

# Understanding Learning Disabilities: A Comprehensive Survey Analysis

By Kelly VanZant, BFA

**Abstract:** This study was designed and executed by Kelly VanZant with the help of SurveyMonkey, and explored the prevalence and impact of learning disabilities among individuals across various age groups from a well-established art college located in Milwaukee Wisconsin. Utilizing a comprehensive survey designed in SurveyMonkey, Miss VanZant gathered data from 142 respondents, asking 20 questions examining factors such as diagnosis age, types of learning disabilities, and educational experiences.

Key findings indicate that a significant portion of respondents were diagnosed with dyslexia, ADHD, and anxiety. The study also highlights the challenges faced by individuals with learning disabilities in educational settings, particularly during middle and high school. The college reports on their website that less than 50% of enrolled students graduate. These insights underscore the need for tailored educational support and increased awareness to better accommodate neurodivergent individuals so that they may find success and acquire access to education equity.

This study investigated the prevalence and impact of learning disabilities among the diverse college population. A total of 142 participants completed the comprehensive survey, addressing various aspects of their experiences with learning disabilities.

## Key findings:

- **Prevalence:** 54.93% of respondents reported being diagnosed with LD, with dyslexia, ADHD, and anxiety being the most common diagnoses.
- **Age of Diagnosis:** Most diagnoses occurred between ages 7-12, with a significant portion diagnosed in early childhood.
- **Educational Impact:** 39.01% of participants had been enrolled in Special Education, and 35.51% had or currently have an Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- **Challenges:** Many respondents reported negative impacts on their learning experiences across different educational stages, highlighting the need for tailored support and interventions.
- **Diagnosis Trends:** The most common learning disabilities diagnosed among the respondents are dyslexia, ADHD, and anxiety.
- **Age of Diagnosis:** Most individuals are diagnosed with learning disabilities between the ages of 7 and 12, with a significant portion also diagnosed in early childhood.
- **Impact on Education:** Learning disabilities negatively impact educational experiences at various stages:
  - **Pre-K:** Early signs of learning difficulties can lead to challenges in foundational skills.

- **Middle School:** Increased academic demands often exacerbate difficulties, leading to struggles with organization, attention, and specific subjects.
- **High School:** Continued academic challenges can affect self-esteem, motivation, and performance, often requiring more intensive support.
- **Support Systems:**
  - **Special Education:** 39.01% of respondents have been enrolled in Special Education programs.
  - **Individualized Education Programs (IEPs):** 35.35% of the respondents diagnosed with a learning disability did not have an IEP.

**Conclusion:** These findings underscore the importance of early diagnosis and comprehensive support systems for individuals with learning disabilities. It also shows the importance to implement inclusivity procedures with appreciation and acceptance for those who learn differently. The information was presented to the college and attendance included students, their family, college teachers, leadership and disability department representatives.

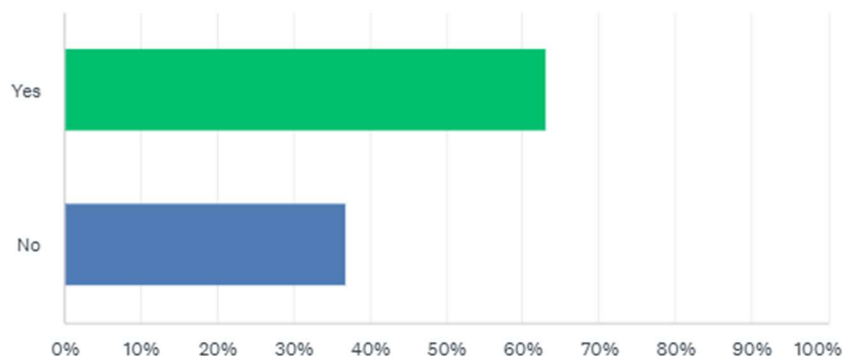
**Next Steps:** The overall follow-up included specific recommendations to be implemented by the disability department, for potential positive change in student experience.

1. Provide orientation to the school's Disability Program annually
2. Create a Neurodivergent community & space for sense of belonging and support
3. Encourage those who are not yet diagnosed to seek professional diagnosis with access support
5. Annual review with all faculty and students on Neurodivergent Inclusivity policy

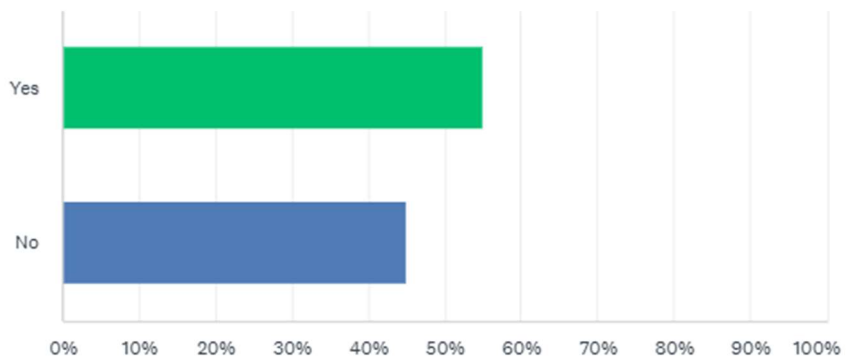
### Survey Data:

There was a total of 20 survey questions. Respondents who did not identify as a person with a Learning Disability (Q1) were automatically exited from the survey. Those who answered yes (n 142) to identifying with a Learning Disability were allowed to complete the remaining of the survey.

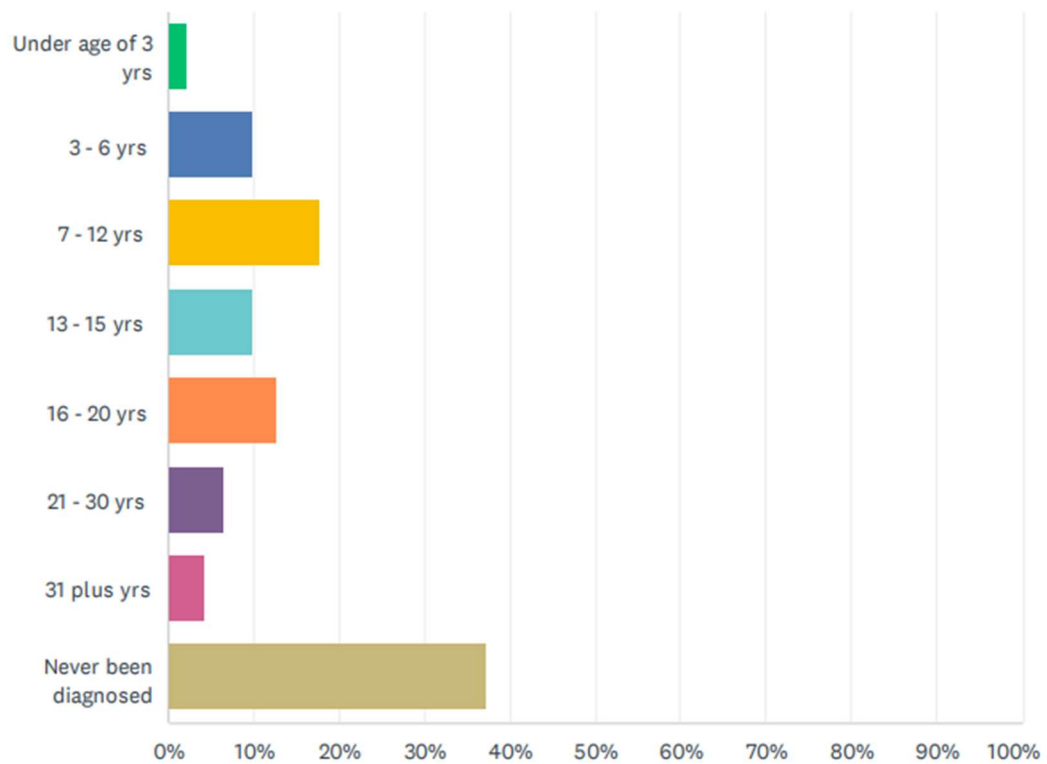
Do you identify as a person with Learning Disabilities?



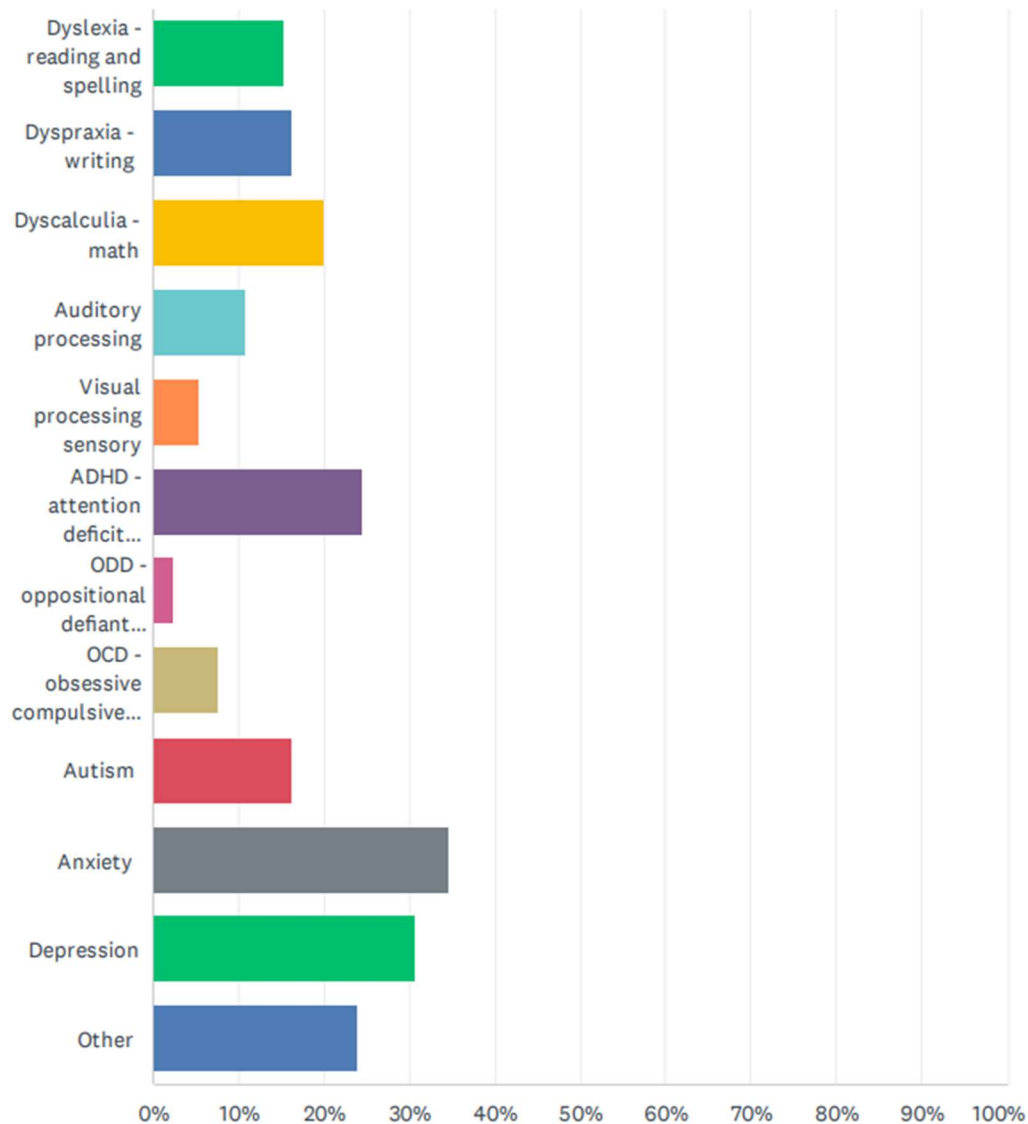
Were you diagnosed by a professional for your Learning Disability?



What was the age of your Learning Disability diagnosis?



What diagnosis did you receive?



**Forty-one of the total respondents chose to share personal stories regarding their school experiences. Some of these responses are shared below:**

**R23:** "Teachers ignore my IEP for their own convince. Having meltdowns and being locked in a empty room. They would forget we were in there and leave us there for hours."

**R87:** "I feel like some people don't consider how someone may process things differently. Recently I have experienced someone getting mad at me for not understanding them and for not thinking like they do. I believe we were coming from similar places at heart but she were not understanding of my inabilities to understand her. It mad her more mad. This experience made me realize that when someone does not think like you it's hard to take a step back to try to understand their thought process."

**R 5:** "I would say my LD has negatively effected me but not in the way most would. After I was diagnosed with dyslexia as a young age I was put into disability learning. Instead of learning ways to work with or around my disability I was mainly just excepted from having to do work that was deemed "too much." This has become a problem into my adult years as I never developed many necessary/Needed skills. The more I learn about dyslexia the more I'm incline to declassify dyslexia as a LD. In short a lot of Scientific articles estimate that 1/5 of the US population has dyslexia. So instead of calling it a LD it's more of just a different way of understanding the world around us."

**R 134:** "Being a woman diagnosed with ADHD (inattentive) later in life, it went undiagnosed for a very long time. I didn't understand why I had so much trouble focusing in class, getting things done, starting tasks, focusing on anything. It was definitely ignored/looked over, or dismissed as laziness/simply not caring, due to being a girl and learning masking early on"

**R 42:** "for me having ADHD has caused me to have a massive struggle focusing in class and lots of random outbursts where i just say random things. always seems like my mind is racing and i can never focus on one topic"

**R 76:** "I was denied extra time I needed on tests, (and told) because it would give me an unfair advantage to the other students."

**R 19:** "Most of my life I was pretty unaware of my adhd, even after being referred to testing by a teacher, being diagnosed with anxiety related to school and later depression instead. It wasnt until colledge that I really started finding out how my behaviours related to neurodivercity, and thats been its own series of struggles."

**R 101:** "Teachers have thought less of me because of my disability. I had a teacher in 6th grade that was always expecting wrong from me, possibly because he disliked me or maybe he was ableist. During my sophomore year of high school my case manager/study hall teacher denied a lot of my autism habits and would get me in trouble for those things acting up. She never let me go to the counselor for mental health stuff."

**R 58:** "My old phyc told me It sounded like I wasn't trying and didn't care as I sobbed on her couch at 15 because I didn't know why I couldn't just do the homework. Having an extremely difficult time getting a diagnosis even after my whole childhood having teachers and everyone else suggested adhd because I was too well spoken/too high of an IQ score when they did test and a women ofc (I was failing classes, self harming and having constant breakdowns and severe insomnia) but they kept pushing SSRIs and DBT for years despite pleas to look at the cognitive side of things. Still riding that diagnosis train right now."

**R 3:** "Trouble feeling like I'm drowning when I'm just trying to stay afloat with everyone else in my grade, the amount of effort it takes them to function likely takes me twice as much"

**R 112:** "I have always been told to "just focus" despite my literal biochemistry preventing me from doing so"

**R 67:** "My disabilities made enrollment in any school almost impossible due to schools not wanting to follow my ied. Most schools I atteneded treated me like an invalid. In highschool,

my academic advisor lied to my parents and myself about sending documentation to the standardized testing people, and caused me to not be able to take the sat/act. Severely limiting my ability to go to college.”

**R 29:** “My life has been a nightmare. Bullying. Hatred.”

**R 140:** “In middle and elementary school I was always bullied and had no fun in recess. I did not know what to do to make friends or have fun with others. Unfortunately, there was not enough support during recess or play time.”

**R 11:** “I've always been super anxious when it comes to asking for help from teachers, especially when it came to math, out of fear of being perceived as stupid and hindering class progress during lessons. As a result I'd never fully understood the curriculum and I'd end up getting pretty low grades for most of my education. I also remember a time during grade school I was put into a small group because of my low grades in math, I don't remember too much about why but I'm assuming that it's cause I would do math using my fingers. All I remember is the teacher encouraging us to do the math in our heads and me counting with my fingers under the table and answering quickly so I wasn't in that group for long. “

**Conclusion:** These findings underscore the importance of early diagnosis and comprehensive support systems for individuals with learning disabilities. It also shows the importance to implement inclusivity procedures with appreciation and acceptance for those who learn differently. The information was presented to the college and attendance included students, their family, college teachers, leadership and disability department representatives.