



**TO:** Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES)  
and P-12 Education Committees

**FROM:** Kevin G. Smith   
Ken Slentz 

**SUBJECT:** Transition Planning and Services for Students with  
Disabilities

**DATE:** March 3, 2014

**AUTHORIZATION(S):**   
SUMMARY

**Issue for Discussion**

To provide the Board of Regents with updated information on Department initiatives to improve transition planning and employment outcomes for students with disabilities.

**Reason(s) for Consideration**

Review of policy and joint program initiatives for students and young adults with disabilities.

**Proposed Handling**

This item will come before the Board of Regents in a joint presentation to the ACCES and P-12 Education Committees at their March 2014 meeting.

**Background Information**

The ACCES and P-12 Education Committees have made six joint presentations to the Regents on the topic of transition planning and services since June 2011. This report provides information on seven new initiatives and an update on current initiatives.

## **New Initiatives**

### **1. Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE) Grant:**

ACCES-Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and the P-12: Office of Special Education are participants in the PROMISE Grant. This federally funded grant is sponsored jointly by the U.S. Department of Education, the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). New York State (NYS) was awarded \$32,500,000 for a five-year period and is one of six grants awarded nationwide. Administered in NYS by the Office of Mental Health, with Cornell University Employment and Disability Institute as managing partner, the purpose of the PROMISE Grant is to improve the education and employment outcomes of youth recipients of supplemental security income (SSI), decreasing their long-term reliance on the program. Targeting three regions of the State (Western, Capital District and New York City), the focus of the PROMISE Grant is to:

- develop strong and effective partnerships with agencies responsible for programs that play a key role in providing services to children ages 14-16 who receive SSI and their families;
- provide a set of coordinated services and supports, and implement effective practices targeted to the needs of child SSI recipients and their families within local demonstration sites; and
- identify effective interventions in transition based upon a rigorous study design and evaluation of the NYS PROMISE model.

### **2. Olmstead Implementation Plan**

In the 1999 Olmstead Decision, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that states, in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), have an obligation to provide services to individuals with disabilities in the most integrated setting appropriate to their needs. Through a November 2012 executive order, Governor Cuomo established the Olmstead Development and Implementation Cabinet (Olmstead Cabinet). The Olmstead Cabinet subsequently developed a comprehensive Olmstead Implementation Plan to meet New York's obligations under the United States Supreme Court decision.

The Olmstead Implementation Plan addresses integrated housing, employment, transportation, community services and other important issues. It identifies specific actions that State agencies responsible for providing services to people with disabilities will take to serve people with disabilities in the most integrated setting such as:

- assist in transitioning people with disabilities into the community from developmental centers, intermediate care facilities, sheltered workshops, psychiatric centers, adult homes, and nursing homes;
- enhance integrated housing, employment, and transportation services available to people with disabilities;

- improve services to children, seniors, and people with disabilities involved with the criminal justice system; and
- assure continuing accountability for serving people with disabilities in the most integrated setting.

Meetings of the Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council (MISCC) are the means of public accountability for the State's accomplishment of the Olmstead Plan. Currently chaired by the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD), the MISCC Council consists of representatives from ten State agencies (one of which is SED) and nine appointed members comprised of consumers of services for individuals with disabilities, individuals with expertise in the field of community services for people of all ages with disabilities, and individuals with expertise in or recipients of services available to senior citizens with disabilities.

SED has committed to actively working with the Plan partners to ensure services are provided in the most integrated settings. The P-12: Office of Special Education will continue to monitor the appropriateness of residential school placements, reduce the number of students in out-of-State placements, ensure students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment and support and monitor transition planning and services consistent with this Plan. With regard to employment, the NYS DOL has the lead responsibility to coordinate with ACCES-VR and all other State agencies that serve people with disabilities. The goal is to better align NYS disability workforce strategies with the vocational rehabilitation and employment programs.

The New York State Olmstead Implementation Plan may be accessed at: <http://www.governor.ny.gov/assets/documents/olmstead-cabinet-report101013.pdf>.

### **3. Transformation Agreement**

In 2013, OPWDD initiated its Transformation Agreement, designed to reform its system of supports and services for individuals with developmental disabilities in the areas of employment, integrated living, and self-direction of services. One of the goals is to increase the number of individuals with disabilities that are competitively employed. Effective July 1, 2013, NYS no longer allows new admissions to sheltered workshops and is developing a plan to close existing workshops over a period of time or have them shift to integrated business models. OPWDD will work collaboratively with ACCES-VR to assist individuals with the transition to competitive employment. Discussions are currently underway between OPWDD and ACCES-VR to formalize the role that each agency will have in developing strategies to assist people with development disabilities in achieving competitive employment. OPWDD will also work with the P-12: Office of Special Education to educate school district and high school administrators, regional Transition Specialists and Board of Cooperative Educational Services superintendents about employment options for high school students.

#### **4. Youth Service Professionals' Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities (YSP-KSA) Professional Development Demonstration and Evaluation project**

ACCES-VR and the P-12: Office of Special Education are participants in the YSP-KSA Demonstration project. YSP-KSA is one of three grants awarded nationwide by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD) for Youth. Administered by the NYS DOL, this 18-month professional development initiative which targets the Capital Region will provide training and resources on the core competencies for youth service professionals; and conduct pre- and post-training technical assistance. Training will be provided by workforce, youth development, and disability experts from the NCWD/Youth, a national technical assistance center supported by the USDOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy.

#### **5. Higher Education Advisory Council**

In order to improve access to higher education and college graduation outcomes for students with disabilities, the Board of Regents approved SED's creation of an Advisory Council on Higher Education for Students with Disabilities in December of 2013. The purpose of the council is to provide critical thinking and feedback to SED on the issues impacting students' access to support services leading to the successful completion of a higher education degree. Representatives from SED's ACCES-VR office, Office of Higher Education and the P-12: Office of Special Education are developing a framework for the council related to the advisory council structure, committee membership and the process for selection of representatives. Staff is working to further define the ongoing role of SED staff and the structure and the specific charge of the advisory council. It is proposed that two meetings of the advisory council be held annually with the first to be held in the fall of 2014.

#### **6. Youth Advisory Council**

The P-12: Office of Special Education is establishing a Youth Advisory Council to advise on policy issues related to the education of students with disabilities from the perspective of youth with disabilities. Eligible youth include those with disabilities who are either still in high school or are no more than two years out of high school. Youth nominees were sought from a number of State and local organizations. Nominations were received and appointment letters were sent to nine individuals and ongoing recruitment efforts continue. In addition to commenting on and providing their recommendations regarding proposed policies, youth will have the opportunity to share their concerns and recommendations for future policy consideration. Youth participation will serve to advise SED from a first-hand perspective on ways to improve the quality of special education services and student outcomes. Participation in the panel will also provide students with the opportunity to sharpen their self-advocacy and leadership skills and network with other youth. It is anticipated that three meetings of the advisory council will be held annually with the first scheduled for April 2014.

## **7. Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Commencement Credential**

Beginning with the 2013-14 school year, the CDOS Commencement Credential may be awarded to a student with a disability upon graduation as a certificate of readiness for entry level employment. This credential would be awarded as a supplement to the student's Regents or local diploma. However, for a student with a disability who is unable to earn a regular diploma after attending school for 12 years, excluding Kindergarten, the credential may be awarded as the student's only high school exiting credential. The following describes activities the State has initiated to assist school districts to prepare students to earn the CDOS Commencement Credential.

- In the fall of 2013, six webinars, developed in collaboration with the P-12: Office of Career and Technical Education (CTE), were posted on SED's website related to the CDOS Commencement Credential. In addition to an overview of requirements, the webinars include information on career planning and CareerZone, instruction in the CDOS Learning Standards, CTE coursework and work-based learning requirements, and the four nationally recognized work readiness credentials.
- The P-12: Office of Special Education, through its Regional Special Education Technical Assistance Center (RSE-TASC) Transition Specialists and Regional Special Education Training Specialists, provided 267 professional development sessions Statewide since the July 1, 2013 implementation of the CDOS Commencement Credential. This includes the following sessions specific to the Big Five City School Districts: Buffalo (11); Rochester (4); Syracuse (3); Yonkers (3) and NYC (28). Participants included administrators, teachers, community-based agencies and parents. Additionally, each of the 10 RSE-TASC regions has facilitated approximately 10 meetings related to implementation of the CDOS Commencement Credential with Committee on Special Education Chairpersons, regional interagency transition groups, and special education administrators and teachers to assist in developing district structure to support implementation of the credential.
- The RSE-TASC will host a full day conference in each of their 10 regions, which include the big five city school districts, beginning this spring through December 2014 on the CDOS Commencement Credential. Each RSE-TASC will partner with local employers and several statewide organizations to provide information to school district personnel, parents, students and community organizations on career planning, work-based learning programs, and instruction in the CDOS learning standards, student safety in the workplace and workforce expectations.
- The P-12: Office of Special Education is developing a request for proposal to award grants to assist school districts, including the big five city school districts, to develop high quality work-based learning opportunities for students with disabilities and increase students with disabilities access to CTE courses.

- Since September 2013, P-12: Office of Special Education staff have provided presentations to:
  - ACCES-VR District Office Managers;
  - ACCES-VR counselors;
  - NYSDOL Workforce Investment Act Youth Programs Network staff;
  - NYS' Commission for the Blind Vocational Rehabilitation District Office Managers; and
  - P-12: Office of Special Education staff.
  
- Future presentations will be provided to:
  - recent graduates of the NYS Partners in Policymaking program; and
  - the New York Association of Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP) which includes hundreds of workforce professionals from a range of youth-serving organizations for professional development, education and training, and networking. NYATEP, an affiliate of the NYS Association of Counties, works closely with other statewide and national associations on workforce policy and program issues.
  
- In April 2014, SED leadership will co-present at the Council for Exceptional Children: Division of Career Development and Transition Conference about transition planning and services, related improvement initiatives and outcomes for NYS students. Additionally, P-12: Office of Special Education staff will provide information on the CDOS Commencement Credential.

### **Update on Existing Initiatives**

Progress continues with the initiatives discussed in the September 2013 report to the Regents related to strengthening collaborations across SED, schools, stakeholders and community providers; expanding options for paid and unpaid work experiences; and devoting additional IDEA and Rehabilitation Services Administration resources to improve transition services and outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

- In October 2013, both offices provided professional development to all ACCES-VR counselors on the content of the 2013 Joint Agreement on the Provision of Transition Services; the Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential; the CDOS Commencement Credential; and technical assistance initiatives related to transition planning and services.
  
- RSE-TASC Transition Specialists continue to facilitate regional interagency meetings and provide professional development and technical assistance to school districts to improve transition planning and outcomes.
  
- ACCES-VR is forming a Transition Unit to meet the priorities of the Board of Regents in supporting youth and emerging adults with disabilities in transitioning to careers. An Associate Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) position and 14 additional Senior VRCs are being recruited. The unit will work closely with the

ACCES-VR Regional Coordinators, ACCES-VR District Offices and P-12: Office of Special Education to ensure that clear referral, VR eligibility and service delivery processes are consistently implemented and relationships are formed among stakeholders, resulting in better employment outcomes for youth.

- ACCES-VR initiated Youth Employment Services (YES) in its Core Rehabilitation Services (CRS) contracts that started on January 1, 2014. In the new CRS contract, ACCES-VR identified a group of services called YES which are based on research-based evidence related to better employment outcomes for youth. Through these particular services, transition-age youth will participate in activities that will lead to employment. These services include community-based work assessment in integrated real work settings and paid community work experiences prior to school exit. The objective is to prepare youth for successful long-term employment. For transition-age youth enrolled in secondary school, YES will be provided after school, during the summer or after exiting high school.
- ACCES-VR will procure services for the provision of consultative and technical assistance through the Regional VR-Community Employment Specialists to local educational agencies to inform schools on student eligibility requirements for VR services, availability of VR services to youth who are eligible for VR services, and coordination of the individualized education program transition activities with the individualized plan for employment. Specific performance measures, deliverables and quality assurance controls will be identified to monitor outcomes related to this initiative. The deliverables would include tracking the number of referrals from schools to ACCES-VR and the timely engagement of youth in VR services (i.e., VR eligibility and plan development).

### **Recommendation**

With support of the Board of Regents, the Department will continue to implement the above actions. Staff will present a CDOS implementation panel to the Board at a future meeting.