

BREAKING THE SCHOOL BUS TO COUCH CYCLE:

PROVIDING FULL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES



DISENGAGED

Every year, the Kentucky Post School Outcomes Center (KyPSO) interviews students who had an IEP when they exited high school. The study seeks to understand how and what students are doing one year after graduation. Since 2014, the number of students with disabilities who report they are neither working nor attending any kind of postsecondary education or training program has remained fairly consistent—around 30%.

Nationally, the youth disconnection rate is 11.2 percent, or one in nine young people as reported by Measure of America.* Disengaged youth are at higher risk for physical and mental health problems, substance abuse, incarceration, and long term unemployment. This is not the future we want to create.

Too many of Kentucky's young adults with disabilities go from their school bus to the couch after graduation.

*<https://measureofamerica.org/youth-disconnection-2020/>

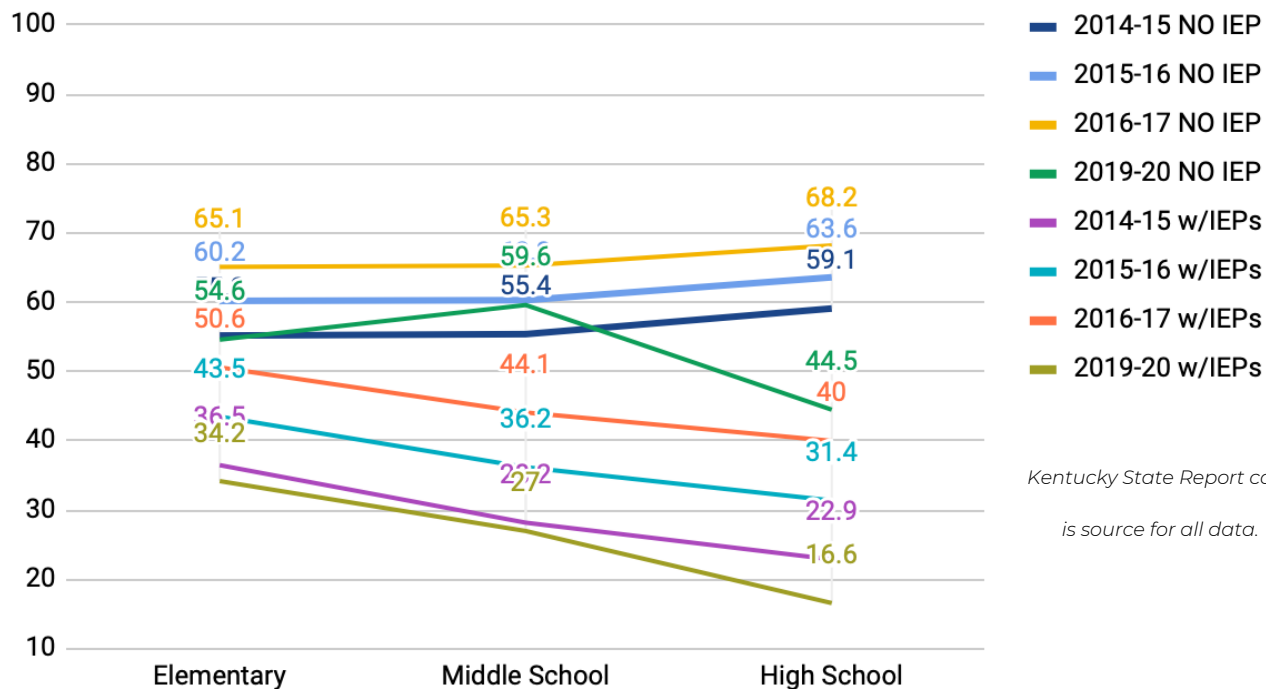
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Approximately 30% of former students report being unengaged in any post school outcome.

<http://www.kypso.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2018-Annual-Report.pdf>

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KY Performance Goals for Reading Proficiency



PLANTING THE SEEDS

A tendency to view these students primarily through the narrow lens of their disabilities unfortunately constrains their futures and leads to lower expectations. State goals for reading provide insight into the long term impact of assumptions which begin early in the student's education and persist through graduation.

For example, goals for students with disabilities begin at substantially lower levels (36.5% in 2014) than corresponding goals for their peers (55.2% in 2014). With the exception of 2019-20, reading targets for students without IEPs increase slightly as they progress through the grades.

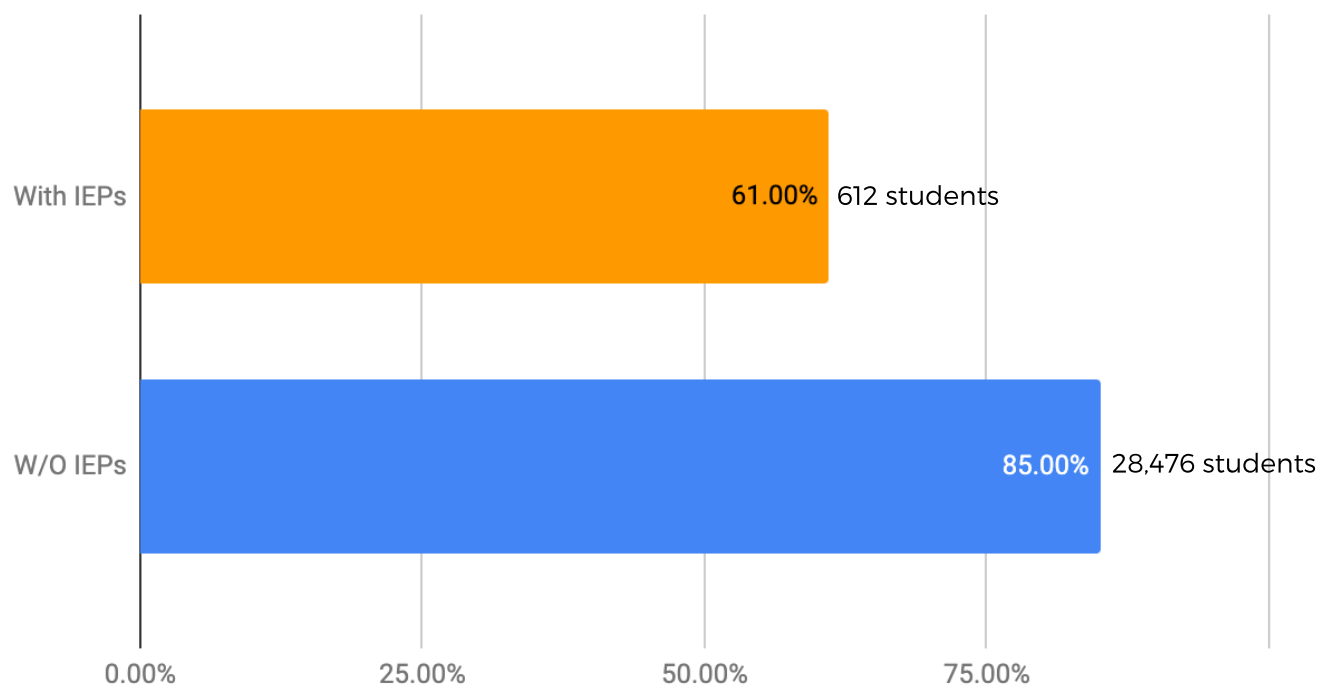
In sharp contrast, for every year historically, as well as for goals set through 2030, the expectation for students with IEPs is that reading proficiency will **decline** as they move from elementary to middle school and middle to high school.

BEARING FRUIT

While Kentucky has successfully prioritized expanding access to the many and varied educational opportunities offered throughout the Commonwealth, students with disabilities participate at much lower rates in academic programs like dual credit, AP or IB coursework and internships. These are exactly the kinds of opportunities which can increase student engagement both during and after secondary school and lead to better postsecondary outcomes, including meaningful employment—whether or not the student chooses to continue their education.

The good news is that when they do participate, students with disabilities demonstrate their capacity for success as shown in the graph below.

2019 Dual Credit Completion



Source: https://www.kyschoolreportcard.com/organization/20/educational_opportunity/advanced_coursework/dual_credit?year=2019

THE DISABILITY PAY GAP

K-12 education provides an essential platform from which a student is poised to launch their post secondary life. The ability to be meaningfully employed, engaged in their communities, and as self sufficient as possible is, to a large degree, a function of educational opportunities and outcomes. Faced with a future in which, on average, they will earn just 67¢ for every \$1 earned by their peers, students with disabilities cannot afford to miss out on the full range of educational programs and options to which all students deserve equitable access.



<https://www.air.org/resource/uneven-playing-field-lack-equal-pay-people-disabilities>

ALL MEANS ALL

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Making dual-credit programs accessible to all Kentucky students is a priority for my administration because it gives students a jump start on their postsecondary education path, whether that is a four-year university or technical school, and their careers.

Gov. Andy Beshear, 2/27/2020

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<https://kentucky.gov/Pages/Activity-stream.aspx?n=EducationCabinet&prId=391>

Dual credit programming is a valuable lens through which to view the landscape of possibilities. By changing our focus and taking a wide angle perspective, we can view each individual as what they in fact are—a student first and foremost. In recent years, Kentucky's legislature and governors have made funding dual credit scholarship and expanding access a priority. Dual credit is no longer only for advanced or gifted students. It is for all students.

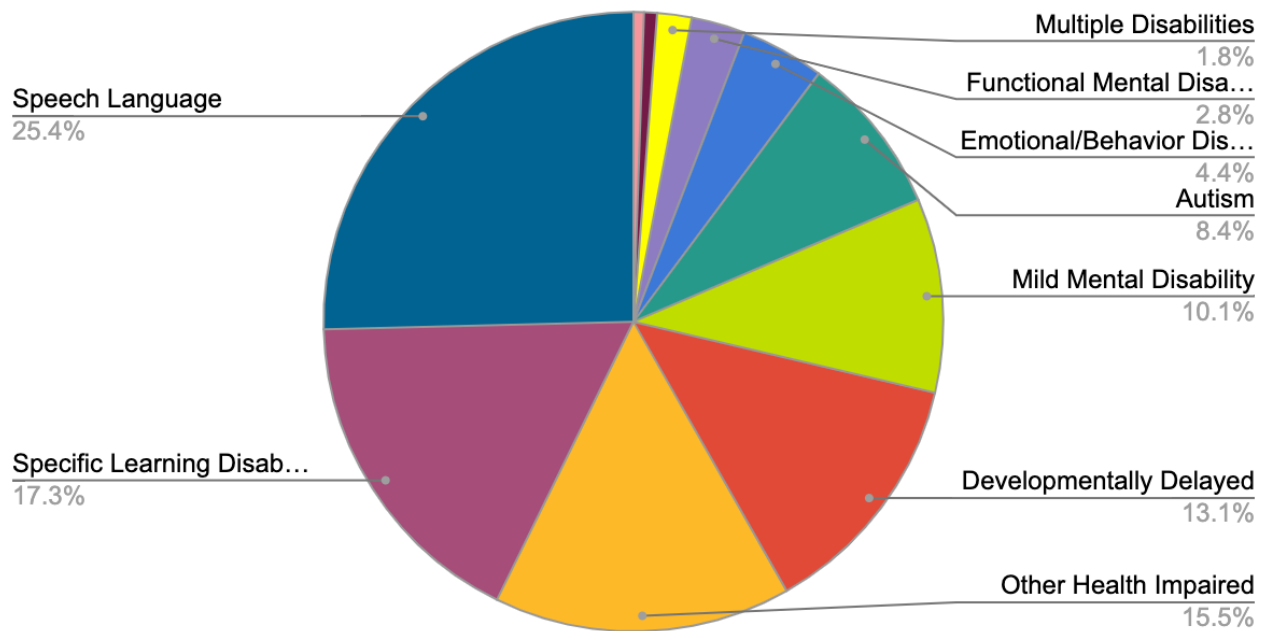
The drive to encourage exposure to college level coursework while in high school is firmly based on data which show that people with a postsecondary degree earn more and have more secure futures. Why are students with disabilities being left out of this equation?

However, the Kentucky Department of Education Report Card data point to significant disparities in participation rates that cannot be explained merely as a function of ability.

ALL MEANS ALL

2019-20 KY Students w/IEPs

104,359



The overwhelming majority of students with disabilities are able to participate in the general education setting and, in fact, they do. With their accommodations and individual education plans, they are equally able to participate in the full range of opportunities offered to all other students. To condition their participation on giving up their accommodations is a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

SNAPSHOT

2019-20 KY Students
with Disabilities



468 "2E"

**TWICE EXCEPTIONAL
DISABILITIES + GIFTED**

Yet only 1.5% participated in AP classes while 19.8% of their peers without disabilities did.

>65%

**IN GENERAL ED MOST
OF THE DAY**

Yet just 5% participated in dual credit classes while 18% of their peers without disabilities did.

> 98%

**WILL GRADUATE WITH
A REGULAR DIPLOMA**


Yet, 30% will go from their school bus to the couch after graduation. while fewer than 13% of their peers will be disengaged.

WHAT IS GETTING IN THE WAY? HOW DO WE SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

1. ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT ABILITY; CHANGE THE ASSUMPTIONS

Anne Donnellan, a special education educator and researcher urges that educational decisions be based on assumptions which, "if incorrect, will have the least dangerous effect on the student".

Donnellan, A. M. (1984). The Criterion of the Least Dangerous Assumption. Behavioral Disorders, 9(2), 141-150. p.142.



**WHICH IS THE
LEAST DANGEROUS
ASSUMPTION?**

<p>We assumed he could learn, so we gave him every opportunity. And it turns out he couldn't</p>	VS.	<p>We assumed he could NOT learn, so we did not give him the opportunity. But it turns out he COULD learn</p>
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source: Anne Donnellan, 1984

WHAT IS GETTING IN THE WAY? HOW DO WE SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

2. NOT ON OUR RADAR; "BAKE IN" CONSIDERATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Too often we do not consider implications for students with disabilities when developing policy or designing programs. Dual credit is a case in point. Or we do not provide data or sufficiently detailed data (on Section 504 students, for example). Every single education policy should include an impact statement regarding how students with disabilities will participate.



3. A LACK OF EXPOSURE; COMMUNICATE OPPORTUNITIES TO ALL STUDENTS

Students with disabilities do not always learn about opportunities like internships or accelerated course options. They are often not invited to college awareness fairs. IEP teams or guidance counselors may not be aware that these opportunities can be included on a student's course of study. Some students have been told that they may not be included or that in order to take an AP class, they must give up their IEP. This is wrong.

WHAT IS GETTING IN THE WAY?

HOW DO WE SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

4. PRACTICES THAT LIMIT OPPORTUNITY; UPDATE PRACTICES TO ENSURE THEY ARE EQUITABLE

Selection criteria may inadvertently screen out qualified students with disabilities. For example, if a program requires that a student demonstrate they are "well organized," a student with an executive function disorder or ADD/ADHD ("other health impairment") would likely not qualify—nor would a lot of other teenagers (and some adults)! Replace practices such as these with alternative ways to demonstrate readiness and ability. Check to be sure the school's SBDM addresses the full range of educational opportunities and clearly provides for how **all** underrepresented populations, including students with disabilities will participate.

Are students with disabilities at a disadvantage because of transportation issues or are they being asked to relinquish the special ed services in their IEP or accommodations in a Section 504 plan as a function of the class location?

Each of these serves as a barrier to access for a student with disabilities and may not be necessary.

WHAT IS GETTING IN THE WAY? HOW DO WE SOLVE THE PROBLEM?

5. ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT POLICY; COMPLIANCE IS THE EXPECTATION, NOT THE DESTINATION.

The regulatory framework that underpins secondary and postsecondary obligations with respect to students with disabilities is complex. There are, however opportunities to be creative and to collaborate to ensure both access and compliance. At least one state (MN) has enacted a regulation explicitly requiring the implementation of of an IEP in a dual credit class.

A first step would be to ensure a model ***Memorandum of Understanding*** (MoU) which, at a minimum, would specify how students with disabilities will participate and be served. (In fact, at least one KY university has included such a statement.) There is considerable variation right now in the MoUs between secondary and postsecondary partners.

It is important to put into context the intent of these programs. What is our goal? Are we interested in facilitating the student towards a path to as full and rewarding a life as possible? If so, creative collaboration can resolve many of the perceived implementation challenges. Thus far, there is no record of any school district, college or university being sanctioned or losing accreditation or funding as a result of serving a qualified high school student with disabilities.

The costs of not doing so are great. The price paid is dear quite steep—measured not only in dollars lost to the community, state, and nation but most importantly to the individual student faced with a curtailed potential for a life of greater need, dependence and less fulfillment than might have been achieved. We all lose when the gifts and contributions these young people have to offer us and themselves are squandered—on the couch.

RE-IMAGINE SPECIAL EDUCATION



JackBeNimble is committed to the idea that all students, regardless of ability, deserve an education that works for them. Our mission is to engage communities in coming together to reimagine special education in a way that works for all stakeholders—beginning of course, with the student, and including the student's family and educators as well as employers, community members and policymakers.

For more information, please visit jackbenimble.org or contact jude@jackbenimble.org.

Not every child has an equal talent or an equal ability or equal motivation, but they should have the equal right to develop their talent and their ability and their motivation, to make something of themselves.

John F. Kennedy