

Study: Enrolment and persistence in postsecondary education among high school graduates in British Columbia: A focus on special needs status

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Postsecondary education plays a key role in individuals' quality of life by helping them secure better jobs and a higher income. For persons with disabilities, completing postsecondary education may be especially important because it helps narrow the gap in employment and earnings between those with and without disabilities. However, persons with disabilities may face barriers and additional challenges in their transition to postsecondary education.

The study "[Enrolment and Persistence in Postsecondary Education Among High School Graduates in British Columbia: A Focus on Special Needs Status](#)" looks at the transition to postsecondary education for five cohorts of high school graduates with and without special needs in British Columbia.

The study reveals that about 8 in 10 high school graduates in British Columbia enrolled in postsecondary education in Canada, but this proportion was driven by graduates without special needs. Graduates with gifted status were more likely to transition to postsecondary education immediately (about 70% to 80%) or within six years (about 90%) and graduates with mental health-related or cognitive needs (about 40% for immediate transition or about 70% within six years) were less likely to do so, compared with graduates without special needs (50% to 60% immediately, about 80% within six years). Graduates with physical or sensory needs were also less likely to transition to postsecondary education within six years (about 70% to 80%).

Graduates with gifted status were more likely to enrol in undergraduate degree programs (about 75% to 80%), with about 40% to 50% of them across all five cohorts enrolling in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields of study. In contrast, graduates with mental health-related or cognitive needs and those with physical or sensory needs were more likely to enrol in college-level certificate programs, particularly in non-STEM (other) fields of study (about 70% to 75%). Lastly, graduates with mental health-related or cognitive needs (about 70%) were less likely to persist two years after postsecondary enrolment compared with graduates without special needs (about 85%).

Graduates with mental health-related or cognitive needs were less likely to transition to postsecondary education immediately, have first-time enrolment in postsecondary education, and persist two years after their first-time enrolment, even after considering differences in individual characteristics, family background and academic achievement. Overall, high school graduates with special needs in British Columbia, particularly graduates with mental health-related or cognitive needs, may experience different types of barriers in enrolling and persisting in postsecondary education.

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Note to readers

This study draws on administrative data from the British Columbia Ministry of Education, the Postsecondary Student Information System and the T1 Family File within the Education and Labour Market Longitudinal Platform.

The study "[Enrolment and Persistence in Postsecondary Education Among High School Graduates in British Columbia: A Focus on Special Needs Status](#)," part of the *Analytical Studies Branch Research Paper Series* (**11F0019M**), is now available.

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; infostats@statcan.gc.ca) or Media Relations (statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca).