



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE
OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

TO: Adult Career and Continuing Education Services
(ACCES) Committee

FROM: Kevin G. Smith

SUBJECT: Status Report on Business Initiatives in ACCES

DATE: April 29, 2011

AUTHORIZATION(S):

SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program within Adult Career and Continuing Education Services (ACCES) plays a significant role in promoting career and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities in New York State. In order to increase quality employment outcomes, ACCES-VR and its partners must share resources to build business contacts. The Board of Regents will examine the current status of ACCES-VR business initiatives.

Reason(s) for Consideration

To obtain support for ACCES-VR's proposed services and planned activities to outreach to businesses in an effort to increase the number of individuals with disabilities obtaining successful employment outcomes.

Proposed Handling

This item will come before the ACCES Committee at its May 2011 meeting.

Procedural History

- In November 2009, ACCES-VR presented to the Board of Regents a plan to review its vocational rehabilitation (VR) program and functions to meet changing needs impacted by consumer demographics, changes in the federally funded vocational services system, and increased fiscal accountability. This plan was called "***Designing Our Future.***" The marketing strategy developed through "*Designing Our Future*" provided the construct for ACCES-VR's current Business Initiatives by emphasizing:

- The use of work incentives in our marketing and employment outcome efforts;
- Utilizing staff members who have been specifically designated to perform employment outcomes functions such as coordination of placement vendors and provision of employer supports;
- Ensure access to an accurate and updated employer database to use in marketing and job development/placement efforts; and
- Facilitate career opportunities for individuals with disabilities by developing contacts with large-scale businesses that are consistent with current and projected local opportunities related directly to expanding business initiatives designed to increase employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

In order to meet the employment needs of the more than 53,000 individuals who are engaged in the VR program, it is imperative that VR continues to develop strategies that connect consumer training with the employment needs of businesses. The resulting initiatives will serve to provide VR professionals and consumers with information about essential job skills, hiring practices, and company-based opportunities for career development. Such information will serve to empower individuals with disabilities in their choice of employment or career path. The following is a report on the initiatives undertaken by ACCES-VR to outreach to businesses, to increase employment options for consumers and to increase the number to employment outcomes.

Background

In recent years, the VR program has seen a reduction in employment outcomes with approximately 1500 fewer individuals being successfully placed in employment between FFY 07-08 and 09-10. This downturn in employment outcomes can be associated with the economic recession. Although we did not meet the desired outcome goal, the percentage of success between the goal and outcome was close in two of three years with a 91.8 percent success rate for FFY 08-09 to a 99.5 percent success rate in FY 09-10. This success can be related to Design Our Future planning and organizational efforts.

PERFORMANCE AREA	FFY 07-08		FFY 08-09		FFY 09 -10	
	GOAL	OUTCOME	GOAL	OUTCOME	GOAL	OUTCOME
Employment Outcomes	13,593	13,236	13,236	12,151	12,151	12,092

Labor Force characteristics from 2009 indicate a large disparity in employment rates for individuals with disabilities and the general population. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported employment rate for persons with disabilities was 19.2 percent as compared to employment rate of persons without a disability at 64.5 percent. A gap of 45.3 percent. The unemployment rate of persons with a disability was 14.5 percent, 5.5 percent higher than the rate for those with no disability, which was 9.0 percent.

With respect to youth with disabilities, ages 16-19 the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported an employment rate of 11.6 percent compared to 24.7 percent for same-aged youth with no disabilities. Youth with disabilities ages 20-24 had an employment rate of 31.4 percent compared to same aged youth with no disabilities at 61.0 percent.

This statewide data highlights the inequity in representation of individuals with disabilities in the workforce. Opportunities for employment for individuals with disabilities are adversely impacted by:

- Misconceptions that people with disabilities will cost businesses money due to higher absenteeism rates, and other perceived risk factors because disability is equated with illness.
- Erroneous assumption that impairments limit productivity and accommodating an individual with a disability is expensive.
- The inability to gain access to entry level jobs, build a work history and an understanding about the world of work.

In addition, the recent labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey (CPS) provided an opportunity to look at working-age adults with disabilities during a major economic downturn. Between October 2008 and June 2010, the US employment rate for people with disabilities dropped by 9 percent. During the same period, there was no statistically significant drop of employment for people with out disabilities. This “last in-first out” cycle could be due to a number of factors such as, individuals with disabilities accepting short-term jobs or work as independent contractors, many times persons with disabilities are employed in occupations with lower status and less stability.

These perceptions coupled with the current economic recession have been the impetus for the reassessment of strategies used to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. ACCES-VR has begun to:

- Outreach to businesses
- Track job ready consumers
- Expand marketing of business incentives

Outreach to Businesses

ACCES–VR has had a long standing partnership with businesses. However, these partnerships were focused primarily on a single job placement model which was matching one person to one job. Over the past four years ACCES-VR has developed a relationship model that embraces broader, long-term partnerships with businesses and results in multiple employment outcomes as well as internships, mentoring experiences, and job retention. Through a series of national, state and local initiatives ACCES-VR has begun working directly with businesses and is now working to identify and train

individuals to meet employers' skilled labor needs. Examples of these partnerships include:

- A collaboration with the Council on State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation's (CSAVR) National Employment Team (THE NET), ACCES-VR has partnered with CVS Caremark, a new distribution center scheduled to open in Elmira, New York in 2012. A total of 600 jobs are projected. Early dialogue with CVS Caremark prior to its opening allowed ACCES-VR to meet the CVS Human Resource Team and exchange information on corporate values and workforce expectations as well as ACCES-VR services including on-the-job training and work try outs, and Department of Labor business incentives, federal and state tax credits. These efforts will result in VR consumers being better prepared to meet the business needs of employers and enhance the individual's potential for being hired by CVS. This initiative was also a collaboration across state agencies Commission for the Blind and Visually Handicapped (CBVH), Department of Labor (DOL), and Pennsylvania VR.
- Recently ACCES-VR initiated business contact with NYS's American Red Cross (ARC) Blood Services Unit which offers a variety of jobs including Donor Specialist, Call Center Operator, and Collection Phlebotomist. These positions require a minimum of a high school diploma and exist in offices across New York State from Buffalo to Poughkeepsie. This business relationship has resulted in immediate employment opportunities for ACCES-VR consumers with seven hires.
- ACCES-VR has developed a strong business partnership with Rosicki, Rosicki and Associates (RR&A) a leading mortgage banking law firm in New York. RR&A has hired over 65 individuals for positions as: attorney, paralegal, records clerk, billing/accounting, IT, and various clerical positions. ACCES-VR also works closely with RR&A staff to retain employees who need VR services in order to remain in their job. RR&A has participated in various projects including providing summer paid internship opportunities.

Tracking Job Ready Consumers

A critical component in addressing the workforce needs of businesses is being able to provide potential employees who have the skills and knowledge needed to work in a multifaceted business. In order to meet the workforce demand ACCES-VR must know who is in the VR pipeline, understand what skills they possess and their job expectations. This information helps ACCES-VR better meet the needs of both of our customers...business and the qualified worker with a disability.

As part of the Business Initiative strategy, each district office is developing a job ready data base. These data bases will include essential data such as the individual's vocational rehabilitation counselor, email addresses and employment goal. With this

information ACCES-VR is able to quickly forward resumes directly to employers as appropriate and to target businesses to discuss job ready consumers available to meet their needs. The job ready data base allows ACCES-VR to take control of the job matching process, maintain a connection to ACCES-VR consumers and demonstrate increased responsiveness to our business partners and their business needs by referring only qualified applicants.

Marketing of Business Incentives

ACCES-VR provides a variety of no cost services to our business partners (Public, private and not for profit). These services include and are not limited to: retention programs to support employees who develop or acquire a disability while still employed, workplace accommodations and assistive technology and financial supports including access to tax credits and/or deductions available for hiring or accommodating people with disabilities. Our business partnerships with large corporations have taught us these entities understand and fully utilize financial hiring incentives. However, practical application of the same financial incentives with mid-size to micro-businesses have taught us these employers do not utilize business incentives because they find the process too cumbersome to implement. ACCES-VR has been engaging in discussion with the Most Integrated Setting Coordinating Council (MISCC) Employment committee and Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG) Employment Committee, along with the National Industries for the Severely Handicapped (NISH) to review other approaches that might provide NYS businesses a larger incentive under a payroll tax credit. The approach which is similar to the one available through American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is accessible at time of hiring and doesn't require the business to perform extensive calculations. In the meantime, ACCES-VR continues to engage employers through our liaisons with local Chambers of Commerce, Workforce Investment Boards, and Society for Human Resources Management chapter meetings about our diverse talent pool and the no cost services we provide to employers.

Future Challenges

It is essential ACCES-VR continues to foster its partnerships with business, qualified employers and its potential employees. Partnerships are the key for VR to ensure equal access to the world of work because the labor market changes constantly and those changes impact individuals with disabilities obtaining employment. Some of these labor market issues are:

- The loss of entry jobs that do not require a high school diploma and an increase in what is called Middle-Skill jobs such as plumbers, electricians, health care workers, legal assistants, machinists, green jobs, financial institution jobs, transportation and material moving and police/security officers. Such jobs require significant education and training, but not necessarily a four-year college degree. They make up roughly half of all employment today, and demand for middle-skill workers is expected to continue despite the economic downturn.

- Business trends require individuals to be able to multi-task and work cross-functionally. This tendency represents a loss of opportunity to carve out “niche” jobs for individuals in integrated settings. Business cannot afford a hire a workforce that specializes at one or two tasks.
- County, state and federal systems have created programs to allow entry for disabled workers. These legislative programs allow individuals with disabilities to enter the government workforce as entry level workers in non-protected status. Although these programs provide an entrée for individuals who are disabled, there is also a risk when economic downtrends hit because they are the first released from employment.

Conclusion

The goal of Vocational Rehabilitation is for individuals with disabilities to achieve an employment outcome that allows them to be self-sufficient and support themselves through earned income. For VR to support that goal, it means VR must be responsive to the ever changing labor market forces. In order to do this, ACCES-VR has acknowledged and taken bold steps to:

- be part of a larger part of a “one-company network”, under Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) in order to leverage access to Fortune 500 companies,
- actively engage all our partners as we work together to share resources, and
- make sure individuals with disabilities understand VR products and services and the expectations of our business partners enabling them to attain, regain and maintain their employment goal.

Recommendation

By understanding the business arena, economic trends and employment outlook, ACCES-VR will be better prepared to meet consumer’s employment needs. However our approach must incorporate an understanding of business workforce needs and skill requirements of employees. Business can not function without a productive and strong workforce and our consumers can not meet their goals without having employment outcomes. It is a natural pairing.

Time Table for Implementation

ACCES-VR will continue to partner with all stakeholders and continue outreach to business in an effort to increase employment options for individuals with disabilities.