

# UCLA Tarjan Center ACCESS Newsletter

Advancing College Capacity for Equitable Student Success

## WELCOME!

*This newsletter aims to provide a convenient and current resource for information related to postsecondary education for students with developmental disabilities, such as autism and intellectual disability. While our primary focus will be on content relevant to the California Community College system, much of the newsletter will have broader applicability.*



## Funding For Neurodivergent Students in Riverside



The Riverside Community College District (RCCD) recently received a three-year \$1 million grant by Inland Empire Regional K-16 Education Collaborative to develop the Promoting Achievable College Transitions (PACT) program.

The PACT program plans to serve neurodivergent college students, including those on the autism spectrum and/or with ADHD, through tailored supports to enable these students to thrive academically and socially. The PACT team embodies the power of collaboration, with planning conversations bringing together three community college partners, local K-12 districts,

State Council on Developmental Disabilities, Department of Rehabilitation, Autism Society of the Inland Empire, UCLA Tarjan Center, and other community organizations. Michael Peterson, RCCD Executive Director for Adult Education and Community Initiatives, shared that “the excitement and engagement we’re seeing from our partners in the community speaks to the clear need that exists in our community. We intend to meet those needs in new and innovative ways and build something very special.”

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# Autism Acceptance Month: Inclusive Language Guide

## April was Autism Acceptance Month.

To celebrate, we want to talk about ways we can use language to signal inclusion and respect to autism community. Language is important, and always changing. We hope this will help you understand current terms and community preferences, while acknowledging that any individual may have different preferences.

Research suggests that **autistic people and their families prefer identity-first language** (“autistic adults”) over person-first language (“adults with autism”).

The Autism Society of America renamed Autism Awareness Month to **Autism Acceptance Month** to promote understanding, respect, and inclusion of autistic people, instead of simple awareness.

Many prefer the **infinity symbol** to represent autism and its diversity, rather than the puzzle piece, which evokes negative associations and may imply that autistic people are incomplete or a puzzle to be solved.

The term neurodiversity refers to the full range of differences in how brains work, including neurotypical and neurodivergent brains. **Autism is only one form of neurodivergence.**

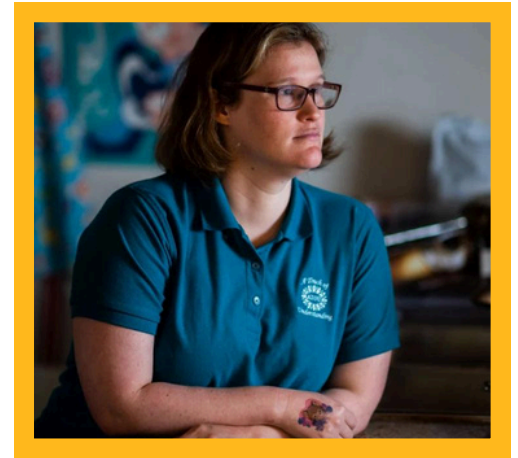
Terms like “high functioning” and “low functioning” to describe autism are often considered outdated, inaccurate, and unhelpful. Instead, talk about the **specific support needs** of an individual.

# Senate Bill 639: Ending Subminimum Wage

For decades, special waivers have allowed employers to pay people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) less than minimum wage for their work. These sheltered work placements are segregated from people without disabilities and often do not provide meaningful training or employment experiences. In 2021, California Senate Bill 639 (SB639) ended subminimum wage, signaling a shift towards equitable employment practices. Under the new law, more than 4,000 people with disabilities in subminimum wage settings in California must be transitioned out by the end of this year - January 1st, 2025.

SB639 will ensure fair wages for 1.8 million working-aged Californians with disabilities, narrowing the income gap between disabled and non-disabled workers. Concerns about the law are often founded in myths. Colleges have always played a pivotal role in training and preparing people for fulfilling careers. Now, because of SB639, California Community Colleges (CCCs) may see an increase in students with IDD as they explore alternative options. Colleges may consider:

1. Investing in professional development related to serving students with IDD
2. Creatively allocating funding or applying for new funding for supports that benefit students with IDD, such as educational coaching.
3. Expanding and creating new programs for students with intellectual disabilities, such as the College to Career (C2C) programs at 8 CCC's.
4. Collaborating with developmental disability service systems, including Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) and Regional Center. For example, the DOR California Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment Project has partnered with the San Diego and North Orange Community College Districts to support transitions from subminimum wage settings to gainful employment through education and training.



**WATCH:** Learn about Jackie's employment story



**READ:** A progress report as of Jan. 2024



# Research Insights: The Benefits of Inclusive Postsecondary Education for Students with Intellectual Disability

The number of inclusive postsecondary education (PSE) programs for students with intellectual disability (ID) is growing. Prior research has shown wide benefits to such programs, including gains in independent living skills, better employment outcomes, and improved social and self-determination skills.

In this study, the authors wanted to look at the effects of inclusive PSE on intellectual functioning or IQ, which is one of the criteria used to diagnose ID. Generally, individuals with IQs in the below average range (<70) who also have challenges with daily living skills qualify for a diagnosis.

Twelve students with mild intellectual disability participated in a PSE program at Bar-Ilan University in Israel. They were assessed at the beginning of the inclusive component of the PSE program, and again after 4.5 years. During those 4+ years, students either

audited inclusive classes with adapted requirements or took inclusive classes for credit. Students received specialized academic supports tailored to their needs and to the classes they enrolled in.

In addition, 12 adults with ID who were matched on demographic characteristics, but not enrolled in PSE, served as the control group. The results showed significant gains in IQ over the 4 years, but only for the students who participated in PSE. Students in the program showed an average increase of 9 points in IQ.

**For six students, the increase in IQ scores after the inclusive college program meant they were no longer in the range for ID.**

These findings underscore the transformative potential of inclusive PSE programs for students with ID.

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[Lifshitz, H., Meirovich, S. S., & Vakil, E. \(2023\). Postsecondary University Education Improves Intelligence of Adult Students with Intellectual Disability: A Preliminary Study. \*European Journal of Special Needs Education\*, 38\(6\), 818-834.](#)



# Reflections with Dr. Olivia Raynor: An Exclusive Interview



Dr. Olivia Raynor, former Director of the UCLA Tarjan Center, reflects on nearly four decades of service in the field of developmental disabilities, shares her hopes for the future, and tells us what she is up to next. Responses have been lightly edited for clarity.

**Q: Congratulations on your retirement! Can you share some of the most memorable moments from your time here?**

*A: I first came to UCLA working clinically as an occupational therapist. Over time, I pursued a Master's at USC in Occupational Therapy and later a doctorate in Educational Psychology at UCLA. It was a learning environment, and one of my memories is of personal*

*and professional evolution. Another significant moment was when I was selected as Director of the Tarjan Center, marking the first time a woman and non-physician held the position.*

**Q: You've been involved in some major initiatives related to postsecondary education and employment here at the Tarjan Center. Could you share any reflections from those projects that you're proud of?**

*To start with a story... Decades ago, a group of parents, led by Hal and Marge Friedman, came to UCLA and said, "we want a college program for students with developmental disabilities." And I admit I was challenged by that vision. Hal said, "Olivia, let's walk around campus" and he painted a picture of what the college experience is: to grow up, to make friends, to find things you're interested in and what you want to be. And his question, "why not students with developmental disabilities?" expanded my vision. I'm forever grateful for that conversation because it led to the planning committee for Pathway at UCLA Extension, a fully inclusive college program. Another thing I'm very proud of is the founding of the National Arts and Disability Center in the early '90s. Up until that point, the arts were only talked about for people with disabilities as a rehabilitative tool... But what about art for art's sake? We developed a resource, information, and training center that provided support and grants that allowed artists with disabilities to pursue their careers. Another highlight was spearheading the California Employment Consortium for Youth, which helped pave the way for California's Employment First policy.*

*And, there are moments where lightning strikes. One such moment was when we scheduled a meeting with the Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) and the California Community College Chancellor's Office to talk about opportunities for college students with developmental disabilities. DOR was already thinking about how they could support individuals with intellectual disabilities, and the Chancellor's Office knew they were serving up to 10,000 students with ID and wanted to better understand their experience and how to support them. So we had terrific partners from the beginning and were able to establish the now 8 College to Career programs in California. One of my long-term goals would be for the college themselves to take ownership of these programs and fully integrate them into the fabric of California's higher education system supports, so they're not separate or "special" programs.*

# Reflections with Dr. Olivia Raynor: An Exclusive Interview

**Q: You've been such a fierce advocate for postsecondary education and employment for people with developmental disabilities. How do you hope that work will grow and develop in the coming years?**

*A: I hope we can broaden of the conceptualization of accommodations beyond what has been historically offered by colleges and expand our view of supports to looking at how do we help all students belong. Campuses overall need to be more accessible and faculty still need education about what's needed to adequately support students with intellectual disability, who we know add breadth and depth to many of the conversations in college classrooms. I think the other real force to make this happen is peer support and inclusion - being parts of clubs, in classes, living in dorms. I'm more optimistic than ever that these things are no longer imagined or aspirational - these things can happen.*



**Q: Reflecting on your experience and advocacy work, what advice would you give to those working to advance opportunities for individuals with disabilities?**

*A: I think we have to be better listeners. We need to bring more professionals into the field that have disabilities themselves - and recognize them as experts to really reflect the knowledge they're bringing. I would also say, learn the foundational knowledge, what has come before you, and the history of the issue that you're interested in. Partner with many, many people - you can be a very powerful advocate by creating a community where you're getting other people excited and enthusiastic to bring their own contributions to the cause. Align yourself immediately with those that you intend to be advocating for. And don't be afraid to course correct and learn from your own advocacy experience.*

**Q: Tell us a little bit about your next steps as you continue to pursue your passions, personal and professional.**

*A: My personal passion is hiking, so you'll see me out there on the Santa Monica Mountains Backbone Trail! I'm also really fortunate to be serving as a consultant for the Department of Developmental Services and in the newly formed California Health and Human Services' Master Plan for Developmental Services. And I have two other areas where I'm actively involved - I am on the leadership team of the California Transition Alliance. And I had the honor of being appointed by Governor Newsom to the California Arts Council, where I am excited to advance inclusion, accessibility, and opportunities for careers in the arts for people with disabilities.*

## LEARN MORE

- [Department of Developmental Services](#)
- [Master Plan for Developmental Services](#)
- [California Transition Alliance](#)
- [California Arts Council](#)



# Resource Spotlight: Autism Goes to College

In the past year, Santa Rosa Junior College and Santa Ana College, have screened the award-winning documentary, *Autism Goes to College*, on campus. The film has sparked conversations on inclusion and neurodiversity among faculty and students. Learn how to [host a screening](#) here.

Watch the trailer:



Beyond the movie, the [Autism Goes to College](#) website offers other resources to support autistic college students, their families, and the colleges who serve them, including:

1

## Podcast

Listen to hear how autistic students and college staff are navigating neurodiversity on campus.

2

## Blog

Read about the lived experiences of autistic students, tips for success, and issues they face.



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