

**Testimony for University System Appropriation
Appropriations: Education and Environment Division
Representative Nathe, Chairman March 25, 2025
By Lori Garnes, Tracey Olson, and Elizabeth Romanick
Minot State University's North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD)**

Good morning, Chairman Nathe and members of the Education and Environment Division. My name is Lori Garnes and I am the Executive Director at Minot State University's North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities (NDCPD). My colleague is Tracey Olson and she is the Project Director for the Inclusive Pathways for College and Career Training (IMPCCT) Consortium and the Advancing Students Toward Education and Employment Program (ASTEP). My other colleague is Elizabeth Romanick and she is an employee at Minot State University, but more importantly she is a graduate of Minot State through ASTEP, earning an Associate of Applied Science in Paraprofessional Education and Early Childhood.

I am here today to pass along information about inclusive post-secondary education (IPSE) programs in North Dakota. About 15 years ago, Minot State University's University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (or NDCPD) began ASTEP through a grant from the US Department of Education. Minot State University was one of the first in the nation to develop one of these programs designed for people with developmental disabilities to attend college programs. ASTEP has provided this program for the past four years without any grant support, but with the support of MSU and NDCPD, as well as state support through NDDPI.

In an inclusive and supportive environment, students in the ASTEP program attend college to earn credentials, taking college courses with students without disabilities. Within the last four years there have been two additional programs in the ND University System; at NDSU and Valley City. Students in these programs complete community employment internships and learn important independent living and social skills while engaged in campus and residence life. Students receive additional supports from staff and peer mentors for all areas of campus and community life. The goal of these programs is to make college a reality for students with I/DD and prepare students to live increasingly independent lives and pursue meaningful careers in their communities. In a recent survey of graduates of ND IPSE programs, ninety-six percent (96%) had paid (minimum wage or higher) community, integrated employment in the past twelve months. Sixty percent (60%) of students who graduated from ND's IPSE programs are living independently. Eighty-nine (89) students with intellectual and developmental disabilities have been enrolled in ND IPSE programs since 2010. We have attached an infographic information sheet to the printed testimony for your convenience. It includes the statistics I just provided as well as other interesting information.

These programs are valuable, have very good outcomes for students who participate, and they are sought out by students and families across the state. While Minot State is proud of being the founding program and plans to sustain ASTEP indefinitely, we also support the opportunity for other colleges and universities to develop programs. The need is there. An estimated 700

students graduate from ND schools each year who have an IDD. While I am an alumna of Minot State and am now faculty there, I know that all North Dakotans value having choice in selecting university programs. People choose their campus based on the degrees offered, geographic location, and loyalty to family affiliation or sports team. No matter the reasoning, having choice is valuable.

The current NDSU and Valley City programs are supported through braided funding including university and college support, grant funds through the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) grant from the U.S. Department of Education, some ND Department of Public Instruction transition program funds, and program fees. These funds help to cover the cost of IPSE program staff and peer mentors, who together coordinate and provide direct services to students daily. Students who attend programs are responsible for the cost of tuition, student fees, textbooks and room and board costs - if they live on campus.

During the last four years, with support from the IMPCCT Consortium, which is run through NDCPD at MSU, several ND colleges have expressed a strong desire to develop IPSE programs at their institutions. Bismarck State College and Dakota College of Bottineau both started programs but needed to pause them because they needed to prioritize other campus programs. Informally, IMPCCT consortium staff have had inquiries from other colleges in ND, including two Tribal colleges, expressing interest in having an IPSE program at their campuses.

IPSE programs are not “business as usual” for colleges and universities. It takes additional knowledge about disability populations and alternates to traditional certificates and degrees. Campuses not prepared to provide IPSE programs will have difficulty getting them started and maintaining them. Once established there is a need for universities to support the necessary infrastructure to maintain these programs.

That said, education is education and for a relatively small investment, any ND university or college could develop and sustain an IPSE program. NDCPD invests about \$50,000 per year in our program, but it serves a dual purpose for our center because we can count outcomes as accomplishments supporting the work we do in ND for our core University Center of Excellence on Developmental Disabilities grant.

Through a Department of Education grant, NDCPD has supported the development of new programs at NDSU and Valley City which are running well, and Bismarck State and Dakota College in Bottineau which are currently paused.

There are several key takeaways about IPSE in ND that I want to leave with you:

1. NDCPD at Minot State University has the knowledge and ability to assist other ND universities develop and maintain IPSE programs.
2. Minot State University's program is stable and will continue.
3. Other state universities and colleges would like to develop and maintain IPSE programs at their institutions.
4. NDDPI funds are not available to any program until they have established that they have a successful program capable of graduating students with certificates or degrees. That can take a program three or more years until they have their first graduates. Programs need to be prepared to fund their programs for that length of time without NDDPI funds.
5. Once NDDPI funds are available, they cover the university costs of peer mentors and some infrastructure costs, but we have found that even with the best planning the university needs to plan to cover \$50,000 to \$100,000 infrastructure costs above and beyond currently allocated funds, depending on how big the program is.

We want the legislature to understand how valuable these programs are and to consider ways to increase IPSE programs throughout ND, perhaps even considering state funding to see that they continue.

Thank you for your time. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.

Contact Information:

Lori Garnes Ph.D., Executive Director

Phone: 701-858-3139

Email: Lori.Garnes@MinotStateU.edu

Tracey Olson, Project Director IMPCCT, A-STEP

Phone: 701-858-4496

Email: Tracey.Olson.1@MinotStateU.edu

Elizabeth Romanick, Research Associate, Ability Expert

Phone: 701-858-4023

Email: Elizabeth.Romanick@MinotStateU.edu

NORTH DAKOTA INCLUSIVE POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION (IPSE) PROGRAMS

The ND Inclusive Model Pathways for College and Career Training (IMPCCT) Consortium provides training and technical assistance to build capacity for expanded college options and high school transition services that sufficiently prepare students with intellectual disabilities for college success.

Our Vision: For all institutions of higher education across North Dakota and the Northern Plains to be inclusive of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD); providing programs that focus on academic, independent living, socialization, self-determination, and integrated work experiences culminating in competitive integrated employment for persons with ID and DD.

THE IMPCCT CONSORTIUM WORK WITH INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ND TO DEVELOP IPSE PROGRAMS TO INCORPORATE :

INCLUSIVE COLLEGE CLASSES	SELF-DETERMINATION	PRE-EMPLOYMENT SKILLS
CAREER DEVELOPMENT	INDEPENDENT LIVING	CAMPUS INCLUSION

89

students with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities have been enrolled in a ND IPSE since 2010.



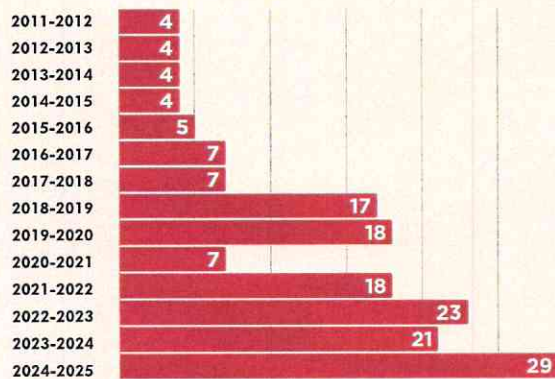
North Dakota's first IPSE program started in 2010 and is currently serving 15 students.

IMPCCT HAS DEVELOPED FOUR PROGRAMS, INCLUDING:

- Transition and Access Program (TAP) at North Dakota State University
- Viking Pathway Program at Valley City State University

These programs are thriving and ready for growth! With a strong foundation and clear vision, they are well-positioned for expansion in the coming years.

ANNUAL IMPACT: STUDENTS SERVED IN OUR PROGRAMS



Total Number of Students Served in ND IPSE Programs

EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES



96% of students who graduated from ND's college programs are employed

INDEPENDENT LIVING

60% of students with ID who graduated from ND's college programs are **living independently**.



THE POWER OF PEER-TO-PEER CONNECTION



Peer mentorship promotes growth by offering students support from their college peers, while simultaneously allowing mentors to grow by developing valuable **leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills**. This collaborative approach strengthens the entire community, **benefiting everyone involved**.

HIGHER COMPLETION RATES AT ND IPSE PROGRAMS

IPSE Programs in ND have a **51% completion rate**, while other 2-year colleges have a 34% completion rate (National Center for Education Statistics).



<https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=40>



This project is funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Post-Secondary Programs: #407A200032