



# **Students with Disabilities at Maryland Colleges and Universities**

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## Introduction and Background

The National Center for Education Statistics recently reported that the population of students with disabilities in higher education has grown significantly. In the 2019-2020 year alone, some 21% of undergraduates and 11% of graduate students self-identified as having a disability<sup>1</sup>. Despite this increase in population, these students face persistent challenges in retention and graduation.

This annual report provides data and analysis on enrollment, retention, graduation, and transfer for students who registered with disability services<sup>2</sup> at Maryland colleges and universities. In order to gain insight into the postsecondary experiences of students with disabilities in Maryland, the Maryland Higher Education Commission (MHEC) partnered with the Maryland Department of Disabilities and the state's higher education institutions to create a survey used by colleges and universities<sup>3</sup> to collect these data in aggregate form. MHEC encourages the use of these data to improve policies and practices to support the success of students with disabilities.

As noted on the Maryland Department of Disabilities website<sup>4</sup>, "Federal law and Maryland state laws require that all students with disabilities be provided a 'free, appropriate public education' that helps them learn and prepares them for employment and daily living. This means local public school districts will provide individualized or special education and related services to students with disabilities from birth until they leave high school. Students who leave high school prior to their 22nd birthday will no longer be eligible for these services."

Under these laws, students in higher education must self-identify as having a disability (with appropriate documentation) to receive necessary supports and accommodations. Evidence shows that less than a third of students who identify in K-12 school as having a disability go on to self-identify as such in post-secondary education<sup>5</sup>. As self-reporting is the only way to identify these students, figures in this report should not be interpreted as representative of all students with a disability in higher education<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). Table 311.10. Number and percentage distribution of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions, by level, disability status, and selected student characteristics: Academic year 2019–20 [Data table]. In *Digest of education statistics*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved February 3, 2026, from [https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22\\_311.10.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d22/tables/dt22_311.10.asp)

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this report, the terms disability services and disability services office will be used throughout for consistency. It is important to note that the name of this office can vary from campus to campus.

<sup>3</sup> Surveys are administered annually to Maryland's 16 community colleges, 13 four-year public institutions, and 13 state-aided independent colleges and universities.

<sup>4</sup> <https://mdod.maryland.gov/education/Pages/Special-Education-Servcies.aspx> and <https://mdod.maryland.gov/employment/Documents/Post-Secondary.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Waves 2, 3, 4, and 5 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2003, 2005, 2007, and 2009 and Newman, Lynn, Mary Wagner, Anne-Marie Knokey, Camille Marder, Katherine Nagle, Debra Shaver, and Xin Wei. "The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years after High School: A Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). NCSER 2011-3005." National Center for Special Education Research (2011). Retrieved September 14, 2017 from <https://ies.ed.gov/ncser/pubs/20113005/pdf/20113005.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> For citations and more complete background information on students with disabilities in Maryland and the nation, please refer to [previous MHEC reports on this subject](#). For a deeper discussion about data in these reports not representing all disabled students, please refer to our [2018 Report on Students with Disabilities at Maryland Colleges and Universities](#).

## Findings from This Report

In fiscal year 2024<sup>7</sup>, 21,790 undergraduate and 3,234 graduate students registered as students with disabilities<sup>8</sup>. This constitutes 5.7% of all students enrolled in that fiscal year and represents 6.1% of undergraduate and 3.7% of graduate student enrollees.

*Table 1 Trends in Disability Support Registration among Public and State-Aided Institutions in Maryland*

<b>Academic Level</b>	<b>FY2020</b>	<b>FY2021</b>	<b>FY2022</b>	<b>FY2023</b>	<b>FY2024</b>
<i>Total Undergraduate Enrollment</i>	364,189	353,156	333,690	338,716	354,425
<i>Registered with Disability Services</i>	15,873	15,937	17,174	18,234	21,790
<i>Proportion of Undergraduates Registered</i>	4.4%	4.5%	5.1%	5.4%	6.1%
<i>Total Graduate Enrollment</i>	88,058	90,832	90,642	89,327	87,962
<i>Registered with Disability Services</i>	1,468	2,024	2,282	2,739	3,234
<i>Proportion of Graduate Students Registered</i>	1.7%	2.2%	2.5%	3.1%	3.7%
<i>Total Overall Enrollment</i>	452,247	443,988	424,332	428,043	442,387
<i>Total Registered with Disability Services</i>	17,341	17,961	19,456	20,973	25,024
<i>Proportion of Total Registered</i>	3.8%	4.0%	4.6%	4.9%	5.7%

## Four-Year Institutions<sup>9</sup>

In fiscal year 2024, Maryland's four-year public and state-aided independent institutions reported 16,702 students registered with disability services, a significant 24.4% increase over the previous year. This growth has nearly doubled since fiscal year 2020, up 77% from the 9,436 students reported that year.

Four-year public institutions accounted for 66.2% of these students who sought disability services, enrolling 9,356 undergraduates (56.0% of the four-year total) and 1,701 graduate students (10.2%). State-aided independent institutions accounted for the remaining 33.8%, with 4,112 undergraduates (24.6%) and 1,533 graduate students (9.2%) who sought disability services.

<sup>7</sup> July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024.

<sup>8</sup> Students registered with their institutions' disability services office in this report's analysis include those who have permanent or temporary disabilities.

<sup>9</sup> The Four-Year Institution data do not include all 26 institutions, as the University of Maryland, Baltimore is not included in the retention and graduation rate data. It does not enroll first-time, full-time undergraduate students and therefore cannot report on the outcomes of those students.

Table 2 Overall Enrollment and Disability Support Registrations among Four-Year Institutions in Maryland

	FY2020	FY2021	FY2022	FY2023	FY2024
<b>Public Four-Year</b>					
Undergraduate Students					
<i>Overall Enrollment</i>	176,058	172,668	168,408	172,990	177,087
<i>Registered with Disability Services</i>	5,141	5,368	6,660	7,118	9,356
<i>Proportion of Undergraduates Registered</i>	2.9%	3.1%	4.0%	4.1%	5.3%
Graduate Students					
<i>Overall Enrollment</i>	51,493	50,027	47,631	47,591	48,030
<i>Registered with Disability Services</i>	809	927	1,204	1,357	1,701
<i>Proportion of Graduate Students Registered</i>	1.6%	1.9%	2.5%	2.9%	3.5%
<b>State-Aided Independents</b>					
Undergraduate Students					
<i>Overall Enrollment</i>	29,073	28,020	28,047	27,491	27,955
<i>Registered with Disability Services</i>	2,827	3,058	3,236	3,573	4,112
<i>Proportion of Undergraduates Registered</i>	9.7%	10.9%	11.5%	13.0%	14.7%
Graduate Students					
<i>Overall Enrollment</i>	36,565	40,805	43,011	41,736	39,932
<i>Registered with Disability Services</i>	659	1,097	1,078	1,382	1,533
<i>Proportion of Graduate Students Registered</i>	1.8%	2.7%	2.5%	3.3%	3.8%

Maryland’s four-year public and state-aided independent institutions also reported on the second-year retention rates of the first-time, full-time, degree- or certificate-seeking students who entered as freshman in Fall 2023 and who were registered with disability services. A student counts as retained if they return to the institution the following fall after entering as a freshman.

*Table 3 Comparing Retention Rates among Students with Disability Support at Four-Year Institutions in Maryland<sup>10</sup>*

	<b>FY2020</b>	<b>FY2021</b>	<b>FY2022</b>	<b>FY2023</b>
<b>Public 4 Year</b>				
<i>Overall Retention to 2<sup>nd</sup> year</i>	84.8%	83.7%	83.6%	83.3%
<i>2<sup>nd</sup> year Retention for Students Registered with Disability Services</i>	84.4%	82.6%	83.8%	86.9%
<b>State-Aided Independents</b>				
<i>Overall Retention to 2<sup>nd</sup> year</i>	83.0%	83.0%	85.1%	83.7%
<i>2<sup>nd</sup> year Retention for Students Registered with Disability Services</i>	82.8%	81.7%	83.0%	84.1%

At four-year public institutions, the 2023 cohort was retained at 86.9%, a 3.1 percentage point increase from the previous year. This rate was also 3.6 percentage points higher than all fall 2023 first-time, full-time students at public four-year institutions. At state-aided independent institutions, the fall 2023 cohort was retained at 84.1%, 1.1 percentage points more than the year before. This retention rate was comparable to the overall retention rate of the fall 2023 general population.

Additionally, institutions reported on the six-year graduation outcomes of first-time, full-time degree or certificate seeking students who first enrolled in Fall 2018. These data reveal that among students at four-year public institutions who registered with disability services, 61.9% graduated within six years. This is 7.0 percentage points lower than the 68.9% graduation rate at public four-year institutions<sup>11</sup> At state-aided independent institutions, only 67.7% of the fall 2018 cohort (registered with disability services) graduated within six years. This is 4.7 percentage points lower than the 72.4% graduation rate at state-independent institutions. These data are indicative of a gap in graduation outcomes among students with disabilities at four-year institutions.

*Table 4 Comparing Graduation Rates among Students with Disability Support at Four-Year Institutions in Maryland*

	<b>FY2017</b>	<b>FY2018</b>
<b>Public 4 Year</b>		
<i>Overall 6-Year Graduation Rate</i>	67.3%	68.9%
<i>6-year Graduation Rate for Students Registered with Disability Services</i>	62.6%	61.9%
<b>State-Aided Independents</b>		
<i>Overall 6-Year Graduation Rate</i>	73.4%	72.4%
<i>6-Year Graduation Rate for Students Registered with Disability Services</i>	67.1%	67.7%

<sup>10</sup> Retention rates at four-year colleges and universities give the percentage of a given cohort of first-time, full-time undergraduate students who enter in a given fall (cohort year) returned to the same institution for the following fall. Due to an incomplete data submission to MHEC, data for Coppin State University are not included in the 2020 cohort retention figures for all undergraduates and those registered with disability services. Statewide retention rates are obtained from *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* (IPEDS), U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Fall 2023 cohort data retrieved January 2026 from <http://nces.ed.gov>.

<sup>11</sup> *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* (IPEDS), U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. Washington, DC. Retrieved January 2026 from <http://nces.ed.gov>

## Community Colleges

In fiscal year 2024, 8,322 community college students registered with disability services, representing 5.6% of total enrollment. While this proportion has remained relatively stable over the last five years, overall community college enrollment has decreased during this same period. The raw number of students seeking disability services has continued to rise—increasing from 7,905 in fiscal year 2020 to 8,322 in fiscal year 2024. This growth suggests that a larger share of the student body is actively seeking support, even as the overall student population shrinks.

*Table 5 Overall Enrollment and Disability Support Registrations among Community Colleges in Maryland*

	<b>FY2020</b>	<b>FY2021</b>	<b>FY2022</b>	<b>FY2023</b>	<b>FY2024</b>
<b>Community Colleges</b>					
<i>Overall Enrollment</i>	159,058	152,468	137,235	138,235	149,383
<i>Registered with Disability Services</i>	7,905	7,511	7,278	7,543	8,322
<i>Proportion of Undergraduates Registered</i>	5.0%	4.9%	5.3%	5.5%	5.6%

Maryland’s community colleges report student outcome using the Degree Progress Analysis (DPA) model<sup>12</sup>. The table below compares DPA outcomes for all students, including a subset registered with disability services. The data show that for Fall 2020, 58.9% of students who registered with disability services offices either graduated or transferred within four years after initial enrollment. This rate was a half of a percentage point higher than the overall cohort and has also steadily increased over the past five years.

*Table 6 Degree Progress Analysis of Students with Disability Support*

	<b>2016 Cohort</b>	<b>2017 Cohort</b>	<b>2018 Cohort</b>	<b>2019 Cohort</b>	<b>2020 Cohort</b>
<b>Graduated and/or Transferred</b>					
<i>Statewide</i>	52.6%	53.8%	52.4%	53.6%	58.4%
<i>Students Registered with Disability Services</i>	44.5%	47.2%	47.0%	50.1%	58.9%
<b>Successful Persister</b>					
<i>Statewide</i>	71.3%	72.7%	71.8%	72.4%	76.4%
<i>Students Registered with Disability Services</i>	73.9%	75.3%	77.4%	75.2%	81.4%

<sup>12</sup> The Degree Progress Analysis is a cohort model used to report the progress toward degree completion of community college students. It incorporates measures of success including completion and transfer rates to other institutions and successful persisting as indicators of progress. Specifically, the measure tracks the success of first-time full- and part-time students over four years who have attempted at least 18 credit hours within the first two years of initial enrollment.

This table also shows persistence rates. A successful persister rate reflects the proportion of students within the cohort who, within four years, graduate or transfer, are still enrolled at the institution, or who complete at least 30 credits or more with a GPA of 2.00 or better<sup>13</sup>. Community college students from the fall 2020 cohort who registered with disability services offices have a successful persister rate of 81.4%, which is 6.2 percentage points higher than Fall 2019. This rate was also 5.0 percentage points higher than the fall 2020 statewide value of 76.4%

## Conclusion

Students with disabilities represent a vital demographic within Maryland’s higher education landscape. The data from fiscal year 2024 highlight some striking trends and important wins among these students and the institutions that support them.

**Increased Needs in Disability Support:** Between fiscal years 2020 and 2024, students at four-year institutions registered with their disability services have nearly doubled from 9,436 to 16,702. This represents a 77% increase in five years – with undergraduate students up by 69% (from 7,968 to 13,468) and graduate students up by 120% (from 1,468 to 3,234). While slight, the number of students registered at community colleges have also increased by 5.3% from 7,905 in FY2020 to 8,322 in FY2024. This upward trend mirrors national data, with the percentage of college students registering for disability services almost doubling in the last two decades<sup>14</sup>. These data also strongly indicate a critical need for more disability support among students in higher education institutions in Maryland.

**Gaps Persist at Four-Year Institutions:** While the Fall 2023 cohort of students registered with disability services showed higher retention rates than previous year, a gap in six-year graduation rates persists. At public four-year institutions, the six-year graduation rate for the Fall 2018 students registered with disability services was 7.0 percentage points lower than the public four-year general population; at state-aided independent institutions, that gap was 4.7 percentage points when compared to their state-aided peers. These data suggest that while institutions appear to remove early barriers to retention, more can be done to help students with disabilities reach the finish line.

**Positive Outcomes at Community Colleges:** Students registered with disability services at community colleges have continued to show improved success outcomes in graduation and transfer and in successful persister rates. The Fall 2020 cohort, for example, graduated and transferred at almost the same rate as their peers. In contrast, the Fall 2016 (five cohorts earlier) cohort’s rate was 8.1 percentage points less than the general population. Community college students registered with disability services have also continued to surpass their peers in successful persistence. The Fall 2020 cohort not only showed higher persistence compared to the previous cohort, its successful persister rate was five percentage points greater than the general population. These data indicate that support services provided by community colleges have allowed students with disabilities to perform at the same level as their peers.

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<sup>13</sup> Students included in the graduation/transfer rate are also included in the successful persister rate.

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2023, July 25). *For Disability Pride Month—we highlight our work on college campus access issues*. <https://www.gao.gov/blog/disability-pride-month-we-highlight-our-work-college-campus-access-issues>

It is critical to note that the data from this report reflect a subset of students who have self-identified as needing disability services. Research show that many students who require support do not necessarily receive them when they transition to college<sup>15</sup>. Therefore, while the findings from these data are promising, caution should be used in interpreting the results.

In summary, the 2024 findings reveal that while more students needing disability services are entering Maryland's higher education system, institutions are actively rising to meet this demand. Trend data across four-year institutions and community colleges demonstrate that students with disabilities can persist and thrive academically when provided with the appropriate support. Ultimately, with the right support, these students perform on par with their peers.

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<sup>15</sup> Mowreader, A. (2024, June 7). *Supporting students with disabilities in degree attainment*. *Inside Higher Ed*. [https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/college-experience/2024/06/07/4-barriers-accommodation-students-disabilities?utm\\_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm\\_campaign=ebca066b70-S2\\_DailyNews\\_COPY\\_01&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_-284161f8c0-%5bLIST\\_EMAIL\\_ID%5d&mc\\_cid=ebca066b70&mc\\_eid=05e0f0b530](https://www.insidehighered.com/news/student-success/college-experience/2024/06/07/4-barriers-accommodation-students-disabilities?utm_source=Inside+Higher+Ed&utm_campaign=ebca066b70-S2_DailyNews_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-284161f8c0-%5bLIST_EMAIL_ID%5d&mc_cid=ebca066b70&mc_eid=05e0f0b530)