11.3%) or no college education (17.3%; US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2025).

PSE participation has been found to be associated with improved employment outcomes (Cimera et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2019; Sannicandro et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2018). However, there is variability in the effectiveness of CIE preparation across programs and additional barriers to securing employment after PSE that are not well understood (Grigal et al., 2019). The goal of the FCTC project is to identify, develop, and test evidence-based solutions to address barriers that PSE programs encounter when supporting students on the pathway from PSE to CIE.

Study 1 of FCTC focuses on:

- » understanding employment outcomes of people who attended PSE
- » identifying characteristics and experiences associated with successful employment outcomes

To do this, Study 1 analyzed two complementary datasets:

1. **RSA-911**, a national dataset of individuals who received services through state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies. It includes individual-level information on demographics, education and service indicators, and employment outcomes at VR case closure.
2. **The Think College National Coordinating Center's (NCC) Transition and Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) dataset**, a national dataset capturing student experiences and employment outcomes within federally funded TPSIDs programs. Funded since 2010 in 5-year cycles, TPSID grantees report annual program and student data to the Think College NCC. Data from the TPSID dataset tell us about the PSE experiences of students with IDD including activities that prepare individuals for CIE and whether the student obtains an employment outcome. The most recent TPSID data are from Cohort 3 (2020-2025).

Findings from RSA-911

In this brief, we will share findings from the RSA-911 dataset. Please read *(From College to Career for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities: Results from Study 1.2)* for findings from the TPSID dataset.

Sample

We analyzed RSA-911 program years 2020–2023 to examine whether PSE or training participation is associated with CIE outcomes at VR exit among people ages 17–35 with intellectual disability. We selected this age range to align with TPSID analyses and to focus on transition-age youth and young adults, a group for whom PSE and employment outcomes are most directly relevant. The analytic sample included intellectual disability as the primary disability for the individuals who exited VR during the study period.

Key Variables

PSE participation was defined using the RSA-911 indicator for whether an individual was enrolled in PSE or career/technical training as part of their individualized plan for employment leading to a recognized PSE credential.

CIE at exit was measured using the RSA-911 closure outcome variable indicating whether an individual exited VR in CIE (with or without supports).

Methods

We used descriptive statistics to summarize the analytic sample and compare outcomes between individuals who did and did not participate in PSE or training. We assessed group differences in CIE using chi-square tests. Then, we assessed differences in hours worked and wages at exit using mean comparisons.

To examine whether PSE participation was associated with CIE, we conducted a sequence of logistic regression models. We used models that included demographic characteristics and barriers to employment, such as homelessness, ex-offender status, low-income status, basic skills deficiency, cultural barriers, and single parent status. Models were estimated in three stages:

1. Postsecondary education (PSE) participation only
2. Postsecondary education (PSE) participation with demographic variables
3. Postsecondary education (PSE) participation with demographic and barrier-to-employment variables

Sample Characteristics

Table 1 summarizes demographic characteristics and PSE participation among individuals with intellectual disability ages 17–35 in the sample.

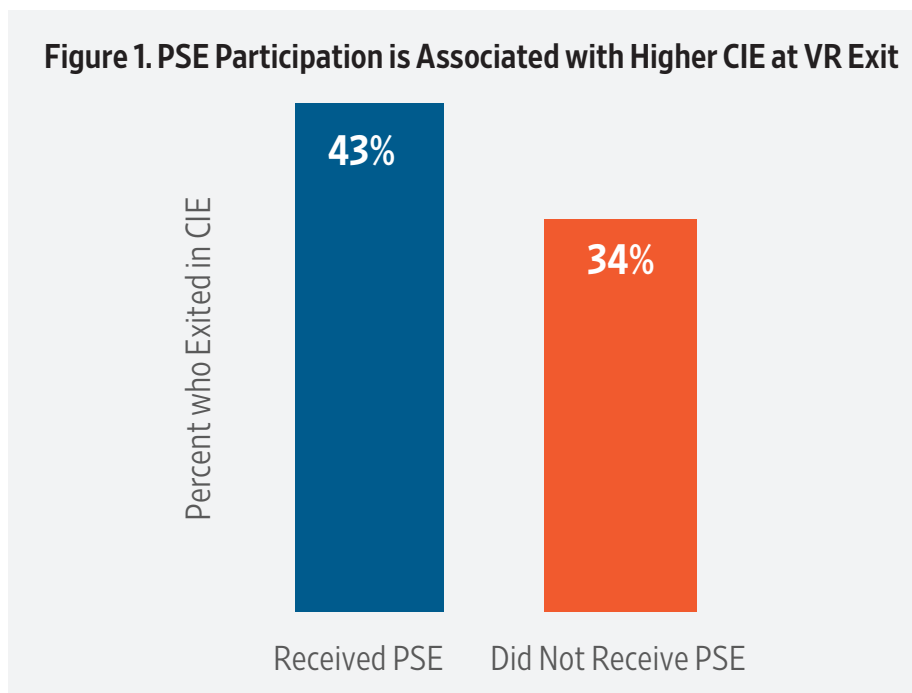
Table 1. RSA-911 Sample Demographics

Characteristic	n	%
Sex		
Male	57,939	57.6%
Female	42,074	41.8%
Did not identify	534	0.5%
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	14,784	14.9%
Not Hispanic	84,128	83.7%
Race		
White	62,996	62.7%
Black	29,809	29.6%
Asian	2,655	2.6%
American Indian	2,088	2.1%
Hawaiian	665	0.7%
Received PSE	9,413	9.4%
Did not receive PSE	91,135	90.6%
Closed into employment	34,650	34.5%

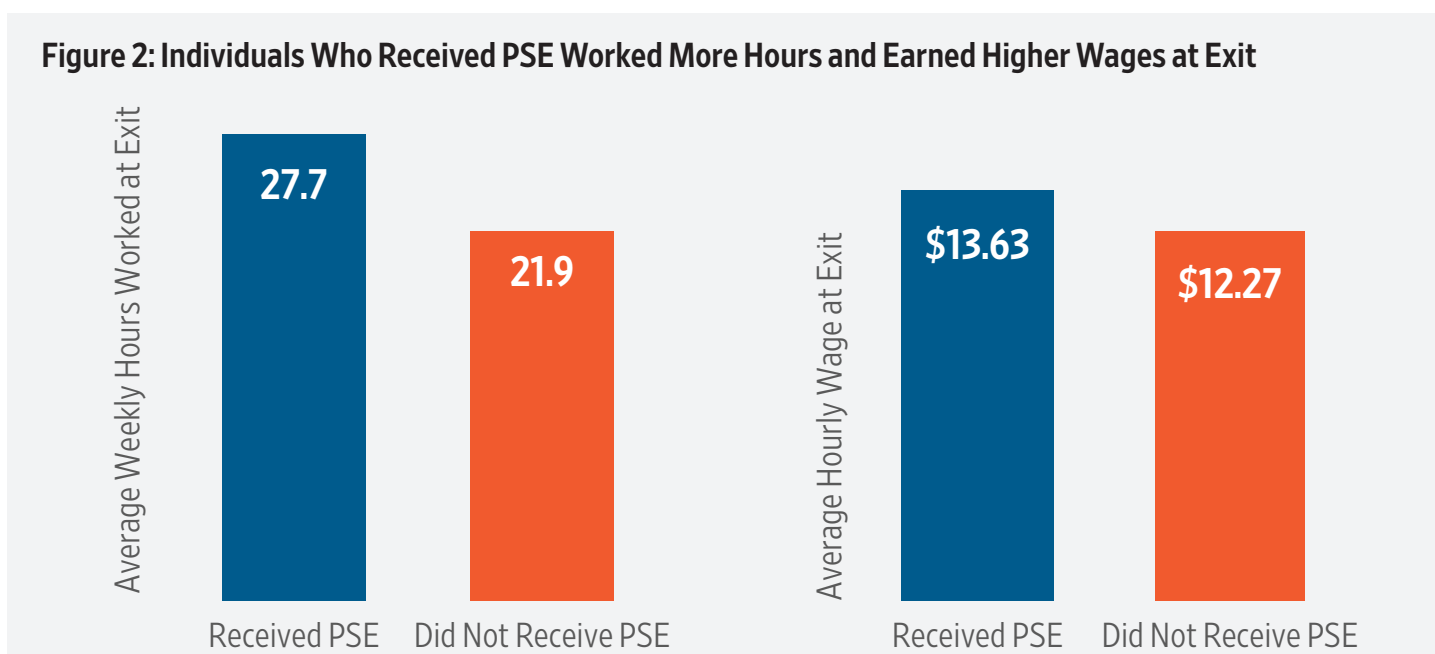
Most people in the sample identified as white (62.7%), followed by Black or African American (29.6%), and most also identified as male (57.6%). Approximately one-third of individuals (34.5%) exited VR in competitive integrated employment. PSE or training participation was relatively uncommon, with just 9.4% of people receiving PSE or training services through VR.

Findings

Employment Outcomes by PSE Participation



People who received PSE or training demonstrated significantly more favorable employment outcomes at VR exit compared to those who did not receive PSE or training (Table 2). Specifically, 43.3% of individuals who received PSE exited VR in competitive integrated employment, compared to 33.5% of individuals who did not receive PSE. This difference was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 361.98$, $p < .001$).



Among individuals who had reported employment earnings and hours data at exit, those who received PSE worked more hours per week on average and earned higher wages compared to those without PSE:

- » People who received PSE worked an average of 27.7 hours per week (SD = 11.1), compared to 21.9 hours per week (SD = 10.5) among people who did not receive PSE.
- » Similarly, people who received PSE earned higher hourly wages at exit (\$13.63, SD = 8.45) compared to those who did not (\$12.27, SD = 8.40).

These differences were statistically significant ($p < .001$).

Table 2. Employment Outcomes at VR Exit by PSE Participation

	No PSE	PSE	p-value
Total sample size	91,135	9,413	--
CIE %	30,571 (33.5%)	4,079 (43.3%)	<0.001
N with reported hours/wage data	30,625	4,094	
Mean weekly hours worked at exit	21.9	27.7	<0.001
Mean wages at exit	12.27	13.63	<0.001

Note: Hours and wages reflect only individuals with reported employment earnings and hours at exit.

PSE Participation Remains Associated with CIE After Accounting for Demographics and Barriers

We conducted a series of logistic regression models to examine whether PSE participation remained associated with CIE after accounting for demographic characteristics and barriers to employment (Table 3). Across all models, individuals who received PSE or training had significantly higher odds of exiting VR in CIE compared to those who did not receive PSE or training.

In the fully adjusted model, older age was associated with higher odds of CIE, while Hispanic ethnicity and Black and American Indian race were associated with lower odds of CIE. Several barrier indicators, including homelessness/runaway status, justice system involvement (ex-offender status), low-income status, and single parent status, were also associated with significantly lower odds of exiting VR in CIE.

Table 3. Fully Adjusted RSA-911 Regression Model

	Predictor	Odds Ratios		
		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Model 1: Postsecondary education	Any PSE	1.52**	1.69**	1.27**
Model 2: Demographics	Age	—	1.04**	1.05**
	Sex	—	0.93**	0.94**
	Hispanic	—	0.71**	0.71**
	Black	—	0.85*	0.89*
	American Indian	—	0.86*	0.87*
Model 3: Barriers	Homeless/runaway	—	—	0.73**
	Ex-offender	—	—	0.58**
	Low income	—	—	0.82**
	Single parent	—	—	0.73**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < 0.001$

Across models, the association between PSE participation and CIE decreased after adjusting for demographic characteristics and barrier indicators, suggesting that structural barriers partially explain, but do not eliminate, the significant relationship between PSE participation and employment outcomes.

Conclusion

Findings from the analysis of the RSA-911 database suggest that PSE participation is associated with improved employment outcomes for individuals with ID served by VR. Individuals who received PSE or training were more likely to exit VR in CIE and had higher average hours worked and wages at exit. However, employment outcomes were also shaped by demographic and structural factors. Several barriers to employment were strongly associated with reduced odds of CIE, and PSE participation did not fully offset the influence of these barriers.

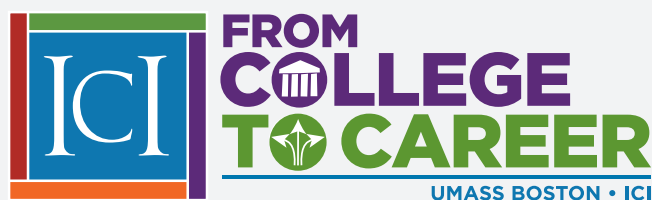
Although RSA-911 provides a broad national view of VR services and employment outcomes, it does not capture detailed information about what students experience during PSE, including specific career preparation activities, work-based learning experiences, and job search supports that may contribute to employment outcomes.

To better understand which PSE experiences are most strongly associated with employment outcomes, Study 1.2 examined the TPSID dataset. TPSID data provide a unique opportunity to examine student-level employment preparation experiences during program enrollment and how these experiences relate to employment outcomes at exit and over time.

[Please see Data Note #108 for key findings from the TPSID analysis.](#)

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FCTC brings together experts from two of ICI's national hubs on inclusive employment & education: [ThinkWork!](#) and [Think College](#). People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who continue their education after high school are more likely to be employed, earn more money, and contribute more to the economy. Through FCTC's collaborative effort, we aim to strengthen the evidence base on how postsecondary education can support competitive integrated employment outcomes for people with IDD.

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