

Lansing Community College
Autism-Friendly Campus Project
Consulting Services

RFP #13001-844-24EL

June 13, 2025

Findings and Recommendations Report

Prepared by:

Landmark College Institute for Research and Training

Adam Lalor, Ph.D., Vice President for Neurodiversity Research and Innovation

Rick Bryck, Ph.D., Senior Director, LCIRT

Emily Helft, Ed.S., Assistant Director of Professional Development

Alyssa Lawson, Ph.D., Research Associate

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Autism Friendly Campus Project: Executive Summary

Need:

The increasing enrollment of autistic students in higher education highlights a critical need for supportive campus environments. Despite growing representation, autistic students often face significant barriers, including social isolation, mental health challenges, and difficulties navigating unstructured academic environments, leading to poorer outcomes and lower graduation rates compared to their neurotypical peers.

Objective:

Lansing Community College (LCC) aims to develop a more autism-friendly campus in order to enhance access, inclusion, and academic success for neurodivergent students.

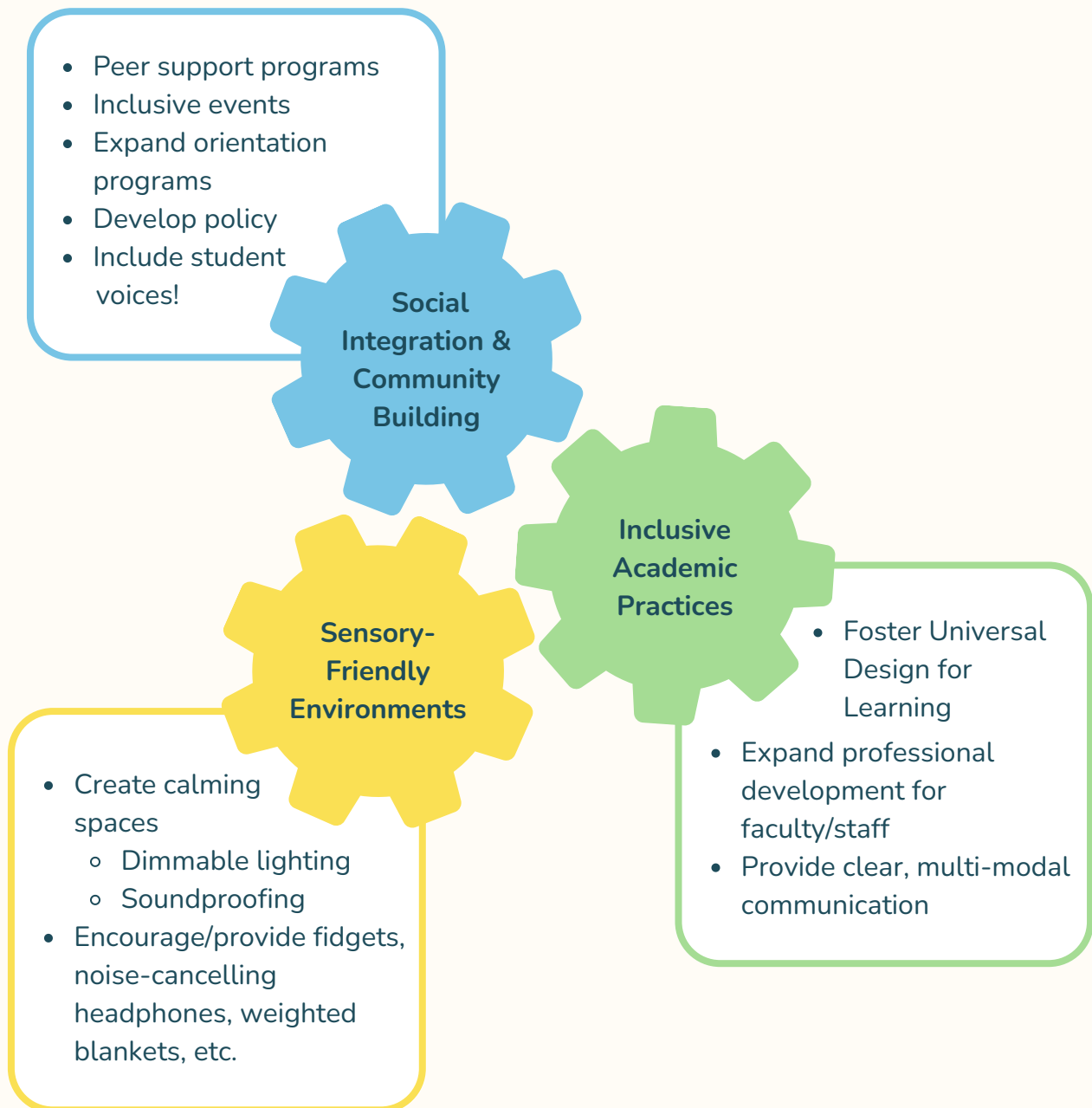
Method:

Landmark College collaborated with LCC to gather data using multiple methods (see table below) guided by questions on neurodiversity's importance, current strengths and available supports, and future needs.

What	Purpose/Description	Participants/Number
Focus Groups	13 on-campus and 2 virtual semi-structured discussions aimed to gain in-depth qualitative insights into stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and recommendations.	107 LCC faculty, staff, and students from diverse departments across campus
Surveys	Surveys served the same purpose and asked the same key questions as focus groups, but allowed for asynchronous responses. They were distributed widely to students and faculty/staff.	75 students 35 faculty/staff
Sensory Audits	Systematic evaluations of selected classroom, office, and social spaces across campus. A rubric was used to assess visual, auditory, and olfactory features.	20 environments, including spaces in Arts and Sciences Building, the Gannon Building, and the Technology and Learning Center

Recommendations Summary

This graphic showcases the key categories of recommendations that the consultants arrived at through a combination of: student, faculty, and staff input and knowledge; sensory audits, and; expertise in best practices for supporting neurodivergent students. Please see the full report, and associated appendices, for the full set of recommendations and guidelines.



Purpose and Background

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to discuss the areas of strength and areas of needed growth for Lansing Community College (LCC) in developing a more autism-friendly campus, with the goal of improving access, inclusion, and academic success for autistic students. As higher education institutions strive to support increasingly diverse student populations, **the inclusion of neurodivergent students—particularly those with autism—must be a central consideration in campus design, policies, and practices.**

Autism Spectrum Disorder (otherwise referred to as autism here) is a neurodevelopmental condition characterized by differences in social communication, sensory processing, and patterns of behavior and thinking (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). In recent years, the number of autistic students enrolling in colleges and universities has increased steadily, due in part to greater diagnostic recognition and improved support in K-12 education (Wei et al., 2015a, 2015b, 2017). However, despite growing representation in postsecondary settings, autistic students continue to face significant barriers that hinder their academic and personal success.

Research consistently shows that autistic students experience poorer outcomes in higher education compared to their neurotypical peers (Accardo et al., 2019; Bakker et al., 2023; Pinder-Amaker, 2014; White et al., 2011). Autistic students are more likely to report social isolation, mental health challenges, and difficulties navigating unstructured academic environments (Jackson et al., 2018; Pinder-Amaker, 2014; Van Hees et al., 2015). Graduation rates for autistic students lag behind those of students with other disabilities (Bakker et al., 2019; Clouder et al., 2020; Jackson et al., 2018), and many report a lack of understanding and support from faculty and peers (Cai & Richdale, 2016; Gurbuz et al., 2019). These challenges are not due to a lack of ability, but rather due to environments that fail to meet the needs of students with diverse cognitive, sensory, and/or communication needs.

Creating a campus environment that meets the diverse cognitive, sensory, and communication needs of its members benefits not only autistic students, but also contributes to a more inclusive, accessible, and equitable learning environment for all students. Given the evidence of persistent disparities in educational experiences and outcomes for autistic students, it is vital to understand the ways in which autistic and neurodivergent students can be served better in an academic environment.

Please see the full recommendations and guidelines for creating an autism and neurodivergent friendly campus on **page 15**.

Why Landmark College?

Landmark College is uniquely positioned to lead a needs assessment and offer strategic guidance on creating a more autism-friendly campus. As the first institution of higher education specifically designed for students with dyslexia, Landmark College has evolved into a global leader in educating neurodivergent students, including those with learning disabilities, ADHD, and autism. With 40 years of experience developing and refining inclusive, research-based teaching practices, Landmark College's educational model has long served as a benchmark for innovation in neurodivergent student support.

Central to Landmark College's capacity to support other institutions is the Landmark College Institute for Research and Training (LCIRT), the College's hub for professional development, consultation, and applied research. LCIRT translates Landmark's extensive experience into practical strategies for educators and institutional leaders through workshops, trainings, and collaborative projects. With a client portfolio that includes more than 40 schools, universities, companies, and agencies annually, LCIRT has developed tailored professional development programs for a wide range of institutions—from local high schools to universities like Harvard, Duke, Stanford, and the University of Toronto.

LCIRT has extensive experience in supporting initiatives that promote neurodiversity, universal design, accessibility, and inclusion. Our work is grounded in both research and practice, often presented at national and international conferences, such as The College Autism Summit, The Association for Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD), and the International Mind, Brain, and Education Society. Our research has also appeared in top journals, such as *American Psychologist*, *Journal for Postsecondary Education and Disability*, and *The Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*.

Importantly, LCIRT has already conducted similar needs assessments and consulting projects aimed at helping colleges and universities create environments where neurodivergent students can thrive. Our work combines cutting-edge research, psychological and educational theory, and tested practices developed through 40 years of serving and learning from neurodivergent students at Landmark College. Testimonials from clients regularly praise LCIRT's trainings as transformative, practical, and among the best professional development they have ever received.

Given Landmark College's long-standing leadership in neurodivergent education, and LCIRT's proven success in guiding institutions through systemic change, LCIRT's team of researchers, educators, and administrators are exceptionally well-suited to assess and support the development of a more autism-friendly campus at LCC. Our holistic, research-informed approach ensures that changes will not only be inclusive and effective, but sustainable over time.



Method

Guiding Questions and Approach

To direct our inquiry with students, staff, faculty, and community members, we derived guiding questions centered around the following three central topics situated at the crux of this project:

1 The Why:

What is neurodiversity and why should LCC embrace it?

2 Current state:

What is going well? What current supports are available?

- a. Are physical spaces on campus autism/neurodivergent-friendly?
- b. Is instruction accessible for diverse learners?

3 Future needs:

What are the additional needs?

- a. What programs, staffing, or additional resources would need to be created or expanded to further support autistic/neurodivergent students on campus? What steps are most crucial?
- b. What professional development trainings or resources are needed for faculty and staff to better support autistic/neurodivergent students at LCC?

To answer the key questions pertaining to this project, we collaborated with key administrators and personnel at LCC to gather data using multiple collection methods. Given the goals of the project and access to campus resources/personnel, we focused data collection to the main LCC campus and in-person instructors; however we did conduct one focus group with faculty/staff from LCC's West Campus. Future considerations could explore the autism-friendly needs of other campuses and online courses (faculty and students).

These included:

- **Pilot Focus Groups: C3 Summit**

We worked with the LCC steering committee to use a recurring, previously scheduled meeting time to run a pilot version of our planned focus groups. This served as a test for the on campus focus groups, allowing us to evaluate the efficacy of the planned questions and procedure.

- **Focus Groups**

A set of questions was created and iterated to use as guiding questions during on campus semi-structured focus groups with various LCC stakeholders. Focus groups allow us to gain in-depth qualitative insights into key project questions through interactive discussions with small groups from similar cohorts at LCC. In short, these allow us to gain an understanding of LCC stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, and decisions around the autism-friendly initiative.

- **Surveys**

Surveys were also distributed that asked key project questions, along with some basic demographic questions. Employing this format allowed for varied response options, enabling greater flexibility and accessibility to stakeholders; in other words, it allowed for participants to respond that could not otherwise have attended an in person focus group due to time constraints, response preference, or social anxiety.

Lessons learned from Pilot Focus Groups (C3 Summit)

Running a practice focus group C3 Summit served several important purposes. Firstly, it allowed us to test and refine questions, to ensure they elicit meaningful and relevant responses, while identifying any ambiguous or confusing questions that may need to be rephrased or clarified. Secondly, it improved facilitation skills by providing an opportunity for facilitators to pilot guiding discussions and determine follow-up questions that would prompt deeper and more detailed responses. Additionally, this served as practice in assessing group dynamics, understanding how participants interact with each other and the facilitators, and identifying any potential challenges. It also allowed us to assess the timing and flow of the session, in order to maintain participant engagement. We were also able to gather some preliminary data which provided initial insights into the broad themes and ideas currently held at LCC.

Data Cleaning

The data cleaning process involved several key steps to ensure the data is accurate, consistent, and ready for analysis. First, it includes a transcription review to check for accuracy and correct any errors or omissions, ensuring consistent formatting and labeling of transcripts. Next, data organization involved categorizing data into themes based on initial coding or predefined frameworks and clearly labeling data segments for easy retrieval. Removing irrelevant data is crucial, as it involves identifying and excluding redundant information and reducing noise by removing filler words and unrelated conversations. Standardization ensued next, which checked for and confirmed uniform terminology and consistent formatting across the dataset. Finally, data integration involves combining data from multiple sources and aligning it with research questions and objectives to ensure coherence and relevance. These steps allowed for clean and reliable data before moving onto analysis.

Data Analysis

Next, we conducted a thematic analysis, a type of qualitative analysis, on the cleaned data. This process involved several key steps to identify and interpret patterns within the cleaned focus group and survey qualitative data. Initially, we familiarized ourselves with the data by thoroughly reading and re-reading transcripts (focus group) or text (survey). We then generated initial codes by systematically tagging relevant features of the data that appeared significant or interesting. These codes were organized into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the data. Themes were then defined and named, providing clear descriptions and labels. Finally, the themes were integrated into a coherent whole and supported by illustrative quotes.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

Focus Groups (On Campus and Virtual)

Members of the LCIRT team visited campus for two days in late March 2025. We conducted thirteen focus groups with various LCC stakeholders; additionally, two virtual video conference focus groups were held in early April. In total, 107 community LCC members participated in focus groups. Table 1 below summarizes the audiences and number of attendees from each of these sessions:

Table 1.

Focus Group Audiences and Attendee Number

Group	N
Health & Human Services	10
Neurodivergent Students (Group 1)	6
Student Affairs (including Center for Student Access, Counseling, Success Coaching)	12
LCC Police/Student Compliance	4
Tech Careers	25
Faculty (Group 1)	1
Faculty (Group 2)	1
Office of Empowerment, Writing Center	5
Non-neurodivergent students	1
Neurodivergent Students (Group 2)	3
Library, Learning Commons, Center for Teaching Excellence, Math Tutoring	8
Staff/Directors	12
Human Resources	3
Community/“town hall” (virtual)	3
Misc. Staff/Faculty (virtual)	13

Surveys

Students

Descriptive statistics for students who completed the survey are shown below, in Tables 2 through 4.

Table 2.

Student Age and Gender Demographics

Group	N	Mean Age	Mean # of Semesters at LCC	Male	Female	Non-binary*	Prefer not to say
NT	23	28.4 (11.0)	4.5 (2.8)	4	18	0	1
ND	25	26.3 (8.5)	4.3 (3.0)	7	30	6	9
Combined	75	26.9 (9.3)	4.3 (2.9)	11	48	6	10

Note: NT = neurotypical; ND = neurodivergent; N = number; standard deviations are presented in parentheses.

*Includes one or more of the following: Non-binary; third gender; Transgender)

Table 3.

Student Self-Reported Ethnicities

Group	White	Black/African American	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	Another race not mentioned	Prefer not to say/other
NT	16	3	0	1	1	2
ND	39	4	4	1	2	5
Total*	55	7	4	2	3	7

Note: NT = neurotypical; ND = neurodivergent; N = number

*Multiple responses possible per participant.

Table 4.*Neurodivergent Identifying Students Self-Reported Diagnoses*

	ADHD	Autism	Mental Health	Non-verbal learning disorder	Specific Learning Disability	Prefer not to disclose
Total*	33	31	41	2	7	4

*Multiple responses possible per participant.

Faculty/Staff

Descriptive statistics for faculty and staff who completed the survey follows in Tables 5 and 6.

Table 5.*Faculty/Staff Age, Experience at LCC, and Gender Demographics*

	N	Mean Age	Mean # of Years at LCC	Male	Female	Non-binary*	Prefer not to say/ other
Faculty	18	53.7 (13.6)	18.4 (14.0)	6	8	1	3
Staff	17	43.7 (14.8)	7.0 (5.5)	6	10	0	1
Combined	35	49.0 (14.8)	12.8 (12.1)	12	18	1	4

Note: standard deviations are presented in parentheses after mean values (when relevant).

*Includes one or more of the following: Non-binary; third gender; Transgender)

Table 6.*Faculty/Staff Self-Reported Ethnicities*

	White	Black/ African American	American Indian or Alaskan Native	Asian	Another race not mentioned	Prefer not to say/other
Faculty	10	1	0	1	0	6
Staff	14	2	0	0	0	1
Total*	24	3	0	1	0	7

*Multiple responses possible per participant.

Of the Faculty and Staff that completed the survey, 6 indicated an ADHD diagnosis, 2 a mental health diagnosis, and 1 indicated a specific learning disability.

Thematic Analyses

A comprehensive summary of the underlying patterns and insights gained from the thematic analyses are described on subsequent pages. Key and meaningful themes and conclusions were drawn from the gathered data, as follows. Data from focus groups and surveys were combined for this set of analyses and interpretation. Results and interpretations that follow are discussed separately within each of the three central topics. When relevant, and enough data was available to disaggregate, results are compared across different groups (students, staff/faculty).

Students

The findings clustered into three main areas: the importance of embracing neurodiversity, the current state of acceptance and support for neurodivergent students, and future needs and supports.

Both neurodivergent and neurotypical students strongly agree that LCC should strive to be a more autism-friendly campus. Most students believe that understanding and supporting autistic and neurodivergent students is a worthy initiative. Neurodivergent students generally feel welcomed on campus, with positive experiences related to the inclusivity and helpfulness of staff and faculty. Many students appreciate the quiet study spaces and the support from academic services. While some students are aware of resources like testing accommodations and quiet study areas, there is a reported lack of awareness about other available support services. Some students face challenges due to a lack of understanding and empathy from faculty and staff. Issues such as overstimulating lighting, distracting noise, and physical discomfort in classrooms are common concerns. Many students are unaware of existing support services, suggesting a need for better promotion and accessibility of these resources. Students highlight issues with lighting, noise, furniture, and temperature regulation, which can be overstimulating and uncomfortable.

Students suggest more flexible learning and assessment methods, clearer and more organized instruction, and compassionate, patient faculty. There is a call for recognizing individuality in neurodivergence and supporting universal design. Students advocate for sensory-friendly spaces, quiet study areas, and infrastructure adjustments to improve comfort and accessibility. There is a strong interest in peer support networks, socialization groups, and centering neurodivergent voices in decision-making processes. In sum, there is a need for LCC to enhance its support for neurodivergent students through better awareness, education, and environmental adjustments.

Please see **Appendix A** for the full, detailed analysis of student data; a summary of the full analysis and findings is provided here.

Faculty/Staff

A summary of the full analysis follows.

The results fell into three major areas:

- 1 The reasons for embracing neurodiversity
- 2 Additional needs and resources,
- 3 Next steps for furthering this initiative

There is moderately high agreement among faculty and staff that LCC should provide a more autism-friendly campus, with faculty showing higher agreement than staff. Several themes emerged regarding why LCC should embrace neurodiversity. These include empowering neurodivergent students to achieve academic and personal success, highlighting the value of neurodiversity in strengthening the community and fostering an inclusive environment, and stressing the need for understanding and supporting neurodivergent individuals to create supportive environments. Additionally, the results advocate for opening educational opportunities to all students, emphasizes creating a sense of community and belonging for all students, recognizes the unique perspectives and innovative potential of neurodivergent individuals, and acknowledges the challenges in supporting neurodivergent students and the ethical responsibility to avoid marginalizing them.

The analysis revealed additional needs and resources that would benefit neurodivergent students on the LCC campus. The analysis emphasizes the need for structured, accommodating, and empathetic classroom environments tailored to neurodivergent students, individualized academic support and flexibility in learning and assessment, and a focus on mental health, peer support, mentorship, and broader educational experiences. There is strong advocacy for recognizing neurodivergent students as valuable individuals, a need for clear pathways and better promotion of existing support services, and suggestions for changes in institutional views on student success, career services, outreach, and program design.

Faculty and staff express a strong call for structured professional development and training to better support neurodivergent learners. There is a need for increased

For a full, detailed analysis of faculty and staff survey and focus group responses, please see **Appendix B**

awareness and foundational understanding of neurodivergence, practical strategies to support neurodivergent students, creating environments that accommodate diverse learning needs, and tangible resources and structured communication. Continuous education and commitment are essential for meaningful impact.

In terms of next steps for furthering the mission of this autism friendly campus initiative, responses from faculty and staff fell into several groupings. There was a call for a cultural shift within the institution to become more inclusive and genuinely committed to serving all students, reducing stigma, and collaborating with neurodivergent individuals and professionals in developing solutions. Practical support and fostering inclusive learning environments were also emphasized, including changing physical and pedagogical environments to support neurodivergent students and improving awareness and access to current support systems. Overall, the feedback from faculty and staff reflects both a readiness to learn and a recognition of current gaps in knowledge and practice, with a strong call for a genuine, sustained commitment to creating a more supportive campus.

Sensory Audits

A sensory audit of several LCC spaces was conducted by Dr. Adam Lalor, Vice President for Neurodiversity Research and Innovation at Landmark College, on Thursday, March 27, 2025, and Friday, March 28, 2025. Sensory audits are systematic evaluations of the sensory stimuli in each environment to identify potential barriers and opportunities for those who engage with that environment. The ultimate purpose of conducting sensory audits at LCC is to support the comfortable and effective engagement of community members with sensory sensitivities on campus.

For the LCC sensory audit, the focus was on systematically evaluating a sample of classroom, office, and social spaces (selected by LCC in communication with LCIRT staff) for autistic and neurodivergent students. A rubric was designed and used to ensure systematic evaluation of visual, auditory, and olfactory features of the sensory environment. Observation was the primary method of data collection. Decibel measurements of each environment were taken using a Tadeto Sound Level Meter. Most, but not all, environments were audited while unoccupied. Thus, audits reflect a base level and the intensity of stimuli (e.g., decibel levels, visual stimulation) would undoubtedly increase when occupied.

All audits were conducted in the presence of Dr. Toni Glasscoe, Associate Vice President for External Affairs, Development & K-12 Operations and audits conducted on Friday, March 28 were also conducted in the presence of Director of Facilities Timothy Martz.

Altogether, 20 spaces were audited between three buildings: The Arts and Sciences Building (A&S), the Gannon Building (GB), and the Technology and Learning Center (TLC).


Current State of Affairs

Overall, the sensory audit finds that LCC has developed a sensory environment that is supportive of variations in student, faculty, staff, and community needs. Many features that support auditory, visual, and olfactory needs of neurodivergent people have been included in the design of spaces on campus.

Of note, the Technology and Learning Center incorporates a number of features that exemplify sensory-friendly design. For example, the incorporation of a complementary color palette (cool colors), white noise, dimmable lighting, varying textures in seating, defined spaces for different purposes (while maintaining the open-concept design), a mix of groupwork areas and individual spaces (e.g., cubbies) for study, and designated quiet areas are all excellent examples of sensory-friendly design.

Reviewing the different aspects of the sensory audit found several trends. Decibel readings across campus spaces were very good overall. Most were below or only slightly above 55 dB (0–55 dB is generally considered to be auditory-friendly for neurodivergent people). This said, only the Technology and Learning Center was truly occupied and being used by students at the time of assessment. Thus, the decibel readings should be considered only baselines and increases in decibel levels should be anticipated as occupancy increases. As such, it is likely that many of the spaces would exceed the 55 dB level when classes are in session in the labs and classrooms, when an event is occurring in the Gannon Building, during peak study times in the Technology and Learning Center, etc.

Visual and color balance assessments found that most spaces in the Technology and Learning Center and the Gannon Building were in relatively good shape; however, the Arts & Sciences Building could use improvements in these areas.

 See the next section for the full set of recommendations (including physical space recommendations).

Nearly all spaces, with the exception of science spaces where odiferous materials were present (e.g., chemistry, biology), had very low, if any, odors present.

Appendix C presents raw data collected during the sensory audit.

Recommendations

After careful analysis and synthesis of information gathered as a part of this project, Landmark has compiled various recommendations for next steps.

The results from these analyses largely guide the answer to one of the key objectives of this work, namely, **what does neurodiversity mean, and how might we achieve an autism-friendly campus?**

Combining the thematic analyses, sensory audits, informal conversations with faculty, staff, and students with our expertise and practical experience serving neurodivergent students culminated in the following recommendations.

To provide flexibility and to help increase odds for success, we are including numerous channels and types of recommendations, affording LCC the opportunity to identify and select specific options that work best for their organization over time. In addition to general themes/types, some recommendations have been tagged by general resource cost in terms of both finances and time/energy (\$, \$\$, and \$\$\$) to provide some structure for a path forward. Note that no costs are provided for sensory audit recommendations given the wide variety of options available to LCC and facilities. In many cases, options can be customized to meet both the functional and aesthetic needs of LCC, thereby substantially altering costs.

Physical Spaces

As previously noted, data collected as part of the sensory audit finds that LCC is already doing an excellent job in terms establishing and maintaining an autism-inclusive/neuroinclusive sensory environment. With the inclusion of multiple types of seating around campus, different areas and cubbies for studying in the Technology and Learning Center, the availability of white noise machines, the existence of a meditation room in the Gannon Building, a cool and complementary color palette in the Technology and Learning Center, and decibel readings in the low-moderate range; LCC is already making very sound decisions related to the sensory environment. Of particular note is LCC's efforts to transition lighting from fluorescent to LED. Fluorescent lighting is among the most frequent complaints of LCC faculty, staff, and students related to the friendliness of the sensory environment, and ongoing changes in this area are commended. Anecdotally, Dr. Lalor believes that LCC likely already has a more autism-inclusive/neuroinclusive sensory environment than the majority of higher education institutions. Still, movement toward a more autism-inclusive and neuro-inclusive sensory environment should continue to occur over time as spaces, technologies, and people change. As such, the following recommendations for continued sensory improvements include the following, as listed in Table 7.

Physical Space Recommendations

Table 7.

Physical Space Recommendations

Recommendation	Space
Continue investing in the conversion to LED lighting.	Camps wide
Repaint walls in classrooms and lab spaces that use bright, fluorescent, and/or contrasting colors.	A&S classrooms and labs
Install doors on shelving (or replace altogether) in classrooms and labs to visually conceal course equipment and materials.	A&S classrooms and labs
Purchase and make available portable room dividers that can be used to further block/absorb sound and block visual stimuli.	Technology and Learning Center
Incorporate additional measures to reduce and absorb sound (e.g., add plants [live or artificial], incorporate baffling and/or soft sculptural elements, install durable/cleanable cushions on hard benches).	Campus wide
Relocate the meditation room to make it more accessible and visible.	Gannon Building
Invest in and maintain the meditation room to improve its usability as a low-sensory environment (e.g., paint walls a soft, neutral color; incorporate dimmable LED lighting [overhead or lamps]; provide varying types of seating in function and material; add natural elements [e.g., plants], add a white noise machine; hang artwork that reflects beauty of Michigan's natural environment).	Gannon Building
Determine if it is possible to replicate the meditation room in other buildings (ideally each building will have a small "satellite" meditation room).	Campus wide
Establish a formal plan for conducting ongoing reviews of the sensory environment.	Campus wide

Examples of various products listed above can be found in **Appendix D**

Additionally, it is recommended that LCC establish a formal plan for conducting ongoing reviews of sensory environments on a regular basis (e.g., every two-to-three years).

Professional Development

Recommendation Regarding “Mandatory Training”

During data collection and analysis, a prevalent concept/theme that arose was that of “mandatory” professional development and/or training. Requiring professional development of any kind can be simultaneously beneficial and harmful to implementation and success. While increasing knowledge and skills is important—as it theoretically should translate into improved teaching and inclusion practices—mandating training can lead to resistance and frustration, most commonly (and ironically) among participants that may be in the most need of the training. This can lead to unintentional consequences that negatively impact genuine buy-in and implementation.

To avoid this undesirable effect, we suggest building professional development into existing systems and structures that are already explicitly or implicitly expected, rather than solely as standalone, required trainings. Especially when this professional development is presented in ways that offer choice, variety, and connection to common goals (all Universal Design for Learning principles, which give participants agency over their own learning), engagement through genuine curiosity and desire for improvement is more likely to be achieved. While this approach can be embedded into all aspects of the 5-Year Plan (see suggestions below), it is particularly emphasized in Year 3: Policy and Environmental Design.

Suggested Ways to Build Professional Development Pathways:

● Staff and Faculty

Incorporating neurodiversity training into new hire onboarding for both faculty and staff; this can be presented as a way to better connect with students/colleagues, increase equitable access for all, and ultimately improve learning and productivity (i.e. a “win-win” that benefits everyone).

● Staff and Students

Developing and offering neurodiversity-focused or neurodiversity-themed classes (e.g. within psychology or sociology as a standalone class, English via literature as it relates to neurodivergent voices, etc.); relatedly, this approach also will help to improve sense of belonging of neurodivergent students, which was mentioned numerous times during data collection.

● Faculty

Heavily valuing neurodiversity, neurodivergence, or Universal Design for Learning training attendance and/or demonstrated application/incorporation of these concepts into teaching practices as an expected aspect of tenure portfolios.

● Students

Including neurodiversity/neurodivergence awareness as a part of new student orientation, first semester seminars (or common core classes that all or many students take), or highly popular courses that are already in high demand.

Five Year Plan

To help lay out a suggested professional development plan for the next 5 years, we have included the following suggestions. Included within this plan are both topics and types, as well as the target audience. Suggestions are included regarding specific workshops and other professional development events; however, many options are available and customizable depending on the input from the Steering Committee.

Please see **Appendix E** for the full Five Year Plan recommendation.

Glossary

As an initial and foundational step towards professional development, we are providing a glossary of terms, both for the audience of this report, and as a resource for the greater LCC community. This models best Universal Design for Learning “Representation” practices (Support: Language & Symbols) and offers a common vocabulary going forward.

This glossary covers both autism/neurodiversity terms, as well as neurodiversity legal/education-specific terms, and can be found in **Appendix F**.

Recommendations Snapshot

The following table was created as a summary, high level and quick reference to the overarching recommendations that culminated from our analyses, combined with our collective expertise knowledge of best practices in serving autistic and neurodivergent students.

Table 8.
Summary of Recommendations and Next Steps

Key Recommendation	Why it is Needed	Examples
Inclusive Academic Practices	To better meet the accessibility needs of a wide range of diverse learners.	<p>Flexible learning options: Incorporate Universal Design for Learning principles.</p> <p>Clear communication: Visual aids, written instructions, routines.</p> <p>Dedicated support staff: Increase number and training of advisors and disability support staff.</p>
Social Integration, Inclusion, and Community Building	Fostering a sense of belonging can build trust, reduce stigma, and strengthen campus relationships.	<p>Peer Support Programs: Implement buddy systems or peer mentoring to help autistic/ND students navigate social situations and build connections.</p> <p>Inclusive Events: Organize sensory-friendly social activities and clubs that accommodate various interests and sensory needs.</p> <p>Orientation Programs: Strengthen early arrival or transition programs to acclimate ND students to campus life and reduce anxiety.</p> <p>Policy Development: Establish guidelines that promote inclusivity and respect for neurodiversity.</p> <p>Student Involvement: Include autistic students in decision-making processes affecting campus life.</p> <p>Awareness Campaigns: Host events and initiatives that celebrate neurodiversity and educate the campus community.</p>

Key Recommendation	Why it is Needed	Examples
Professional Development	Bringing increased awareness and understanding of neurodivergence, and how to best support ND students fosters engagement and boosts student success.	<p>Trainings should focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awareness • Strategies • Policy • Student Empowerment • Sustainability and Evaluation
Sensory-Friendly Environment	Autistic and ND students often experience sensory sensitivities that can make traditional campus settings overwhelming.	<p>Design Calming Spaces: Incorporate areas with soft lighting, soundproofing, and comfortable.</p> <p>Sensory Break Rooms: Equip rooms with tools like weighted blankets, noise-canceling headphones, and fidget items to help students regulate sensory input.</p>

Summary

This project aims to enhance access, inclusion, and academic success for autistic and neurodivergent students by addressing the unique challenges they face in higher education. Despite increased enrollment, autistic students often experience poorer outcomes compared to their neurotypical peers, including social isolation, mental health challenges, and difficulties with unstructured academic environments.

Creating an autism-friendly campus not only benefits autistic students but also **fosters a more inclusive and equitable learning environment for all.**

Findings indicate strong support for the initiative among both neurodivergent and neurotypical students, who appreciate the inclusivity and helpfulness of staff and faculty, quiet study spaces, and academic services. However, there are improvements that could be achieved regarding awareness of available support services, and challenges such as overstimulating environments and physical discomfort in classrooms are perceived as common. Faculty and staff also emphasize the importance of understanding and supporting neurodivergent students, creating inclusive environments, and providing structured professional development. Recommendations for LCC include continuing to transition to LED lighting and incorporating sound-absorbing elements. Additionally, improving and replicating meditation rooms across campus and integrating neurodiversity training into new hire onboarding and student orientation are suggested. A structured five-year professional development plan focusing on awareness, practical strategies, and continuous education is also recommended.

In conclusion, while LCC has made significant strides in creating an autism-friendly campus, ongoing efforts are needed to enhance support through better awareness, education, and environmental adjustments. These recommendations provide a clear path forward for LCC to become a more inclusive and supportive institution for neurodivergent students.

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Appendix A: Full Analyses of Student Survey and Focus Group Responses

Introduction

The following gives a detailed account of the various thematic analyses that were conducted on student response data, including both survey and focus group data. These results have been merged, where appropriate, across students identifying as neurodivergent (“ND”) and those identifying as neurotypical (“NT”), unless otherwise noted (i.e., when clear differences were relevant or emerged between ND and NT students). Results are grouped according to the three major aforementioned areas, the “why”(1) , “current state,” (2) and “future needs.” (3).

1. The Why: Should LCC Embrace Neurodiversity?

Both neurodivergent and neurotypical students were asked if LCC should embrace neurodiversity and strive to be a more autism friendly campus. Specifically, they were asked to rate their agreement, on a scale of 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”) to the following question “To what extent do you agree with the following statement, “Lansing Community College should provide a more autism friendly campus“?

As shown in Figure 1 and Table 1, there was high agreement embracing this statement in both student groups, $M = 4.39 (.78)$ and $M = 4.02 (1.02)$ for neurotypical and neurodivergent students, respectively, and the most frequent response for both groups was “5” (strongly agree) in both groups. Interesting, this statement was embraced more strongly, on average, for neurotypical compared to self-identifying neurodivergent students.

In summary, the majority of students asked agree that continuing to understand and support autistic, and neurodivergent students more broadly, was a worthy initiative to continue at Lansing Community College.

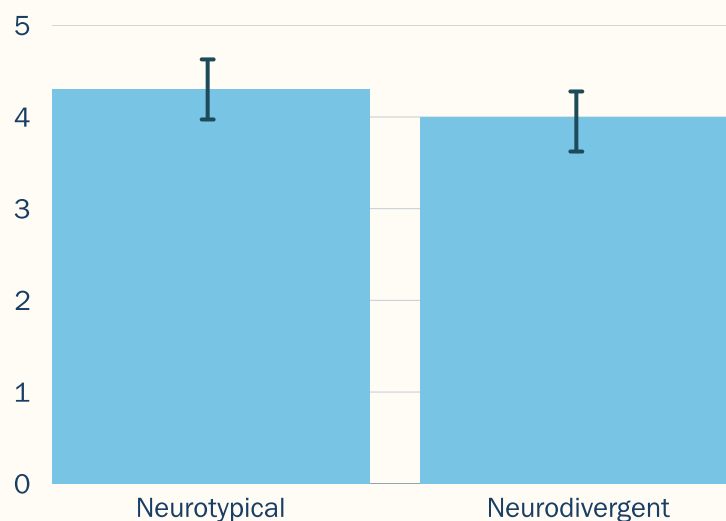


Figure 1. Mean Agreement with “LCC Should Provide a More Autism Friendly Campus” by Student Group

*Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Table 1.

Frequency of Rating Responses to “LCC Should Provide a More Autism Friendly Campus” by Student Group

	N	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Neurotypical	23	4 (17.4%)	6 (26.1%)	12 (56.6%)
Neurodivergent	52	14 (29.2%)	11 (22.9%)	23 (47.9%)

*Neither group recorded any “1” (Strongly Disagree) or “2” (“Disagree) ratings.

2. Current State: Are Neurodivergent Students Culturally Accepted and Supported on Campus?

Here we summarize data obtained from students on their experiences and thoughts on whether autistic and neurodivergent students feel welcomed on campus, both in and out of the classroom, as well as their perceptions and experiences with support services and resources available to neurodivergent students on campus. A number of themes emerged, as shown below, with representative quotes.

2.1 Positive Aspects of the Campus Environment and Support

This theme captures the generally positive feelings and experiences related to the welcoming nature of the campus and the helpfulness of staff and faculty for ND students:

- “Yes, campus is a friendly and welcoming environment.”
- “I think that LCC as a whole does a great job being inclusive. Staff and faculty are very welcoming and genuinely want to help students.”
- “Yes, the teachers and students are usually very respectful.”
- “On top of that everyone I have spoken to (Front desk, library, tutoring) are very helpful and kind! Even without knowing that I have Autism (so I can assume they are helpful and kind to both neurodivergent and non-neurodivergent alike!)”
- “I’d say so overall. There’s plenty of quiet places I can go to study and my teachers are pretty accommodating.”
- “Yes, LCC does a great job with inclusivity. I believe that everyone is deserving of a college education, regardless of their learning ability.”
- “Orientations were very helpful.”
- “I really like the teachers I have had so far.”
- “Academic services have been helpful when I have sought them out.”
- “Most part, I feel very supported by the faculty.”

-
- “So far, the professors have been very understanding and accommodating.”
 - “I find that the teachers are generally very supportive.”
 - “I think the two staff members I’ve interacted with in Disability Services have been helpful.”

Students generally feel welcomed in classrooms, where neurodivergent learning differences and needs are often accommodated. However, social inclusion outside the classroom is less certain. Positive experiences with faculty, for the most part, are reported; many respondents indicated that faculty are understanding and accommodating, though some faculty members lack awareness and sensitivity towards neurodivergent students, according to some students.

2.2 Existing Resources and Accommodations

Some responses mentioned awareness of existing resources and accommodations, though often limited:

- “I am aware of Accommodation resources that students can utilize for a variety of assistance in learning.”
- “The only resource I’m aware of is testing accommodations. I assume there are others but haven’t looked into them myself.”
- “...extensions for assignments.”
- “I’m not aware of any neurodivergent specific programs, although I have been told that the success coaches have helped sort some of the acclimating and schedule changes out well.”
- “I personally do like the quiet study spaces that are available.”
- “I have used the resources at the writing center and found them beneficial.”
- “I have gotten the accommodations I need through Disability Services.”
- “I appreciate the quiet study areas.”

2.3 Challenges and Lack of Understanding Regarding Neurodivergence and Individual Needs

This theme highlights instances where the institution or specific individuals seem to lack understanding or empathy of neurodivergent experiences, along with challenges with receiving accommodations, according to some students.

- “Somewhat, but sometimes I feel like my learning style is not in line with how instructors’ speech.”
- “... Neurodivergent, homeless and above the age of 19? Something must be wrong with me, right?! This is why I get harassed by anyone, including campus cops and hired ‘security’. Professors had led to my downfall 15 years ago, because they didn’t want to believe that I may have ‘issues’ that were important enough to have patience for. This campus has now pulled away resources that used to be better 10–15 years ago, privacy and leaving people alone; not trying to embarrass students that might not even have a home to go to while they work on their degrees/schoolwork. Too many situations to push a person into having a legitimate meltdown b/c I don’t have a wheelchair or a cane? Not all problems are ‘seen’.”
- “... the issues with LCC are issues everywhere. Aka lights being too bright and electricity in general being too loud. There was one teacher that was really mean about accommodations. It was a speech class and she refused to do anything about the 5 point eye contact grade for each

- speech. And because it's technically an 'other' in accommodations she refused to accept it."
- "It would be nice to feel accepted for the way I am, and not put in a box as someone who is (who has a problem) but someone who might just learn differently than others."
- "Although there is always room for improvement among staff and especially students."

2.4 Lack of Awareness of Existing Resources

Many respondents indicated a lack of awareness about existing support services and suggest that these services should be better advertised. There was a call for more visibility and accessibility of these resources.

- "I am not aware of any support available but I do check resources as Ted talks, videos, and documentary films. I think creating support services or groups could be real helpful."
- "I did not know there were programs available, I feel like they should promote it more to the public."
- "I am not aware but I know academic services are great and would be very helpful for neurodivergent students."
- "I am not aware of any services or resources; however, I haven't really explored any options because I am not autistic."
- "No, I am not! [aware of current resources]"
- "I am not aware of any, these services should be better advertised than they currently are."
- "No, I'm not aware of these resources. If it is not created already, maybe an orientation that includes a tour of the campus and resources available for this group would be helpful."

2.5 Physical and Environmental Aspects

This theme points to concrete problems or areas where the institution could improve its support and environment for students, according to students. There was also recognition of current spaces that are sensory friendly and/or decompression-friendly areas, including certain floors in the library, and the Zen Garden.

➡ 2.5.1 Lighting: Overstimulating and Inflexible

Fluorescent and LED lighting is a recurring concern; students describe it as harsh, overwhelming, and anxiety-inducing. Many students request dimmable or adjustable lighting, indirect sources, or warmer tones. Bright lights were frequently linked to physical discomfort (headaches, eye strain) and difficulty concentrating.

- "Lighting is awful in almost all of the classrooms."
- "It's funny this was asked because I've had a very big problem with lighting here."
- "Those fluorescent lights kinda hurt my eyes... especially if they're all on at once."
- "LED lights full stop actually—no thanks."
- "I wish professors would turn off some lights during class, but I don't feel comfortable asking."
- "Flickering lights haven't been fixed for months... that can be very overwhelming."
- "...lights being too bright ..."

➡ 2.5.2 Noise: Distracting and Often Unpredictable

Environmental noise (construction, HVAC systems, overhead music, loud hallways) was noted

often as distressing. Even **typical classroom chatter or ventilation systems** were cited as overstimulating or disruptive.

- “...and electricity in general being too loud.”
- “The HVAC system can be unbearably distressing in some spaces.”
- “Elevator dings scare me.”
- “Live music plays when you’re trying to study... even from the quiet floor.”
- “I carry noise-cancelling headphones everywhere.”
- “It [HVAC] can be overwhelming and distracting.”
- “... the downtown campus is right by the fire station.”

2.5.3 Furniture and Room Design: Physical Discomfort & Spatial Constraints

While some students appreciated swivel chairs or furniture variety; others found many classroom chairs rigid, cramped, or poorly arranged. Overcrowded classrooms and lack of personal space created barriers to comfort and focus. Requests were made for more private, cozy nooks or retreat areas.

- “I always forget the chair leans back and almost fall.”
- “Classrooms are not very comfortable with their chairs.”
- “There’s not a whole lot of small nooks you can retreat to.”
- “The ceilings are low, no windows, no air ventilation or white noise—it’s terrible.”

2.5.4 Temperature and Air Quality: Too Hot, Too Cold, Too Loud

Temperature regulation was a common issue, with buildings being described as “ice cold” or “boiling hot.” HVAC systems were also cited for **inconsistent air quality** and disruptive noise levels. Students noted difficulty in **dressing appropriately**, since internal temps often didn’t match the weather.

- “Rooms are ice cold or boiling hot.”
- “AC causes bad reactions.”
- “The Adult Resource Center is disablingly loud when HVAC is engaged.”
- “Never predictable—I can never dress appropriately.”

3. Future Needs and Supports

Students made many insightful suggested improvements which fell into three main categories: academic related supports, changes to the physical environment, in some places, and opportunities to embrace neurodivergence identity and community. Other suggestions include one-on-one meetings with faculty, orientation programs, academic services, social services, and career support tailored to neurodivergent students. Major themes and sub-themes that emerged are described below.

3.1 Academics and Course Instruction

3.1.1 Flexibility in Learning and Assessment

Some students commented on how rigid teaching and assessment methods can alienate or disadvantage neurodivergent learners. They emphasized the need for multiple ways to complete

assignments—written, verbal, or visual—based on individual strengths, as well as flexible formats (e.g., optional presentations, downloadable content, hands-on projects) which would enable better engagement and expression. Flexibility in assignment submission formats (physical vs. online) and varied types of assignments to accommodate different learning styles were also highlighted.

- “Different ways of presenting course material... Understanding that people with autism perceive communication differently.”
- “Having alternate and equivalent assignments... is a good thing.”
- “No more essays because they trigger me.”

➡ **3.1.2 Clearer, Simpler, and More Organized Instruction**

Poorly organized platforms and vague instructions can cause confusion and stress, as reported by several students. Students request organized course materials, simplified explanations, and clearer assignment expectations. Many highlighted the need for feedback that helps improve work.

- “Being able to get the birds-eye view... helps us go with the flow with less anxiety.”
- “Simplifying things would be better.”
- “I got a paper back... all the feedback I was given was that it ‘didn’t quite meet the standards’... and I still have no idea what I could’ve done to improve.”

➡ **3.1.3 Compassionate, Patient, and Respectful Faculty**

Another sub-theme that emerged is a call for faculty that are empathetic, respectful, and compassionate, especially as it relates to neurodivergence. Respect and kindness are central; students often feel judged, dismissed, or embarrassed for asking for help. Faculty training on neurodivergence and special education is requested to foster a supportive learning environment.

- “Kindness and understanding is key. Many professors can be rude and disgusted by the fact I need extra help.”
- “It feels degrading, to be honest... like one has to wear big button pins and ‘flair’ to announce whatever issues they’re dealing with.”
- “Just be patient! Especially when someone’s trying to figure out how to word a question.”

➡ **3.1.4 Recognizing Individuality in Neurodivergence**

Respondents noted that neurodivergent students are not a monolith; each has unique needs, preferences, and ways of learning.

- “That we may look ‘normal’ but we aren’t far from it.”
- “Autism looks very different for each person who lives with it.”

➡ **3.1.5 Supporting Universal Design**

There was a strong acknowledgment from respondents that accommodations for some may benefit all. Many students stressed the importance of normalizing accommodations, so they don’t feel singled out or “othered.” Several responses suggest adapting learning formats—offering choices between visual, verbal, or written assignments. Others advocate for clearer communication, checklists, and one-on-one support for understanding coursework. Many want participation expectations and attendance policies to be more flexible, recognizing sensory burnout or overstimulation. A need for better access to technology supports was brought up by some respondents.

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- “Supportive and inclusive environments make a huge difference... when everyone embraces flexibility, understanding, and compassion.”
 - “Providing more flexible learning options...”
 - “More directions for assignments and how to get around campus.”
 - “If an assignment can be done as a worksheet, put it on D2L.”
 - “No essays allowed and get rid of requirements to show up to class...”
 - “Some accommodations can help everyone.”
 - “I think this is really hard to generalize... the variety is great, but you have to ask each person.”

➡ **3.1.6 Awareness, Education, and Faculty Training**

A powerful theme is the need to educate staff, faculty, and students about autism and neurodivergence. Students request training for faculty on communication, accommodations, and bias, as well as raising campus-wide awareness to combat stigma. Some feedback calls for inclusive design training that also considers intersecting identities like age, gender, and trans/non-binary experiences.

- “Educating students and staff on autism and neurodivergence is really the biggest step.”
- “Listen to those of us on campus... we can speak for ourselves.”
- “Training faculty & staff... in how to support rather than burden gender minorities.”
- “I think staff and faculty should be trained on autism awareness... there are a ton of misconceptions.”
- “Be patient, be friendly, and try to understand that they function a bit differently than the rest of us.”
- “Educate some staff how to deal with them and how to help them with their problems.”
- “They could make sure that teachers understand the kids who are neurodivergent and get what it means to be neurodivergent so that they can help their students.”
- “Faculty education on neurodivergence and a student organization or student/faculty group to either create a safe inclusive environment or actively make changes to the campus.”
- “Include some kind of sensitivity training for understanding neurodivergent people that all students have to take.”

3.2 Physical Space

As noted above, certain environmental factors pose barriers to inclusion. Addressing these issues would significantly improve the quality of campus life for all students, particularly those with sensory sensitivities or less visible disabilities. Students highlighted the need for sensory-friendly spaces with adjustable lighting, noise control and quiet areas, flexible seating, and more social spaces for neurodivergent students. Students appreciate spaces with **noise-reducing design or policies**, and some suggested access to noise-cancelling headphones or quieter zones.

➡ **3.2.1. Sensory Retreat Spaces and Study Options**

Again, many students advocate for more quiet, private, and sensory-friendly spaces, particularly for decompressing or studying. Suggested features include dim lighting, soundproofing, stim rooms, cool-down rooms, and fidget tools. The need for non-stigmatizing, discreet support spaces came up frequently. There’s a strong desire for **more inclusive design** in existing student areas, such as the library and commons. Some expressed discomfort using group spaces alone.

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- “A room should be dedicated for autistic students to retreat to in case of overstimulation.”
 - “There’s not a whole lot of small nooks you can retreat to without feeling like everyone is watching you.”
 - “Low lighting and quiet with various seating options would help me study much better.”
 - “Noise-cancelling headphones and fidgets in the library would be helpful.”
 - “More private study rooms, maybe.”
 - “Have real designated quiet areas that can be closed off.”
 - “Maybe a stim room with things like hammocks and ball chairs.”
 - “Dim the lights, make the library quieter.”
 - “Some areas where lights are covered with non-blue covers.”
 - “Have more sensory friendly events (for all ages, not just children).”
 - “Maybe consider sensory friendly classrooms (smaller classes, different and softer lighting, and more spacing between desks).”
 - “I believe they could advertise the autism friendly campus better than they currently do and create more quiet rooms.”
 - “Include individuals who have sensory issues and provide quiet, low light places to regroup.”

➡ **3.2.2. Infrastructure and Environmental Adjustments**

Requests include better lighting controls, visibility strips on stairs, and adjustable noise/temperature conditions. Several students mentioned construction and events being disruptive and suggested adjusting their timing or proximity to class spaces.

- “Adding visibility strips to the stairs would be fantastic.”
- “Separate games & construction from class times.”
- “Lighting-controlled spaces and flexible seating.”
- “Dim the lights during testing/studying.”

3.3 Foster Neurodivergence Identity and Community

➡ **3.3.1 Support Networks and Peer Connections**

There’s interest in peer mentoring, autistic-friendly clubs, and opportunities for neurodivergent students to connect socially and academically. Students want a chance to engage without needing to disclose diagnoses and without feeling separated from the rest of the campus community.

- “Autism-specific mentoring programs, with peer support groups, skill workshops...”
- “Providing opportunities for neurodivergent students to connect with each other.”
- “It would be nice to have these things without... slapping an ‘autistic’ label onto yourself.”
- “Start support groups or services for them.”
- “LCC could create a group for autistic/neurodivergent people so that they can get together and socialize.”
- “Creating support/socialization groups and including them in the advertisement of LCC.”

➡ **3.3.2 Centering Neurodivergent Voices**

A strong current is the value of asking ND students directly for feedback and listening genuinely. Students repeatedly stress the importance of being included in decision-making and seen as

experts in their own experiences. Many responses suggest the creation of support groups and services specifically for neurodivergent students:

- “Take the time to talk to us... if we need anything.”
- “Just reaching out... and listening to their feedback is the best thing you could do.”
- “Usually we’re ignored, or choices are made without us.”
- “Show them that they are wanted and included at LCC.”

Appendix B: Full Analyses of Faculty and Staff Survey and Focus Group Responses

Introduction

The following gives a detailed account of the various analyses that were conducted on faculty and staff data, including both survey and focus group data. Except where otherwise noted, these results have been merged across faculty and staff, as we did not have the appropriate power (i.e., number of respondents per category) to separate.

Results are grouped according to the three major areas, the “why”(1) , ” (2) and “future needs.” (3).

1. The Why

1.1 Should LCC Embrace Neurodiversity?

As shown in Figure 1 and Table 1, there was moderately high agreement from both groups to the statement “LCC should provide a more autism friendly campus.” There was, however, a noticeable difference, with faculty, $M = 4.33 (.69)$, having a higher agreement on average compared to staff, $M = 3.88 (.93)$, as well as noticeably higher frequencies of “strongly agree” and “agree” responses for faculty compared to staff.

Overall, a majority of faculty and staff conveyed a consensus that Lansing Community College should continue to embrace an autistic/neurodivergent friendly campus.

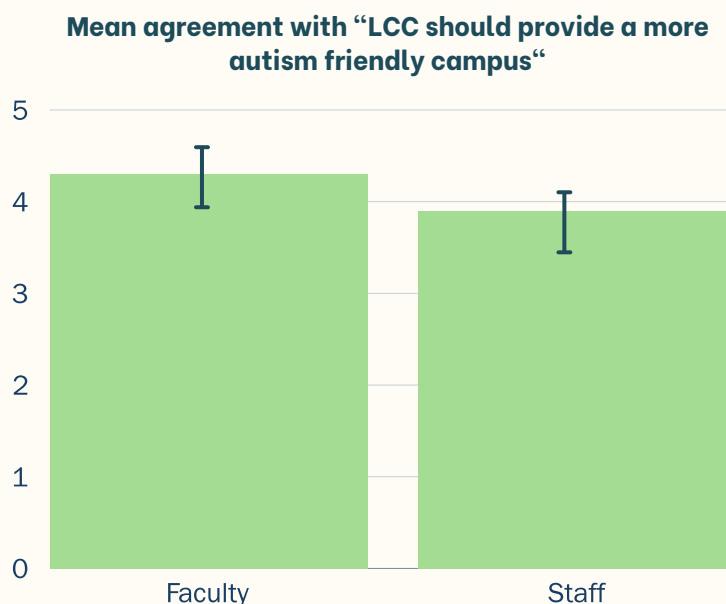


Figure 1. Mean Agreement with “LCC Should Provide a More Autism Friendly Campus” by Faculty and Staff Groups

*Error bars represent standard error of the mean.

Table 1.

Counts and Frequency of Rating Responses to “LCC Should Provide a More Autism Friendly Campus” by Student Group

	N	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
Faculty	18	0 (0%)	2 (11.1%)	8 (44.4%)	8 (44.4%)
Staff	17	1 (5.9%)	5 (29.4%)	6 (35.5%)	5 (29.4%)

*Neither group recorded any “1” (Strongly Disagree) rating.

A number of themes and sub-themes emerged related to why LCC should embrace neurodiversity, from the faculty and staff responses.

1.2 Why Should LCC Embrace Neurodiversity?

➡ 1.2.1 Empowerment and Success

This theme emphasizes responses from faculty and staff related to empowering neurodivergent students to achieve academic and personal success.

- “Our goal as a college is to empower all students including ND students.”
- “LCC strives to set students up for success and this is one step toward that goal.”

➡ 1.2.2 Diversity and Inclusion

Highlights the value of diversity, including neurodiversity, in strengthening the community and fostering an inclusive environment.

- “Diversity of thought strengthens any group.”
- “LCC should embrace neurodiversity because its mission involves empowering a diverse community of learners.”

➡ 1.2.3. Support and Understanding

This theme stresses the need for understanding and supporting neurodivergent individuals to create supportive environments.

- “We need to work to understand and support each other.”
- “By creating an environment that supports students with autism and other neurological differences, LCC can reduce barriers to education.”

1.2.4. Access to Education

Advocates for opening educational opportunities to all students, enhancing their academic and future life opportunities.

- “The college should open their doors to all for education benefits and college degrees.”
- “This support can make all the difference in access to education and future life opportunities.”

1.2.5. Community and Belonging

Emphasizes creating a sense of community and belonging for all students, including neurodivergent ones.

- “We are a community college, and we embrace our whole population.”
- “Because college should be a place where you should both feel accepted and find a community.”

1.2.6. Innovation and Unique Perspectives

Recognizes the unique perspectives and innovative potential of neurodivergent individuals.

- “It seems individuals whose default is, ‘thinking outside of the box,’ have the capacity to produce solutions that neurotypical persons may never imagine.”
- “Neurodiversity brings with it diverse abilities to see problems through different lens to maximize our collective ability to be our best.”

1.2.7. Challenges and Ethical Responsibility

Acknowledges the challenges in supporting neurodivergent students and the ethical responsibility to avoid marginalizing them.

- “There have been severe safety issues in some classes/depts. and some trades are simply not conducive to certain levels/types of neurodiverse folks.”
- “If LCC refuses to become an autism/neurodivergent friendly campus, then LCC is actively playing a role in marginalizing people who are neurodivergent.”

2. What are Additional Needs and Resources that Would Benefit Neurodivergent Students on Campus?

Three major themes were categorized from the faculty and staff focus groups and survey data related to what additional needs and wants are that would best help support neurodivergent students on campus at LCC and provide an even more welcoming environment for them. One large group of responses fell into additional academic supports and structures that could be offered, while another broad theme was related to advocacy and awareness around neurodiversity, and a third centered on the need for professional development training for faculty and staff.

2.1. Additional Resources and Supports

2.1.1 Inclusive and Supportive Learning Environments

Many contributors emphasized the need for structured, accommodating, and empathetic classroom environments tailored to neurodivergent students.

-
- “Be mindful of sensory sensitivities... provide quiet areas, noise-canceling headphones, or softer lighting.”
 - “Neurodivergent students often thrive with predictable routines.”
 - “Training to staff and faculty about what is and is not helpful when trying to support students who are neurodivergent.”

➡ **2.1.2 Academic Flexibility and Grace**

Students need individualized academic support and flexibility in how they learn and are assessed, especially when dealing with challenges like ADHD.

- “Provide options for how students learn and demonstrate their knowledge.”
- “No professor should be proud of the fact that their class is so difficult that a lot of people fail.”
- “Students need and deserve more grace and help with their learning.”

➡ **2.1.3 Holistic Student Success and Well-being**

Emphasis on mental health, peer support, mentorship, and a broader educational experience beyond rigid academic structures.

- “Support social communication... in a safe and supportive environment.”
- “Mentoring programs, additional community and HS outreach.”
- “Hands-on experiences seem to be very beneficial to neurodivergent students.”

2.2. Neurodiversity Awareness and Advocacy

➡ **2.2.1 Acknowledging and Advocating Neurodiversity**

Responses and comments included strong advocacy for acknowledging neurodivergent students not just as recipients of services but as valuable, respected individuals.

- “We should help the neurodiverse student know that they are welcome and that help is available.”
- “We need to treat all students as individuals who deserve our respect for trying to learn and better their lives.”
- “Help them just ‘be’ themselves and know that’s ok.”

➡ **2.2.2 Clarity and Accessibility of Resources**

Many expressed concerns over the complexity and lack of visibility of existing support services. Clear pathways and better promotion are needed.

- “It needs to be more clear the difference between the different services offered and who to reach out to.”
- “Programs and resources specifically targeting neurodivergent students, such as support groups, specialized orientation sessions.”
- “I think we do have a lot of services but many aren’t well known or really promoted.”

➡ **2.2.3 Structural and Systemic Improvements**

Suggestions go beyond the classroom—many called for changes in how the institution views student success, career services, outreach, and program design.

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- “A group whose needs we completely ignore is... students who received Special Education services...”
 - “Tailored pathways to career success.”
 - “Survey and exploratory courses in every area, from art to aeronautics, should be offered and encouraged.”

2.3. Faculty and Staff Training (Professional Development)

There is a strong call for structured professional development and training so that faculty and staff can better support neurodivergent learners. Several respondents acknowledge their limited understanding, but desire to learn from experts.

The analysis reveals a committed faculty and staff eager to enhance their support for neurodivergent students. There was a clear desire to implement comprehensive, inclusive, and practical training, developed in collaboration with experts and ND individuals. By doing so, a consensus from faculty and staff, was that this can then foster environments where all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Sub-themes that emerged related to professional development training include:

2.3.1. Awareness and Foundational Training

A strong theme across responses is the need for increased awareness and foundational understanding of neurodivergence through accessible training. Respondents emphasized starting with small, manageable steps.

- “I think the first step is awareness, and it would be good to receive some easy steps we could take or some basic changes we could do in our words and actions to make things better.”
- “Training for faculty and staff and finding out from students what they would like to see or need.”

2.3.2 Desire for Comprehensive and Practical Training and Resources

Faculty and staff express a need for tangible resources that can be applied in their work with students. Providing clear, structured communication and flexible learning approaches was highlighted as being most beneficial. There was also a clear desire to avoid superficial training, as well as training(s) be designed with input from ND individuals to ensure relevance and impact.

- “Paid training for faculty on how to organize courses and understand and communicate better with ND students.”
- “We do need training on this issue. We have had training and guest speakers for other issues and for being diverse and inclusive. This issue should be something we focus on in the near future.”
- “[neurodiversity training] would be a good addition to PD days... part-time faculty and supporting services should be involved in this training.”
- “General training for staff, faculty and perhaps even a short student training during orientation.”
- “Anything that could be given to assist with everything from identifying neurodivergent students to ways to be of assistance to them.”
- “Training on recognizing behaviors that may be more neurodivergent and methods of speaking to and approaching them (which would be how we should treat everyone).”

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- “Please don’t make it as lame as the sexual harassment training. No more tea, please.”
 - “I believe that if all that comes out of this is we have to click through a two-minute video and take a quiz, it will have been a performative action, not a real one.”

➡ **2.3.3 Advocacy for Inclusive and Flexible Learning Environments**

Respondents highlighted training that focuses on the importance of creating environments that accommodate diverse learning needs. References to implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to enhance engagement for both ND and neurotypical students were also mentioned.

- “Trainings that show how context is what creates ‘disability’ and how creating the right environment can make sure everybody has a chance to use their unique brains.”
- “We should all brush up on how to teach and reach every student.”

➡ **2.3.4. Ongoing Commitment and Follow-Through**

There was recognition from respondents that one-time training efforts are insufficient; continuous education and commitment are essential for meaningful impact.

- “This discussion is the most important step. Next will be the follow-through and continual training with faculty and staff to support this population.”
- “Train all faculty and staff on what to do.”

3. Next Steps: How Does LCC Further this Mission?

Our analysis of faculty and staff responses that probed suggestions and next steps for this larger initiative revealed a strong call for foundational training, as described above, and increased awareness around neurodivergence, with a focus on practical, inclusive strategies and adaptable learning environments. Respondents emphasized the need for institutional cultural change, better visibility and access to existing services, and ongoing collaboration with neurodivergent individuals and experts. There was also a concern about performative efforts, with a desire for genuine, sustained commitment to creating a more supportive campus.

Overall, the feedback reflected both a readiness to learn and a recognition of current gaps in knowledge and practice.

Two broad categories emerged:

3.1 Institutional Transformation and Cultural Change

This includes subthemes related to shifting campus culture, reducing stigma, ensuring genuine commitment over performative actions, improving access to services, and collaborating with neurodivergent individuals. It reflects a call for systemic, long-term change in how the institution understands and supports neurodiversity.

➡ **3.1.1. Cultural Change + Institutional Accountability**

Participants called for a cultural shift within the institution to become more open, inclusive, and genuinely committed to serving all students—beyond symbolic gestures

- “We need to change the culture from that of ‘I know it all’ to ‘I want to constantly improve.’”
- “Do the work. Don’t just be performative.”

➡ **3.1.2 Stigma Reduction**

Participants called for a cultural shift within the institution to become more open, inclusive, and genuinely committed to serving all students—beyond symbolic gestures.

- “Possibly having pins that identify those willing to disclose their status as a way to de-stigmatize it.”

➡ **3.1.3 Collaboration with Experts and the ND Community**

Emphasizing the value of involving neurodivergent individuals and professionals in developing solutions, not just designing for them.

- “Get input from that community.”
- “Acknowledging that the need exists and gathering info from those who know best what would create a neurodivergent friendly campus.”

3.2 Practical Support and Fostering Inclusive Learning Environments

This broad theme encompasses subthemes around sensory and environmental adaptations, flexible teaching strategies, and actionable tools for faculty and staff. It focuses on equipping individuals with the knowledge and resources to make day-to-day interactions and instruction more inclusive and supportive.

➡ **3.2.1 Inclusive and Adaptive Learning Environments**

Suggestions from faculty and staff also focused on changing the physical and pedagogical environment to support ND students, including lighting, time management flexibility, and sensory-friendly spaces.

- “Teach time management as an individual class and have academic classes be on a flexible due date plan.”
- “Changing the lighting from cool/daylight to something slightly warmer may have the greatest impact per dollar spent.”
- “Recognize that many people with ASD learn differently and may need a sensory friendly space to escape to if they are feeling overwhelmed.”

➡ **3.2.2. Awareness and Accessibility of Existing Services**

Improving awareness and access to current support systems is seen as an essential and often overlooked step.

- “Making already existing services more accessible and well known would be helpful for many.”

Other big picture suggested steps that were mentioned by respondents include: enhancing Career Services in a manner to better support neurodivergent students in finding internships and employment, including interview practice and resume writing tailored to their needs. Others argued for advocating for state-level policies that support the transition from K-12 to higher education for neurodivergent students, ensuring continuity of support.

Appendix C: Sensory Audit Data by Location

Table 1.

Neurodivergent Identifying Students Self-Reported Diagnoses

Location	Decibel (dB) Range ^a	Visual Balance? ^b	Color Balance? ^c	Presence of Odor?	Sound Dampening Features? ^d	Notes & Recommendations
GB, Outside 2235J	46.3–48.9	Y	Y	N	Y	
GB, Outside 2276	37.0–50.4	Y	Y	N	Y	
GB, Outside 2225A	47.0–55.4	Y	Y	N	N	Potential for increased sound dampening features while recognizing that this is a highly trafficked area.
GB, Meditation Room	43.9–57.7	Y	Y	N	N	The room is austere and not calming due to the largely hard surfaces and echoing due to bareness and emptiness. The room also lacks organization and intention. Note: The space's ease of access for day-to-day use and "stopping in" is hindered by where it is located in the building. It is situated away from where students will regularly use it. Several students reported not knowing about the space.
A&S, Lobby	46.5–54.8	Y	Y	N	N	Dim monitors/screens slightly. Consider durable cushions (potentially varied textures) on some seating. Hard surfaces with little sound absorption.

Location	Decibel (dB) Range ^a	Visual Balance? ^b	Color Balance? ^c	Presence of Odor?	Sound Dampening Features? ^d	Notes & Recommendations
A&S, 4333	31.0-58.1	Y	N	Y	N	Intensity of orange wall paint can be reduced, but the royal blue paint is fine. Presence of a chemical odor in the space likely due to chemicals needed for the lab. Accommodations to address may be necessary.
A&S, 4307	44.3-66.0	Y	N	N	N	The nature of a lab space requires cleanable surfaces but lend to increased noise. Little can be done about this given the importance of safety. Individual accommodations will be necessary for sound (e.g., Noise dampening headphones). Closed cabinetry reduces visual clutter to a reasonable level. Intensity of orange wall paint can be reduced.
A&S, 4119	42.7-55.1	N	Y	N	N	Explore options for improving visual balance by installing doors for shelving.
A&S, 4138	43.7-60.4	N	N	Y	N	When a machine is turned off, the maximum decibel reading drops to 45.7. Explore options for relocation of the machine or unplugging when not needed.

Location	Decibel (dB) Range ^a	Visual Balance? ^b	Color Balance? ^c	Presence of Odor?	Sound Dampening Features? ^d	Notes & Recommendations
A&S, 3308	30.1-59.6	Y	N	N	Y	
A&S, 3122	48.2-83.6	N	Y	N	N	Explore shelving doors
TLC, 1230H	46.3-58.3	Y	Y	N	Y/N	Consider additional moving partitions to reduce sound and visual distraction. While a mix of materials is present, given the open and modern nature of the TLC, consider additional sound dampening surfaces (e.g., upholstered chairs, sculptural elements made of fabric or wood). The multi zone lighting of the TLC is excellent and allows for dimming lights as necessary.
TLC, 1230A	51.3-62.9	N	Y	N	Y/N	The presence of extensive amounts of science materials (e.g., models) increases visual distraction. Cabinets and/or containers to improve organization and obscure view of materials is recommended.
TLC, 1315A	51.7-57.4	Y	Y	N	Y/N	Very nice area that offers flexibility of use and natural lighting. Subtle but present sculpture hanging from ceiling.
TLC, 1315	56.0-59.6	Y	Y	N	Y/N	

Location	Decibel (dB) Range ^a	Visual Balance? ^b	Color Balance? ^c	Presence of Odor?	Sound Dampening Features? ^d	Notes & Recommendations
TLC, 2110	51.8–52.7	Y	Y	N	Y/N	
TLC, 2212	51.7–53.1	Y	Y	N	Y/N	Cubbies and rooms are excellent features that allow for separation both visual and auditory. Textural elements of these areas is fantastic.
TLC, 3220	51.2–54.3	Y	Y	N	Y	The variety of seating options composed of varying materials is excellent.
TLC, Outside Rm. 3307	44.3–55.4	Y	Y	N	Y	
TLC, 3220A	39.2–43.9	Y	Y	N	Y	

^a Decibel (dB) range is a measure of sound. As a rule of thumb, decibel readings at or above 85 dB are generally considered “dangerous,” particularly under prolonged exposure; 70–80 dB are considered loud; 50–69 dB are considered moderate; and at or below 49 dB are considered soft/safe. Although auditory needs vary by person, 55 dB are considered to be “friendly” to individuals with auditory sensitivities. Decibels are on a logarithmic scale, and the average (statistical) person can hear a 2 dB difference. Every 6 dB increase constitutes a doubling in sound pressure, and 10 dB is approximately where the average person would experience the “loudness” doubled. Note: Factors such as distance from the epicenter of the sound will moderate the impact.

^b Visual balance is a subjective observation of appropriately filled space. A general guideline is that wall space and shelving should be no more than 50% occupied. A “Y” indicates that visual balance is observed.

^c Color balance is an assessment of the extent to which the intensity of colors in a space are low and the extent to which colors do not contrast in large quantities. A “Y” indicates that balance in color is observed. Although color contrast is beneficial for reading and attention, when in large quantities, it overwhelms the senses.

^d Sound dampening features indicates the presence of materials and built features that absorb sound, thereby reducing/dampening the decibel levels. A “Y” indicates that sound dampening features are present.

Appendix D: Examples of Remedies for Sensory Improvements

- [Portable Room Divider](#)
- [Acoustic baffles](#)
- [Sound dampening](#) (various custom)
- [Sound dampening_\(libraries and other spaces\)](#) -
- [Natural sound dampening](#)

Appendix E: Suggested 5-Year Professional Development Plan to Create an Autism-Friendly Campus

The following 5-year professional development plan is designed to empower faculty, staff, and students through progressive awareness, training, and structural transformation. It is informed by data collected during focus groups, surveys, and campus audits. The plan is built around five core milestones, one for each year:

- 1 Awareness and Foundations
- 2 Skill Development and Strategies
- 3 Policy and Environmental Design
- 4 Student Empowerment and Leadership
- 5 Sustainability and Evaluation

The below outline (Plan at a Glance) includes overarching goals and basic activities in order to convey the yearly highlights and progression of the next five years. A list of more detailed and specific activities follows this section of the plan in the Details, Ideas, and Suggestions for Activities by Year section.

Note: this is a suggested plan; if bandwidth and resources allow, some activities could be pursued in tandem, in other words, sooner than proposed here.

Plan at a Glance

➡ Year 1: Awareness and Foundation

Objectives:

1. Build foundational understanding of neurodiversity and autism
2. Gain institutional commitment

Key Activities:

- Establish and hire a Chief Neuro-inclusion Officer (or similar role) to oversee the implementation of this plan and long-term future of this initiative.
- Identify a group of Neuro-inclusion Champions (experts) from each key area on campus so all areas have a designated point person for personnel in that area
 - Enroll these personnel into intensive educational programs, workshop series, and other professional development opportunities throughout the first year of their tenure.
- Begin a neurodivergence and autism awareness campaign.
- Host one introductory webinar/workshop per semester (Fall: neurodiversity and neurodivergence; Spring: autism) geared at specific audiences, such as faculty, students, facilities, and public safety (1 workshop each in the Spring and Fall)

Expected Outcomes:

- Identification and education of key leaders and champions for the initiative, as well as point-personnel experts in various sectors of campus life.
- Shared campus-wide awareness and basic understanding of autism and neurodiversity/gence.

Year 2: Skill Development and Strategies

Objectives:

- Translate awareness into actionable practices tailored to campus roles and begin centering autistic voices in planning and delivery.

Key Activities:

- Utilize Neuro-inclusion Champions' new knowledge to create a centralized neurodiversity resource library website and accompanying support content (videos, tip sheets, articles, worksheets, and other resources).
- Launch a peer mentor/staff ally program for neurodivergent students, faculty, and staff.
- Offer more specialized workshops for:
 - Faculty: Universal Design for Learning (UDL) practices and classroom strategies.
 - Administration and Staff: UDL, communication, and support strategies.
 - Facilities and Public Safety: Accessibility and sensory-sensitive design.
 - Students: Neuro-aware relationships and communication.
- Foster a neuro-inclusion transition team specifically aimed at helping neurodivergent students transition into and out of the LCC.
- Form student, faculty, and staff focus groups to continue to gather feedback and identify gaps.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased student, staff, and faculty competency in supporting autistic and neurodivergent students
- Establishment of support networks and resources across campus

Year 3: Policy and Environmental Design

Objectives:

- Create structural, both physical and conceptual, changes to reduce sensory and procedural barriers, and 2) increase sense of belonging.

Key Activities:

- Identify, introduce, and protect/enforce sensory-friendly zones and spaces, and publicize these by creating a sensory-friendly campus map.
- Review and revise policies to incorporate neuro-inclusion as an expected standard, such as:
 - Sensory friendly requirements and options for campus events, in particular major events like student orientation and graduation.
 - UDL requirements in curriculum and course design.
 - Faculty and staff onboarding including information on the value of neurodiversity and highlighting available campus resources to aid in utilizing and employing UDL and neuroinclusive strategies.

Expected Outcomes:

- Improved sense of belonging through valuing accessibility and comfort for neurodivergent students, faculty, and staff.
- More inclusive policies that reflect the needs of autistic individuals and clearly convey institutional expectation of neuro-inclusion.

Year 4: Student Empowerment and Leadership

Objectives:

- Elevate autistic voices and foster student-led initiatives

Key Activities:

- Create and logistically support (e.g. identifying a staff or faculty mentor) a Student Neurodiversity Club/Center.
- Fund and scaffold/support student-led panels, campaigns, and awareness events

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased student engagement, ownership, and sense of belonging.
- Development of long-term leadership capacity within the student body.
- Improved neurodivergent student retention and/or enrollment.

Year 5: Sustainability and Evaluation

Objectives:

- Solidify initiatives and evaluate impact

Key Activities:

- Conduct surveys and focus groups to continue to assess effectiveness and autism friendliness/neuro-inclusion.
- Establish key stakeholder who will review data from surveys and focus groups and determine needed next steps so that this initiative is iterative and proactive.
- Publish an annual autism-friendliness report (and make publicly available)

Expected Outcomes:

- Clear metrics for success and areas for growth.
- Sustainable integration of autism-friendly practices in campus culture.
- Improved neuro-inclusion via annual reporting accountability.

Details, Ideas, and Suggestions for Activities by Year

There are many ways to implement the above plan. We have provided some ideas for more specific activities/events/action items for each year, below. Note that, while many items can be cross categorized, for simplification purposes, we have not repeated any activities across different years.

Year 1: Awareness and Foundation

Objectives:

1. Build foundational understanding of neurodiversity and autism.
2. Gain institutional commitment.

- **Chief Neuro-inclusion Officer and Neuro-inclusion Champions (\$\$\$)**

Add positions that are “experts” in various types of neurodivergent student support, including an overarching position that supervises and connects these support roles to one another (e.g. “Chief Neuro-inclusion Officer” or something similar). This critical role will help roll out recommendations within this report, as well as serve as a known centralized, common resource on campus while familiarity with various more specific support roles grows over time. While the general campus is in an awareness phase for year 1, Neuro-inclusion Champions should embark on a more intensive educational journey in preparation for their utilization as a resource for Year 2 content and goals. Some suggestions for structured approaches to this more intensive neurodiversity and autism education include:

- **Landmark College’s Certificate Program in Learning Differences and Neurodiversity:** A fully accredited post baccalaureate program that can be completed in a single year (if one course is taken in each of the five yearly terms). This program is designed for professionals who work full time and offers two tracks that are highly relevant to this plan: Autism on Campus and Online and Executive Function. The program culminates in a real-world applied project via the Capstone course, which can be utilized as a beginning to this group’s active role for Year 2.
- **Custom Self-Paced Online Modules:** The Landmark College Institute for Research and Training can also design self-paced online modules with or without synchronous components on a variety of topics including autism, executive function, and universal design for learning.
- **Landmark College’s Summer Institute:** A three-day summit focused on strategies for supporting neurodivergent young adults in an educational setting
- **Landmark College’s Neurodiversity in the Workplace Conference:** a yearly fully virtual/online event focused specifically on neurodiversity in the workplace, including supervision, accommodations, and universal design practices.
- **VCU’s Autism Center for Excellence:** A public resource that offers courses and learning paths that focus specifically on autism.
- **Autism Career Empowerment Course** (an affiliate of Vanderbilt University): Offers deep dive courses into autism, covering a variety of important topics from 101 level foundations to job readiness.
- **College Autism Network’s Autism Inclusive Campus:** A pilot project currently seeking applicants to be a part of their Autism Inclusive Campus Coaching Program.

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- Expert and Community Memberships: Memberships with local and national organizations, in addition to regular engagement with related national organizations and their affiliated conferences, such as The Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD, which has a Knowledge and Practice Community focused on autism) and College Autism Network increase knowledge, offer community, and open doors to additional resources.
 - **Introductory Awareness Training (\$-\$\$)** Offer a small number of brief workshops, webinars, and presentations each semester, making sure to target numerous groups on campus, such as students, staff, faculty, academic affairs, student affairs, and facilities. Landmark College’s Institute for Research and Training is a highly qualified resource for developing and facilitating these trainings, though other resources are available. Some ideas for topics/titles are:
 - Neurodiversity and Neurodivergence
 - Neurodiversity 101: Terms, Language, and Dos/Don’ts
 - The Benefits of Neurodiversity
 - Autism
 - The Venn Diagram of Neurodiversity and Autism
 - Autism 101: From Understanding to Real World Support
 - **Awareness Campaigns (\$-\$\$\$)** Campaign ideas may include a variety of approaches including:
 - Monthly infographics and/or newsletters in both print and digital form (e.g. bathroom stall posters, and TV awareness “ads”).
 - During the month of April an extra boost for autism should be run in conjunction with Autism Awareness Month, such as tabling, student panels, movie showings, and guest speakers.
 - Student, faculty, and staff book clubs (potential titles could include *Born on a Blue Day*, *Look Me in the Eye*, *With the Light: Raising an Autistic Child*, *The ABCs of Autism Acceptance*, *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*.)
 - Weekly or monthly Watch and Discuss Parties (e.g. Love on the Spectrum or Temple Grandin’s documentary: [*An Open Door*](#)).

Year 2: Skill Development and Strategies

Objectives:

- Translate awareness into actionable practices tailored to campus roles and begin centering autistic voices in planning and delivery.
- **Video Resource Library (\$\$)**: Create and promote a resource library of short informational videos that hit on common pain points, questions, or areas of confusion in regard to the neurodivergent community. (Some items that were specifically mentioned during data collection included helping faculty understand how to implement accommodations, or helping students understand how to request appointments with the campus Testing Center). To increase engagement and odds of watching these videos in full, all videos should be 90 seconds or less (longer topics can be broken down into smaller chunks that can be watched in succession).
- **Centralized Resource Website (\$\$)**: To ensure the campus community can find useful information related to autism and neurodiversity, all resources, such as the above Resource

Library, backlog of awareness posters, and recommended internal and external resources related to autism and neurodivergence, should be collected and maintained in a single centralized website. This website can be promoted through continued awareness campaigns, department meetings, and other outlets in conjunction with the college's communications teams.

- **Peer Mentor/Staff Ally Program (\$):** Support the development of a peer social support or mentoring system that pairs knowledgeable/experienced neurodivergent students with younger neurodivergent students and/or neuro-typical students with neurodivergent peers during key times or critical events, such as orientation, midterms, and finals. The goal of this support is genuine connection and belonging, and we therefore do not recommend this involve paid positions.
- **More Intensive Autism and Neurodiversity Training (\$-\$\$):** Offer a variety of more intensive traditional workshops, presentations, webinars, and/or asynchronous courses on key neurodiversity topics to specifically target populations as needed. To maximize collective awareness, care should be taken to include all campus community members, including departments that are often overlooked for neurodiversity training, such as facilities, public safety, dining services, and non-student-facing administration/leadership positions. In order to improve engagement and increase interest across all audiences, these opportunities should intentionally vary in modality and length (as short as 45 minutes to as long as a full day). All events—regardless of modality—should have clear learning objectives so that they are designed with intentionality, and so that attendees understand exactly what they will learn from attending/participating in the event (a vital aspect of Universal Design for Learning).

Landmark College's Institute for Research and Training is a highly qualified resource for developing and facilitating these trainings, though other resources are available. Some ideas for topics/titles are:

- Neurodiversity and Neurodivergence
 - Neurodiversity 101: Terms, Language, and Dos/Don'ts
 - The Benefits of Neurodiversity
 - Incorporating Technology as a Tool to Support Neurodivergent Students (either academically or in the workplace setting)
 - Creating Neuroinclusive Classrooms through Universal Design for Learning: From Neurodivergence Foundations to UDL Implementation
 - Mental Health Neurodivergence: Intersections and Supports
 - I Received an Accommodation Letter...Now What?: How to Collaborate with Neurodivergent Students Who Disclose their Approved Accommodations
 - Access Rights: K12 and Higher Education Legal Differences
- Autism
 - The Venn Diagram of Neurodiversity and Autism (addresses the often interchangeable use of "neurodiversity/genence" and "autism")
 - Autism 101: From Understanding to Real World Support
 - Strategies for Supporting Autistic Students on the Modern College Campus

Two sample workshop proposals that include a title, summary, and learning objectives are included at the end of this document as a point of comparison.

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- **Neuro-Inclusion Transition Team (\$\$):** Establish a neuro-inclusion transition team specifically aimed at helping neurodivergent students transition into and out of the Lansing setting. This should include forming alliances with high traffic transition schools in both the K12 (transitioning *to* Lansing) and higher education (transitioning *away* from Lansing) settings. Potential goals for this team could include
 - Collaboration on transition fairs/events
 - Targeted orientations
 - Creating a peer mentor program
 - Identifying specific points of contact at each location to better ensure strong communication
 - Creating a centralized website for this overall topic

➡ **Year 3: Policy and Environmental Design**

Objectives:

- Create structural (both physical and conceptual) changes to
 1. Reduce sensory and procedural barriers, and
 2. Increase sense of belonging
- **Permanent Low Sensory Spaces (\$\$-\$\$\$):** Designate and build out permanent low sensory spaces (emphasis on plural) on campus (low light, low sound, flexible furniture/chairs, plushies, fidgets, etc.). Based on feedback, we recommend at least 3 spaces in order to improve convenience, provide choice, and keep crowding to a minimum. These designated spaces should, at minimum, include easily accessible places where students 1) regularly “hang out,” 2) regularly study, and 3) eat meals. All spaces should be accompanied by clear usage expectations related to behavior, tidiness, etc.
 - To publicize these spaces, it is recommended that a map be published and maintained on the centralized neuro-inclusion website. In addition to designating these spaces, the entire map can be texture/color-coded to indicate sensory aspects of all spaces.
- **Event Low Sensory Spaces (\$-\$\$):** For any major campus event (orientation, job fairs, “Party with the Prez,” convocation, and graduation) designate and provide clear and consistent signage for low sensory spaces (low light, low sound, comfortable seating, fidgets). When appropriate, consider opening the event 30 minutes early for a “low sensory experience” that limits crowd size, excessively bright lights and loud music.
- **New Student Orientation (\$):** Add low sensory New Student Orientation options, as well as clarity in all orientation events about the availability of safe/low sensory spaces if needed/wanted.
- **Open House Events (\$):** Add Open House events outside of standard class times in order to offer low stakes and/or low sensory gradual exposure/access to spaces that are typically high sensory spaces (e.g. woodworking, autobody, or metal smithing shops).
- **Learning Management System (LMS) Templates (\$):** Create and require the use of LMS templates for all new courses. To align with UDL best practices, templates should be limited to

a maximum of 3 total for the entire college in order to create as much consistency as possible, while still giving faculty options.

- **Accessible Materials Support (\$\$\$):** Add a designated staff position to help faculty identify/select accessible materials for their courses. To help improve awareness of this position and the importance of selecting accessible materials, this topic and resource should be covered in all faculty onboarding, as well as mentioned yearly during department meetings.
- **The Landmark 10 (\$):** Roll out the “Landmark 10” rebranded to The Lansing 10 in a pilot group of courses that are heavily trafficked by neurodivergent students and/or are common/core courses that all or most students take. This involves intentionally devoting 5 minutes at the beginning and end of every class to mentally transitioning into and out of the class environment. Inward transition can involve a brief mindful activity and clear coverage of the learning objectives for class, and outward transition can involve required time to begin work on an assignment in order to make sure students understand independent work expectations and/or how to begin the actual assignment.
- **Language Accessibility (\$):** Simplify website language, especially in regard to high stakes information, such as enrollment, finances/financial aid, registration, withdrawal policies, student handbook (responsibilities and conduct procedures).
- **Onboarding/New Employee Orientation (\$):** In order to educate incoming personnel and to get them up to speed with campus expectations and policies, all new employee orientation and/or faculty onboarding sessions should include a segment related to neurodiversity awareness and education. The information covered can be tailored to the type of employees, and should include basic information on UDL best practices and general neurodiversity and autism education. Campus resources should also be highlighted so that all personnel have been informed of the various staff and resources available to aid them throughout their time at LCC.
- **Tenure Portfolio (\$):** To continue to incentivize faculty to keep up with neuro-inclusion and UDL best practices, demonstration of awareness and ability to apply knowledge related to accessibility and neuro-inclusion should be introduced as a weighted aspect of tenure portfolio review. If tenure is not relevant, it can be tied to performance reviews and/or merit-based salary increases.
- **Microgrants (\$-\$\$):** To continue to incentivize staff to keep up with neuro-inclusion and UDL best practices, microgrants should be awarded to individuals or departments that pilot neuro-inclusive programs, practices, and initiatives. Monies can either be awarded directly to individuals or to offices/departments in order to help cover costs of changes, hire personnel, or to replenish resources. Awarding should be overseen by the Chief Neuro-inclusion Officer, and the awarding of microgrants can go toward a variety of concepts, such as new supervision techniques, updated onboarding procedures, intentional communication style changes, or altering sensory aspects of the office environment.

Year 4: Student Empowerment and Leadership

Objectives: Elevate autistic voices and foster student-led initiatives.

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- **Create a Center for Neurodiversity (\$\$\$):** The Center for Neurodiversity should be staffed with at least one full-time staff member and be in a designated modern, well-equipped space. Priority hiring for autistic and neurodivergent student workers should be emphasized for various support roles in the office. This Center should absorb the responsibility of continued awareness programming and campaigning, from panels, to tabling, to watch parties.
 - **Launch a Student Neurodiversity Club (\$\$):** In addition to the Center, a student organization that recognizes and celebrates neurodiversity should be formed. This organization should have a designated faculty or staff advisor, and the organization should be responsible for sponsoring regular events and programming that raise awareness and provide opportunities for neurodivergent students to connect and feel a sense of belonging. Ideas for programming can include events such as a Pillow Fort Night, plushie making workshop, and fidget toy party.
 - **Cultural Achievement Recognition Events (\$\$):** Hold semesterly autism and/or neurodivergent cultural achievement ceremonies in conjunction with all graduation events. These events should include a featured autistic or neurodivergent speaker in addition to special cords, tassels, or pins. Based on scale/interest, all students recognized at this event may be given a 3-5-minute window to publicly address the audience.
 - **Financial Support (\$-\$\$\$):** Create channels to financial aid for students to utilize for foundational skills courses that are not traditionally covered by financial aid (“008 and 009”).
 - **No Standard Diploma Courses (\$\$\$):** To reach additional students, LCC can add courses/tracks that are accessible to students without a high school diploma (i.e., have earned a certificate of completion).
 - **Neuro-Inclusive Sister Courses (\$\$\$):** Designate and design courses that are similar to credit-bearing courses but are 20 minutes longer than their equivalent “sister” courses. (For example, PSY 101 may typically be 3-credits and meet 3 times a week for 50 minutes.) The sister course would still be 3-credits and still meet 3 times a week but would instead be 70 minutes.) These courses should be marketed to students interested in the topic, but who prefer an approach that allows for additional time to start and end each class in a way that is academically supportive. These courses should include heavily scaffolded activities to make use of the additional time and may include activities such as mindfulness activities at the start of class, 1:1 benchmark check-ins on long-term projects, designated time to begin homework during class time, receive direct feedback, or other needs.
 - While these courses are the same credit-weight from the student perspective, faculty who teach these courses should be fairly compensated at a higher rate, as well as have demonstrated expertise of supporting neurodivergent students.

Year 5: Evaluation and Sustainability

Objectives: Solidify initiatives and evaluate impact

- **Focus Groups/Campus Survey (\$-\$\$):** To continue assessing the effectiveness of programming it is recommended to convene 3 separate focus groups in the fall and spring. Going forward, if

desired, feedback and climate evaluation can be conducted by a campus survey every other year rather than focus groups.

- When designing either focus group questions or survey questions, autistic and/or neurodivergent students should be consulted and involved in the co-design and evolution of these tools.
- **Autism Friendliness Report (\$\$):** Every other year starting in Year 5, a Campus Autism Friendliness report should be compiled and made publicly available. This report should include data and input from students, faculty, staff, and, when appropriate, parents and community members. It should be framed not as an endpoint, but as part of an ongoing feedback and implementation cycle. The report should provide objective, honest information and be posted to the centralized website. Having a public, biannual objective such as this continues to hold Lansing Community College accountable through public assessment and evaluation, while also giving autistic and neurodivergent LCC community members ongoing opportunities to provide input and feedback.
 - Similar to the focus groups and surveys above, autistic and/or **neurodivergent students should be consulted and involved in the co-design and evolution** of this report so that it reflects the most salient and important information to these identity groups.
 - To support a UDL approach, it is strongly recommended that this report include a Key Performance Indicators (**KPI**) **metrics dashboard** that is streamlined, understandable, and interactive. Over time, this board can begin to incorporate longitudinal data to convey long-term, meaningful change. Data reported by Landmark in the main report can be used as a baseline for maximum long-term impact comparison, but Lansing will likely also identify other new KPIs that are deemed important by the autistic community as time passes.
 - In addition to data reporting, a key aspect of each report should be the identification and communication of a clear Action Plan to improve areas of concern, and to maintain areas that are strengths within the Lansing community. This **Action Plan** should link feedback and reported data directly to concrete initiatives/steps (e.g., modifying lighting in specific spaces, improving certain aspects of sensory-friendly areas, etc.). In future years, each previous year's Action Plan should be referenced in terms of progress made on its identified objectives.
 - An additional critical aspect of this report is the identification and **celebration of “wins” and successes**. Progress should be clearly identified and backed with data, and certain campus community members or groups can be highlighted as Autism Friendly Champions.

Sample Landmark College Institute for Research and Training Workshop Proposals

Example 1

Title

Creating Neuroinclusive Classrooms through Universal Design for Learning: From Neurodivergence Foundations to UDL Implementation

Summary

Institutions of higher learning are more diverse than ever before, and many educators are eager to understand how to best support the wide variety of backgrounds, needs, and preferences that will be present in their future classrooms. This training will focus on universal design for learning (UDL) as a framework for accessibility and inclusion—a fluid, proactive approach to education that emphasizes a mindset of designing and teaching to the edges, rather than concrete perfection. While UDL benefits all learners, this session will focus more closely on its benefits for neurodivergent students. To better understand this intersection, the workshop will provide an introduction to common neurodivergent profiles (such as autism, learning disabilities/disorders, and ADHD) before transitioning to an overview of the three pillars of UDL that are the new “ERA” of accessibility and inclusion. Content will cover a combination of theory and its connection to attendees’ roles, real-world support strategies, and activities focused on deeper and experiential learning. Attendees should come prepared to participate!

Learning Objectives

- Connect a newly learned fact about a neurodivergent identity to a current or former student you have worked or taken courses with
- Name the three pillars of UDL
- Identify at least 1 strategy that supports neurodivergent students to utilize in your everyday work starting today

Outline

- An overview of neurodiversity versus neurodivergence
- Brief coverage of common neurodivergent profiles, such as ADHD, LDs, and autism
- Coverage of the three pillars of UDL and their underlying mindset
- Realistic strategies for implementing a UDL approach
- Devoted time for strategies application
- Experiential activities interwoven throughout

Example 2

Title

Strategies for Supporting Autistic Students on the Modern College Campus

Summary

Autism diagnoses have been steadily increasing over the last few decades, and educators are eager to understand what they can do to support autistic students on their campus. This workshop will cover autism basics, such as diagnostic features, prevalence, and common behavior patterns, as well as strategies to foster success for this population. Attendees will learn about approaches they can utilize to foster an overall neuro-inclusive campus, as well as strategies that can be implemented to support autistic students in their everyday experiences as college students. Content will include strategy suggestions, as well as opportunities to practice utilizing and/or applying content live during the workshop.

Learning Objectives

- Recall the two classic hallmarks of autism
- State one new thing you learned about autism today
- Identify one new strategy to implement in your everyday work
- Apply a new strategy to an existing situation

Outline

- An introduction to autism through a clinical lens
- Information on autism prevalence
- Myth-busting/debunking
- Common autistic student behaviors and areas of challenge
- Strategies suggestions
- Interactive empathy-building experience
- Dedicated time to interact with/apply various strategies
- Q&A

Appendix F: Glossary of Terms

Autism and Neurodiversity Terms

Ableism – Discrimination or bias against disabled people, including assumptions that neurotypical ways of thinking and behaving are superior, or that disabled people are “broken” and need to be “fixed.”

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) – A developmental condition affecting social communication, sensory processing, and behavior. Many autistic individuals prefer identity-first language (e.g., “autistic person”) rather than person-first language (“person with autism”).

Burnout (Autistic/ADHD Burnout) – A state of extreme mental, emotional, or physical exhaustion due to prolonged masking, overstimulation, or unmet needs.

Executive Functioning – A set of cognitive skills (such as planning, time management, and impulse control) that help people navigate daily life, which can be likened to the “brain’s CEO.” Many neurodivergent individuals experience executive dysfunction, making tasks like organization and transitions more challenging.

Hyper-fixation – An intense, prolonged focus on a particular interest, often experienced by autistic and ADHD individuals.

Masking – The process of suppressing or camouflaging neurodivergent traits (such as stimming or niche interests) to fit into social norms, often leading to burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Meltdown – An intense reaction by an autistic person to sensory overload or emotional distress, often involving crying or shouting (and can eventually lead to a shutdown). Unlike a tantrum, a meltdown is not manipulative but an involuntary response. Unlike a shutdown, a meltdown is an externalized reaction.

Neurodiversity – A term coined by Judy Singer that asserts that natural variation in human brain function and cognition is to be expected. It promotes the idea that differences are not deficits—they are to be expected as an aspect of diversity, much like biodiversity, racial diversity, or gender diversity.

Neurodivergent (ND) – A term describing individuals whose brains function in ways that diverge from the “norm,” including autistic people, those with ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia, etc.. It is not a perfect term, in that there is no hard “cutoff” for becoming neurodivergent, and some folks deem the term to be deficit-focused (however, we at Landmark, do not assign positive or negative aspects to the continuum, so we simply see this as a descriptor with no positive or negative connotation).

Neurotypical (NT) – A term used to describe individuals whose brain function, behavior, and development align with what society considers “typical,” “standard,” or “normal.”

Sensory-Friendly Spaces or Sensory Rooms– Designated quiet or low-stimulation areas in schools or campuses where students can go to regulate sensory input and avoid overstimulation. They often are equipped with fidgets, adjustable lighting, noise machines, various types of seating, and

weighted objects (such as blankets or vests).

Sensory Processing – How the brain interprets sensory information. Some neurodivergent individuals experience sensory sensitivities (hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity) to sounds, lights, textures, or other stimuli.

Shutdown – A response to overwhelm where an individual becomes nonverbal, withdraws, or struggles to engage with their environment. Unlike a meltdown, a shutdown is an internalized reaction.

Special Interests – Deep, passionate interests in specific topics that bring joy and comfort to many autistic individuals. Whether society deems them to be “positive” is context-specific. For example, a special interest in grasshoppers while at a dinner party is likely not deemed positive by guests, while this same special interest may lead to someone being labeled an “expert” in a certain research field or conference setting.

Spoon Theory – A metaphor used to describe energy levels in people with disabilities, chronic illnesses, or neurodivergent conditions. Each activity takes a certain number of “spoons,” and when the spoons run out, the person experiences exhaustion or burnout. Saying “I’m all out of spoons” or “that will use too many spoons” is a way of contextualizing the mental energy/stamina someone has or something takes for that particular person.

Stimming (Self-Stimulatory Behavior) – Repetitive behaviors (such as rocking, hand-flapping, or humming) that help regulate emotions, focus, or sensory input. Stimming is often a coping mechanism used to maintain comfort and to try and find sensory equilibrium.

Legal and Education-Specific Terms

504 Plan – A legally binding plan resulting from **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** that outlines approved accommodations for students with disabilities in K-12 schools, ensuring equal access to education. Unlike an IEP, it does not include specialized instruction/services (only accommodations). Similar to an IEP, it does not “transfer” to the higher education setting.

Accommodations – Adjustments made to ensure that disabled/neurodivergent students have equitable access to the (college) experience. They are individualized to each student and can include things like extended test time, priority registration, and reduced distraction testing environments. Accommodations level the playing field and do not move the goal post. They cannot alter learning objectives.

Accommodation Letter/Plan – A document generated by a campus’s Disability Resource Office (DRO) that specifies the accommodations for which a student has been approved. An Accommodation letter does not contain information about a student’s disability or the reasoning around why an accommodation was approved, as this is highly confidential information limited to DRO personnel.

Assistive Technology (AT) – Tools and software that support learning and enhance accessibility, such as text-to-speech programs, speech-to-text software, noise-canceling headphones, and organizational apps. AT can be high tech (such as eye gaze technology) or low tech (such as a special pencil grip).

Disability Resource Office (DRO) – The office in colleges and universities responsible for preventing disability discrimination and determining and enforcing the implementation of approved accommodations to students with disabilities, including neurodivergent students. The term is not standardized, and the office can go by many other names, such as Access Services, Student Accessibility, Disability Support Services, etc..

Executive Function Coaching – An optional service on some campuses that helps students to develop strategies for organization, time management, task initiation, and other executive function skills. Executive function coaching is not the same as tutoring, which targets content-specific knowledge rather than bigger picture executive function skills.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) – A legally binding document in U.S. public schools that outlines special education goals, services, and accommodations for K-12 students with disabilities. IEPs only apply in the K12 setting and do not “transfer” to college.

Self-Advocacy – The ability to understand and communicate one’s own needs and accommodations (in an educational/work setting). Neurodivergent students are often encouraged to practice self-advocacy when working with teachers, professors, and various staff.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) – An educational framework that promotes multiple ways of engaging students, representing information, and assessing learning so as to accommodate different learning preferences and needs. UDL can be thought of as a way of “teaching to the edges” so that all students’ needs are met in order to prevent the need for accommodations. In the process of meeting students’ needs most students’ preferences also benefit thanks to variety and choice.