



Expanding Workforce Access

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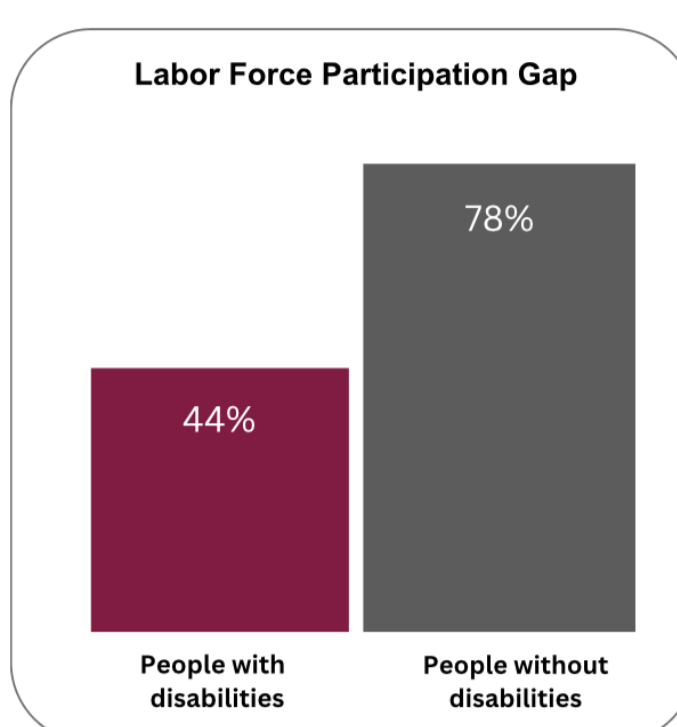
Expanding Workforce Access for New Mexicans with Disabilities

Closing Gaps in Education, Support, and Employment

A strong workforce starts with opportunity, which means ensuring every New Mexican has access to education, training, and meaningful employment. Yet across the state, many individuals with disabilities continue to face barriers that limit participation in the workforce. Addressing gaps in access isn't just about equity; it is essential to building a stronger, more inclusive economy for New Mexico.

Individuals with Disabilities in New Mexico

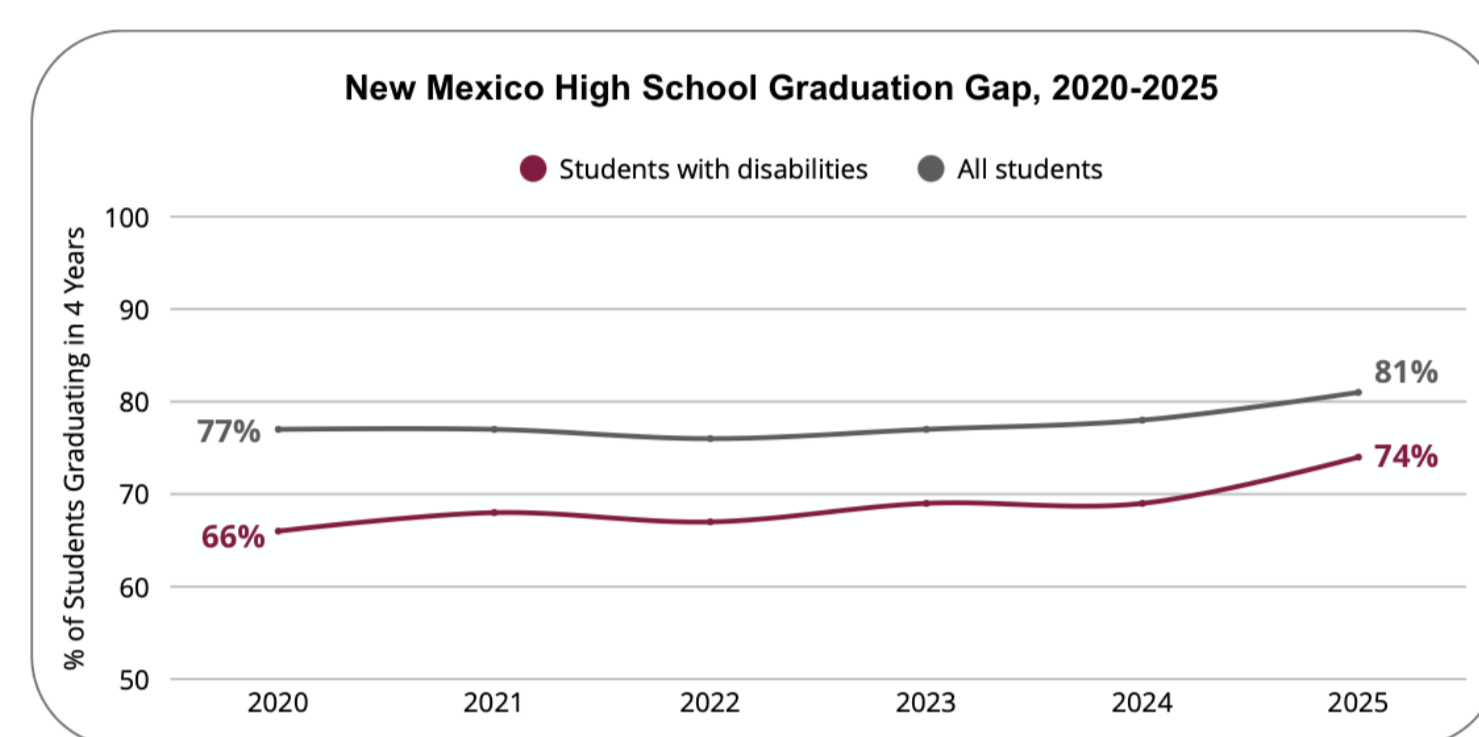
As of 2023, 17% of New Mexicans, approximately 346,122 residents ages 16–64, live with a disability (1). Despite representing a considerable portion of the population, individuals with disabilities continue to face persistent barriers in the labor market. Only 44% of New Mexicans with disabilities participate in the labor force, compared with 78% of those without disabilities. The unemployment rate for people with disabilities is 12%, twice that of non-disabled workers. Together, these indicators reveal a substantial and ongoing employment gap, underscoring the need for continued investment in programs that advance equitable workforce participation.



Source: New Mexico Department of Workforce Solutions, 2025 State of the Workforce Report.

Educational Opportunities

Closing workforce gaps begins with improving educational outcomes. Education strongly influences employment outcomes, and higher levels of attainment lead to greater participation in the workforce and better job opportunities (2). In New Mexico, students with disabilities continue to graduate at lower rates, 74% in 2025 compared to 81% for all students (3).



Source: New Mexico Public Education Department, Webfiles 2020-2025.

Note: "All students" include students with disabilities. The comparison group (students without disabilities) is not included in the Public Education Department's dataset.

[View the High School Graduation Rates Dashboard](#)

Early support is essential. The Family Infant Toddler program, administered by New Mexico's Early Childhood Education & Care Departments, supports early identification and intervention, helping reduce the need for more intensive interventions later in life (4).

Recent legislation, such as SB 37, which requires K–3 literacy assessments and parent notification, and SB 29, which requires K–3 math screening and support plans, further strengthens early intervention efforts (5). These efforts are complemented by the creation of the Office of Special Education within the New Mexico Public Education Department. Established in 2023 and made permanent in 2026, the office serves approximately 61,000 students with disabilities and works to improve coordination, communication, professional development, and student support (6, 7, 8).

The Yazzie/Martinez v. State of New Mexico case continues to highlight gaps in support for students with disabilities, low-income students, Native American students, and English language learners. As of 2026, the court is considering a request to reject the state's proposed Comprehensive Remedial Action Plan and require a revised version (9).

Together, these efforts are building a more consistent and well-supported educational pipeline, from early childhood through graduation, to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Strengthening Pathways from Education to Employment

Early workforce experiences are important in helping students with disabilities transition into employment. Several initiatives support these students before and after high school. [Parents Reaching Out](#) helps schools implement student-led Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and capstone projects that provide real-world work experience and count toward graduation (10). Locally, there is the Supported Success Internship Program (SSIP) created by the Success Partnership's [Kinder-Career Coalition](#) (11). This program connects students who are often overlooked in traditional work-based learning programs with an internship.

Career-connected learning models supported by the Disability Innovation Fund help students transition into postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment. These programs offer opportunities for career exploration, skill development, and self-advocacy while aligning with local workforce needs (12). The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's School-to-Work Transition Program also supports high school seniors with IEPs or 504 Plans by connecting them with counselors who guide them through job training, postsecondary education options, and workforce entry (13).

Upcoming Opportunities

On April 18th, Parents Reaching Out is hosting an event in Las Cruces to provide options and support for those transitioning into adulthood. [Click here](#) to learn more about upcoming events. In addition, the Arc of New Mexico Higher Education Scholarship provides financial support for students with disabilities. The application period closes on April 1st. [Click here](#) to learn more.

By strengthening supports from early childhood through high school, New Mexico is laying the groundwork for a more equitable future for students with disabilities. Sustaining this progress will require continued collaboration across agencies, educators, and community partners.

Sources:

- (1)(2) [New Mexico 2025 State of the Workforce](#)
- (3) [CCA High School Graduation Rates Dashboard](#)
- (4) [New Mexico maintains top national ranking for infant early intervention](#)
- (5) (8) [Governor signs four education bills - SB 37 builds upon years of progress in literacy instruction](#)
- (6) [Governor creates state's first Office of Special Education - State launches national search for leadership](#)
- (7) [New Mexico lawmaker pushes to make Special Education Bureau permanent](#)
- (9) [Families, Communities, and Experts Ask Court to Reject State's Non-Compliant Education Plan and Order Rewrite in Yazzie/Martinez](#)
- (10) [Individualized Education and Capstones Empower Students with Disabilities](#)
- (11) [SSIP Success Snapshot - Opening Doors for Students Through the Supported Success Internship Program](#)
- (12) [Disability Innovation Fund \(DIF\) - New Mexico Public Education Department](#)
- (13) [NMDVR helps students and young adults with disabilities find work and plan careers](#)



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