

Rick Newell: Self Advocate – Inclusive College and Employment First Policy Bill

SB 16-077

"Mr. Chair Neville, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to present to you today. My name is Rick Newell. I am a self-advocate representing inclusive college. I am the first student enrolled in the Inclusive Higher Education Certificate Program at Metropolitan State University. I'm here today to speak in support of this bill because unemployment rates for individuals with disabilities is so high. The Core State Advisory Group in this bill will work to suggest solutions that increase the number of students with disabilities leaving high school with acceptance to post secondary education, and I believe that post-secondary education is important and essential to the success of many young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as they seek competitive integrated employment.

I'd like to share a little bit of my story with you.

When I was Junior in High School, I was told I couldn't go to college because I have disabilities and cannot pass the college entrance exams. And there weren't any inclusive post-secondary education programs in Colorado for students like me.

Until now.

As of Aug 17, 2015, we now have an inclusive college certificate program in Colorado. I attend Metro State and I am taking Hospitality and computer classes. I am also a member of the Metro State Men's choir.

What young person doesn't want a chance to live life to the fullest of his or her abilities? Until recently, Colorado students who have an intellectual disability lacked that opportunity. Most faced one of three futures after high school: staying at home with a parent; attending taxpayer-supported daycare centers; or working at a low-skill, low paying supported jobs. But now there is another option – Inclusive College which will lead to "real work for real pay".

We now have a pilot program in Colorado to allow individuals with I/DD to attend higher education, but these opportunities aren't available to everyone in the state yet. The Core State Advisory Group will be able to examine national trends, evaluate the successes of this pilot program and explore ways to make college available to more of our students throughout the state, and make suggestions on filling in the gaps."

As you can see on the hand out I gave you....

*There are many benefits to inclusive higher education resulting in meaningful employment.*

*Did you know that without higher education and improved rates of employment, the estimated cost to taxpayers for lifelong warehousing of adults who have an intellectual disability is \$1.5 million dollars per person?*

*Research shows 92% of adults who have an intellectual disability (IDD) and NO college experience are unemployed.*

*Here's the good news: 87% of adults who have an intellectual disability and college experience are employed or in job training.*

I'd like to share a quote with you: "Data from the national vocational rehabilitation database (RSA 911) show that youth with IDD who participated in postsecondary education were **25 percent** more likely to leave vocational rehabilitation services with a paid job and earn a **73 percent higher weekly income**," (Migliore, Mank, Grossi & Rogan, 2007).

I share my story today because all students with disabilities, like me, should be able to go to college, if they want to, and work in a career that is meaningful to them. Instead of a bridge to nowhere, inclusive college provides a way to bridge the gap from secondary education to meaningful, competitive, integrated employment.

I am in full support of Senate Bill 077. With parents, advocates, and people with disabilities working together with the already existing Core State Advisory group, solutions to increasing these opportunities for persons with disabilities can be found. Please assume competence and assume employability. We want to work.

I thank you for your time.