

Graduation, College, and Employment Outcomes for CTE Students with an Identified Disability

Students with an identified disability (SWD) who participate in career and technical education (CTE) in high school tend to have better graduation and employment outcomes than SWD who do not participate in CTE. We use administrative data from Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Washington state to analyze the relationship between CTE participation and later outcomes for SWD across different educational policy settings and for students receiving special education services for different disabilities.

What did we learn?

CTE concentration rates for SWD vary across Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Washington state, and by disability type.

Concentration rates for students with specific learning disabilities, communication disorders, or health disorders are relatively high in all three states.

SWD who concentrate in CTE are more likely to graduate from high school than non-concentrators.

College attendance for SWD who graduate from high school is positively associated with CTE concentration in Tennessee, negatively associated in Massachusetts, and varies by disability type in Washington state.

SWD who concentrate in CTE and graduate from high school are more likely to be employed at least half-time in the year after graduation compared to non-concentrators.

What are the policy implications?

Policymakers should have a vested interest in developing data systems and analyses to investigate trends in SWD who do and do not concentrate in CTE in their own educational context.

Students with identified lower-incidence disabilities might benefit from interventions to improve access and advising to pursue CTE.

Differences in the needs of individual students, and the use of CTE to meet those needs, should be differentiated by disability and state context.

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Published

May 2022

What questions did we answer?

1. How do CTE concentration rates for SWD vary across states and by disability type?
2. Are SWD who concentrate in CTE more likely to graduate from high school than non-concentrators? How do the findings differ by disability type?
3. Are SWD who concentrate in CTE more likely to attend college than non-concentrators? How do the findings differ by disability type?
4. Are SWD who concentrate in CTE more likely to be employed at least half-time in the year after high school graduation than non-concentrators? How do the findings differ by disability type?

What data did we use?

We used high school, postsecondary, and employment administrative data from Massachusetts, Tennessee, and Washington. Our analysis sample is limited to students enrolled in high school for at least four consecutive years. We focus on disability identifications as of Grade 9. We define high school graduation as graduating within five years of the first year of ninth grade.

Why is this issue important?

For SWD, there are important differences across states and disability identifications in the association between CTE concentration and high school graduation, college attendance, and employment after high school. These differences suggest that CTE policymakers and researchers should not consider SWD as a monolith for the purpose of policy and research but rather as representing a broad array of identified disability categories with different trends and needs. It also suggests that innovative policies at all administrative levels are needed to support these broad outcomes for SWD.

Want to learn more?

A report is available at
gpl.gsu.edu/gpl-publications

The **Career & Technical Education Policy Exchange (CTEx)** is a component of the **Georgia Policy Labs (GPL)**, a research collaboration between Georgia State University and a variety of government agencies committed to leveraging the power of data to drive policy and programmatic decisions that lift children, students, and families—especially those experiencing vulnerabilities.

Suggested citation

Carruthers, C. K., Dougherty, S., McGuinness, S., Payne, S., & Theobald, R. (2022). *Graduation, College, and Employment Outcomes for CTE Students with an Identified Disability*. Georgia Policy Labs.