

# Wasted Potential, Broken Dreams

Improving Educational Opportunities and Outcomes for K-12 Students with Disabilities

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Disabled students have significant disadvantages in acquiring the degrees they need to be considered for employment in the current workforce [5]. Disabled people presently have more than double the unemployment rate of those who are not disabled [11]. While the best job prospects are in STEM fields, disabled students are often discouraged from taking or are denied access to those K-12 level classes that would prepare them for post-secondary education and STEM careers [9]. The Page Unified School District does not have a qualified SPED instructor, and other teachers have little or no guidance on how to help disabled students [1]. Teachers and counselors can undergo professional development to improve their abilities to teach and mentor disabled students, greatly enhancing the disabled students' chances for educational and vocational success.

## A Critical Deficiency

In today's world, good-paying unskilled or semi-skilled jobs have evaporated, for the most part taken over by automation [1]. By 2018, it will be necessary to have a post-secondary degree or certificate to even be considered for 63% of all jobs [2]. On this topic there is one more statistic of concern to educators: although a majority of disabled students want to further their education, they enroll in and complete post-secondary studies at only half the rate of their non-disabled peers [6], this despite the fact that within two years of leaving high school, 80% have entered the job market or are preparing to do so [12].