



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

**FROM:** Kevin G. Smith *KGS*  
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**SUBJECT:** Transition Planning and Services for Students with  
Disabilities

**DATE:** October 19, 2015

**AUTHORIZATION(S):** *Mary Ellen Elin*

**SUMMARY**

**Issue for Discussion**

To provide the Board of Regents with updated information on Department initiatives to improve transition planning and services 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 October 2015 meeting.

**Background Information**

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

## **1. Promoting access to Career and Technical Education Coursework and Work-Based Learning Activities to Prepare Students with Disabilities with Essential Work-Readiness Skills**

In collaboration with ACCES-VR and P-12 (CTE and Office of Special Education), professional development to school district personnel has been continuously provided through Statewide conferences, regional and district specific technical assistance and training sessions, as well as through written guidance.

- In 2014, the Regional Special Education Technical Assistance Centers (RSE-TASC) hosted ten regional conferences on the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) Commencement Credential. Each of these full-day conferences were attended by over 250 people, including parents, educators, administrators, community agencies, students and employers. Twenty seven different businesses representing large State and national corporations and smaller local companies participated in panel discussions at the conferences. These businesses included manufacturers; retail establishments; health care, hospitality, security and custodial agencies; media and technology companies; and financial and legal firms.
- Between September 2014 and August 2015, the RSE-TASC transition specialists engaged in 480 separate events specific to the instruction students need to earn the CDOS Commencement Credential (regional training regarding the requirements of the credential, work-based learning experiences and instruction in the CDOS learning standards; individual technical assistance to districts; and facilitation of interagency meetings).
- Since September 2013, the Department has made more than 30 presentations on the CDOS Commencement Credential to State and local organizations which include school personnel, parents, and business organizations.
- Six recorded webinars are available on the Department's website to address frequently asked questions from the field regarding the CDOS Commencement Credential. See <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/gradrequirements/home.html>.
- ACCES-VR's summer Youth Employment Services (YES) program provides youth with community-based work assessment in integrated real work settings, work readiness skills training, and both unpaid and paid community work experiences prior to and/or post school exit. Through individual school district agreements, including school district staff supervision and monitoring of the activities, students may be able to apply some hours toward their CDOS credential. (see page 6)

The Office of Special Education is in the final stages of awarding 39 grants that provide \$30 million over a three-year period to school districts, boards of cooperative educational services programs (BOCES), special act school districts and approved private schools to assist them in enhancing their instructional programs to increase students with disabilities' access to and participation in CTE coursework, and work-based learning opportunities.

Informational materials to enhance awareness of the CDOS Commencement Credential are being broadly disseminated.

- A brochure for parents on the work-readiness credentials, developed in collaboration with representatives from the Special Education Parent Centers, is posted on the website at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/2015memos/documents/Parentbrochure6-30-15PGJDrevisions.pdf>
- A brochure for businesses about the benefits of hiring students who earn the CDOS Commencement Credential and how business can collaborate with schools to help students earn the credential is posted on the Office of Special Education's website at <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/publications/2015-memos/documents/cdos-transition-business-rack-card.pdf>. SED has printed 10,000 of these brochures to disseminate to RSE-TASC, ACCES-VR District Offices, and Department of Labor to assist in the distribution to businesses.

The Department has worked in collaboration with the New York State Commission for the Blind on revisions to their transition policy and in a Joint Agreement on the Provision of Transition Services to Students Who Are Legally Blind.

## **2. Regional Professional Development on Transition Planning and Services**

The **Transition Services Professional Development Support Center (PDSC)** through Cornell University provides professional development and support to the RSE-TASC Transition Specialists to ensure they have the knowledge and skills necessary to assist districts improve transition programs and to provide a website [transitionsource.org](http://transitionsource.org) which provides:

- detailed descriptions and videos of transition-related best practices;
- a mechanism for districts with these best practices to engage in online discussion and resource sharing with other districts across the State;
- a tool for districts to plan and track their progress in relation to transition programs and services according to five quality indicators (student development, student-focused planning, program structure, family involvement and interagency collaboration); and
- resources for the public including a community resource finder, transition-related articles and research, and an online discussion and planning forum.

Regional planning between the RSE-TASC and the District ACCES-VR offices will ensure collaborative and coordinated regional technical assistance and training to schools by VR Community Employment Specialists and Transition Specialists.

**Transition Specialists** in the RSE-TASC provide ongoing regional training on a variety of transition related topics, including but not limited to Self-Determination and Self-Advocacy, CDOS learning standards, age appropriate transition assessments and IEP development. These specialists also coordinate regional interagency task forces on transition planning which include ACCES-VR staff.

The regional **Special Education Parent Centers** work with parents and students with disabilities to understand and participate in the transition planning process.

### **3. Youth Advisory Panel**

A Youth Advisory Panel<sup>1</sup> was established by the Office of Special Education in 2014 to advise the Department on proposed policies related to the education of students with disabilities. Sixteen students and young adults with a variety of disabilities make up this Panel. The agenda for the meetings is driven by the topics raised by the Panel Members and to date have focused on important factors that would impact transition such as assistive technology access and self-advocacy and self-determination. Representatives from other offices in P-12 and ACCES-VR are invited to attend and participate in these meetings.

### **4. Monitoring of Appropriate Transition Planning**

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) “transition services” means that students are provided with a coordinated set of activities that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student to facilitate the student’s movement from school to post-school activities. In order for a student to receive these coordinated services, designed with a results-oriented process, the Committees on Special Education must ensure that transition services needs and goals are explicitly addressed in the individualized education program (IEP) planning process.

The Office of Special Education monitored 106 school districts this past year, conducting a qualitative review of IEPs around the following eight components to determine if:

- Students actively participated in planning their educational programs leading toward achievement of post-secondary goals.
- IEPs were individualized and based on the assessment information about the students, including individual needs, preferences, interests and strengths of the students.
- Transition needs identified in the students' assessment information were included in the students' present levels of performance.
- Annual goals addressed students' transition needs identified in the present levels of performance and are calculated to help each student progress incrementally toward the attainment of the post-secondary goals.
- The recommended special education programs and services will assist the students to meet their annual goals relating to transition.
- The statements of needed transition services were developed in consideration of the students' needs, preferences and interests, are directly related to the students' goals beyond secondary education and will assist the students to reach their post-secondary goals.
- Courses are linked to attainment of the students' post-secondary goals.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/specialed/youthpanel/home.html>

- The school district and appropriate participating agencies coordinated their activities in support of the students' attainment of post-secondary goals.

The total number of IEPs reviewed from these representative school districts was 3,088. Of the IEPs reviewed, 2,383 were found to have been in compliance with all IEP transition requirements; and 705 had one or more transition planning requirements that were not appropriately addressed in the students' IEPs. Data results show that more than 86 percent of the IEPs reviewed were appropriately developed. Results were disaggregated regionally to determine the regions/districts where targeted technical assistance and professional development work is needed to improve compliance. Over the past four years, State data shows compliance in the area of transition planning has improved from 67.20 percent to 86.10 percent.

This monitoring data is disaggregated by RSE-TASC regions to inform the nature of the professional development needed in each region. This data as well as post school outcome data also informs regional interagency discussions and planning. Each school district's monitoring results are reviewed by the RSE-TASC **Transition Specialists** for the purpose of ensuring that schools are provided professional development and technical assistance to improve transition planning. The Office of Special Education Quality Assurance Offices ensure correction of noncompliance for each student and that changes are made to the district's policies, procedures and practices to ensure appropriate transition planning for all students within that district.

## 5. ACCES-VR initiatives with P-12 collaboration

Over the past two years, ACCES-VR has initiated changes in staff resources, contracts, and collaboration, in an effort to develop better overall strategies in working with youth. All of these modifications are focused on improving the career trajectory of youth with disabilities.

The ACCES-VR Statewide Transition and Youth Services (TAYS) Team was launched in April 2014, currently staffed with a Manager and Associate Manager in Central Administration and a dedicated Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (SVRC) assigned in each of the 15 district offices. The goals of the team are:

- **Engage:** To engage youth, parents, high schools, and other transition specialists in exploring and planning career choices that connect to a full range of post-secondary options for training, career development, and employment;
- **Improve:** To improve the number, quality, and rate of employment outcomes for youth participating in VR services;
- **Collaborate:** To collaborate with multiple stakeholders, including high schools, other State agencies, Office of Special Education Quality Assurance (SEQA) and RSE-TASC Transition Specialists; and,
- **Substantiate:** To substantiate the policies and practices that lead to increased outcomes through gathering and tracking data and using it to guide the implementation and continuous improvement efforts at building knowledge and skill of VR staff and our partners.

In September 2014 the ACCES-VR transition and youth referral system was streamlined to reduce barriers for students and youth to access post-secondary services necessary to obtain and maintain quality employment outcomes. With input from P-12 and high schools from each region, this consistent process was initiated across the state, both within ACCES-VR and with high schools and other collaborating agencies. Statewide consistent orientation presentations for in-school students will be conducted for students two years prior to high school exit and for out-of-school youth under 25 years of age.

In the Core Rehabilitation Services (CRS) contract, which began January 1, 2014, ACCES-VR identified a group of services as Youth Employment Services (YES), which are based on research evidence and are related to better employment outcomes for youth. These services include community-based work assessment in integrated real work settings, work readiness skills training, and both unpaid and paid community work experiences prior to and/or post school exit. Statewide, more than 100 Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) agreed to provide YES options that will prepare transition-age youth for successful long-term employment. For youth enrolled in secondary school, YES is provided after school hours or during the summer. Through individual school district agreements, including school district staff supervision and monitoring of the activities, students may be able to apply some hours toward their CDOS credential.

A new project developed by ACCES-VR for summer 2015 tells the story of engagement and collaboration utilizing YES options for VR eligible students. Each borough in New York City was represented in this collaboration of five high schools, four TAYS SVRCs, two Integrated Employment Specialists (IESs) and one CRP. Junior high school students were recruited from one high school in each of the boroughs. They were referred to the CRP for work readiness skills development, work experience development, and an optional paid internship. Twenty-four internship sites were developed, in fields such as Social Services, Early Childhood Education, Food Services and Culinary Arts, Health Care, Maintenance/Custodial/Building Services, and Office Services. Preliminary results indicate that 64 students were referred. There were 56 work readiness participants; 52 completed the work readiness, and 43 opted to also participate in an internship opportunity. Discussions with youth participants revealed that 50% of them believe they need additional work readiness preparation, including additional assistance with communication, interpersonal skills, time management, and customer service skills. Most youth felt their internship provided career insight and they overall found their internships engaging and said they would be interested in participating in another internship opportunity. Statistical data and anecdotal feedback will be used to modify the program for next year as well as develop a foundational model for use elsewhere in the state.

An RFP issued in early 2014 for the expansion of P-12 RSE-TASC demonstrates collaboration between P-12 and ACCES-VR, with Part III creating a Regional Vocational Rehabilitation (RVR) project. Commencing in early 2015, one provider in each of the ten RSE-TASC regions was awarded a contract to hire RVR-Community Employment Specialists (CES) statewide (totaling 32) to provide technical assistance to school districts about VR services, referral process and timelines, as well as information about

other post-secondary options leading to quality employment outcomes. Cornell University, through a joint MOU, will assist in developing a logic model for the project and facilitating ongoing training for the RVR-CES staff. The MOU covers the length of the project through June 30, 2019. Both P-12 and ACCES have MOUs with Cornell for training. We can work together on a strategy to share our resources to improve transition connections and services.

Internal staff training on counseling and guidance with the youth population is being developed by ACCES-VR in collaboration with P-12 RSE-TASC Transition Specialists to enhance the skill set of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors throughout the state and provide tools to improve their ability to work effectively with youth. Topic areas to be covered include counseling youth, transitioning from a school achievement-based *Individualized Education Program* (IEP) to a post-school vocational-based *Individualized Plan for Employment* (IPE), career maturity, the teen world, and teens as often involuntary participants. We expect to conduct this training across the 15 District Offices in 2016.

The TAYS team began planning early in 2015 to build upon the focus of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to increase the potential of people with disabilities who enter the VR system to meet with employment success. With the focus on youth in WIOA, there is a requirement to spend 15% of federal VR dollars on the provision of pre-employment transition services (PETS) to high school students with disabilities. In 2016, ACCES-VR plans to issue a Youth Employment Initiative RFP (request for proposal) to develop specific programs including PETS, for VR eligible in-school, and out-of-school disengaged youth, with a critical emphasis to initially engage and continue to engage youth until they obtain quality employment outcomes. P-12 OSE colleagues have been engaged in early discussion and later review of the draft proposal. The target project start date is in early 2017.

### **Data Analysis and Outcomes**

Data from the Office of Special Education (OSE) is being continually reviewed to identify potential numbers of applicants for VR services. The recently hired Community Employment Specialists (CES) will positively affect school district knowledge about ACCES-VR, resulting in increased referrals to both in-school and out-of-school disengaged youth is being increased through the use of flyers and posters, and presentations at professional conferences. ACCES-VR will work within its Case Management System to track the specific high school referral source of in-school youth and set improvement targets for high schools in need of attention, utilizing CES to do additional targeted outreach. Identification of referral sources of out-of-school youth under 25 years of age will help assess the effectiveness of outreach efforts to that age group. ACCES-VR has established baseline youth measures to assess our progress in engaging youth.

### Youth Measures

Federal Fiscal Year	Employment Outcomes Achieved (Youth – < age 25 at application)	New Applicants (Youth)	Total Caseload (Youth)	Youth with Disability <sup>**</sup> (Student with Disability)	Average Hourly Wage at Closure (Youth)
2015	11,284 (5,091; 45%)	36,161 (16,563; 46%)	52,896 (25,803; 49%)	25,803 (18,226; 71%)	\$11.48 (\$10.59)
2014	12,059 (5,407; 45%)	32,807 (14,260; 43%)	50,504 (23,813; 47%)		\$11.10 (\$10.27)
2013	12,025 (5,374; 45%)	33,570 (14,282; 43%)	52,361 (21,438; 41%)		\$10.92 (\$9.97)

<sup>\*\*</sup>Student with a Disability- student in secondary school with an IEP or 504 plan and 16-21 years old at application- a new measure

**New Applicants:** The percentage of new youth applicants increased from 43% of total new applicants in 2014 to 46% in 2015.

**Youth Caseload:** The percentage of youth in the total caseload increased significantly over three years (41% in 2013, 47% in 2014, 49% in 2015).

The new **Youth with Disability** measure initiated in 2015 shows that 71% of the youth caseload are students in secondary school at application with an IEP or 504 plan, 16-21 years old.

**Employment Outcomes:** The number and percentage of employment outcomes for youth has remained stable since 2013 (45% of total caseload).

**Wage at Closure:** The average hourly wage at closure for youth has increased steadily over three years (\$9.97 in 2013, \$10.27 in 2014, \$10.59 in 2015).

**Employment outcomes** remain relatively stable for youth. As more youth participate in services (**new applicants** and **youth caseload**) it is expected that we will begin to see **employment outcomes** increase. The TAYS team efforts in engagement and consistency has contributed to the significant increase in **new applicants**. VR Counselors assist eligible youth with disabilities to develop quality employment goals and receive necessary services to reach those goals. In the **youth caseload**, YES provides opportunities that can be offered very quickly to engage eligible youth, often before they have a clearly developed employment goal. In fact YES are designed to help youth with disabilities achieve quality employment goals by engaging early and moving into active plans for different services quickly, making ongoing engagement more likely. As our efforts in consistency and staff training lead to better quality employment outcomes for youth, the **wage at closure** will continue to rise.

#### 6. Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE) Grant

ACCES-Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and the 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. The PROMISE student/family recruitment phase will continue until April 30, 2016. Presently over 824 youths and their families are enrolled and implementation of services and interventions have begun in the three targeted regions of the State (Western, Capital District and New York City).

## **7. Higher Education Advisory Council**

ACCES-Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and the Office of Special Education are participants in the Advisory Council on Higher Education for Students with Disabilities to provide critical thinking and feedback to NYSED on the issues impacting students' access to, support during, and the successful completion of a higher education degree.

### **Recommendation**

With support of the Board of Regents, the Department will continue to implement the above actions.