

Coordination with Education Officials: Attachment 4.8(b)(2)

ACCES-VR considers the coordination of services to youth with disabilities as one of its main priorities. ACCES-VR works closely with the New York State Education Department (NYSED) Office of P-12 Education - Office of Special Education to ensure that students with disabilities are prepared for employment, postsecondary education, and community living when they leave school. ACCES-VR, through its vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs) and 15 district offices, also works closely with the local education agencies to provide transition services. ACCES-VR policy seeks school referrals within two years prior to high school exit to coordinate vocational rehabilitation (VR) services with school transition planning.

Youth, as defined by ACCES-VR, are individuals with disabilities who are less than 22 years of age at application to the VR program. In Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2012, ACCES-VR served 35,064 youths, a slight decrease from the previous year. Of these, 21,392 youth were considered to be most significantly disabled. Caseload statistics on youth are monitored to determine the progress of ACCES-VR in serving and placing youth.

VR Transition Policy

ACCES-VR collaborated with the Office of Special Education and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) in 2008 to revise the 421.00 Youth in School - Transition Referral, Planning and Services Policy, to ensure a common understanding of transition requirements and responsibilities and to assist with building a collaborative partnership between transition specialists, school districts and ACCES-VR district offices throughout the state. The policy provides information about the requirements, roles and responsibilities of VR in preparing students with disabilities for successful employment. ACCES-VR, with the SRC, reviews the policy periodically to determine its current relevance. As such, the policy remains up-to-date.

This policy establishes an affirmative role for VRCs working with students in transition from school to work, a critical time for young adults with disabilities. The policy delineates the referral process of students with disabilities two years prior to their expected school exit. It outlines the role of the VRC as an active participant in the transition planning process. The policy provides information regarding the documentation that may, with parental or student consent as appropriate, be available from school districts to assist the VRC in determining the students' eligibility for VR services and to expedite post-school services. The ACCES-VR counselor works with the school districts to identify in-school youth who are likely to be eligible for VR services. The VRC can assist students with disabilities to prepare for and obtain employment consistent with their employment factors.

While local school districts are responsible for providing education and transition services to students with disabilities who are still in high school, the ACCES-VR counselor can provide transition services that involve preparing for the students' future

employment. After application, the ACCES-VR counselor, the student, and the student's family work with the school district to coordinate VR services for students with disabilities.

VR and State Education Agency Agreement

The New York State Education Agency Agreement (SEA) between ACCES-VR and the Office of Special Education was signed by the two offices and is in effect from January 1, 2013 – December 31, 2017. The SEA outlines the collaborative and coordinated responsibilities of each office to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities to post-school employment. The SEA, called the *Joint Agreement on the Provision of Transition Services between the New York State Education Department's (NYSED'S) Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation and the Office of P-12 Education - Office of Special Education* replaces the 1992 Joint Agreement.

The current *Joint Agreement on the Provision of Transition Services* reflects VR federal requirements and provides an overview of the purposes, objectives and responsibilities of each office in the transition process.

The purposes of agreement are to: 1) strengthen shared efforts to prepare youth with disabilities for successful careers, community jobs and independent living; 2) outline a collaborative framework for coordinating State and local services and resources; and 3) provide guidance for coordinating plans, policies and procedures developed to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities - including the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services leading to employment.

The SEA agreement and the 421.00 Youth in School - Transition Referral, Planning and Services Policy are posted on the ACCES-VR policy website at <http://www.acces.nysed.gov/vr>

Local Level Coordination and Collaboration

The ACCES-VR counselors coordinate a range of activities with the high schools to promote the transition of youth from school to employment. These VRC activities may include:

- creating a liaison relationship with over 1,000 high schools;
- conducting orientation, accepting school referrals and meeting with students on-site for intakes and transition planning at high schools;
- scheduling after-hours parent meetings;
- participating at transition career fairs and high school open houses;
- participating at local high school college nights hosting workshops on post-school planning, planning for postsecondary education or training and other outreach transition activities;
- participating at college programs held on college campuses;

- participating in orientation programs on ACCES-VR for junior and senior high school students to assist prospective consumers on making an informed choice about VR services;
- determining eligibility and working with students, families and school personnel to develop an original Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE);
- attending Committee of Special Education meetings as appropriate;
- participating in transition forums hosted by community rehabilitation providers;
- participating in local Youth Councils affiliated with the Workforce Investment Boards;
- participating at transition conferences;
- developing partnerships with community providers in regions to engage in all related transition activities;
- developing partnerships with non-community providers (business, county youth programs, youth councils, the PTA, pre-vocational programs);
- participating in local college consortiums;
- engaging other State partners such as local Developmental Disabilities Services Organizations, the Office of Persons with Developmental Disabilities and the Office of Mental Health.

State Level Coordination and Collaboration

Regional Special Education Technical Assistance Support Centers (RSE-TASC)

The RSE-TASC was established by Office of Special Education to act as a coordinated statewide network of special education technical assistance centers. RSE-TASC provides technical assistance to school districts to improve core instructional programs that research has shown to be effective for students with disabilities. Each RSE-TASC includes regional Transition Specialists who provide training and technical assistance to groups of school districts across the region and to school districts identified as needing assistance with transition planning and services.

ACCES-VR has identified VR staff as liaisons to each of the RSE-TASC Transition Specialists. The ACCES-VR district office managers continue to meet with each RSE-TASC to educate school districts about VR services and to provide assistance to school districts in coordinating with agencies that provide post-school and employment services. The ACCES-VR Policy and Partnership unit collaborates with the Office of Special Education Policy and Professional Development units to ensure the RSE-TASC transition specialists and the ACCES-VR district office managers deliver a consistent statewide message.

Nondiploma exiting credential for students with disabilities

In January 2012, the NYSED Regulations of the Commissioner were amended to repeal the individualized education program (IEP) diploma effective July 1, 2013. A Skills and Achievement Commencement Credential was established for students with

significant disabilities who are eligible to take the New York State Alternate Assessment (NYSAA). ACCES-VR assisted the Office of Special Education in obtaining public comment about the policy framework and proposed documentation requirements for this credential prior to being formally adopted by the New York State Board of Regents.

The Office of Special Education is developing a commencement credential documenting attainment of the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) learning standards for other students with disabilities, including students with disabilities who are unable to earn a regular diploma. The proposed amendment would, beginning July 1, 2013 and thereafter, authorize school districts and nonpublic schools to award a nondiploma exiting credential to a student with a disability to document his/her high school preparation for entry level employment.

ACCES-VR assisted the Office of Special Education in obtaining public comment about the policy framework and proposed documentation requirements for this nondiploma exiting credential. The Office of Special Education staff met with the SRC several times on the proposed exiting credential and ACCES-VR hosted a public meeting comprised of individuals from Independent Living Centers, community rehabilitation providers, advocates and employers to weigh in on the credential. These groups were most interested in how the proposed exiting nondiploma credential would be viewed by employers as students transitioned from school to employment. ACCES-VR will continue to monitor the credential for students who are not able to receive a regular high school diploma and work with the Office of Special Education when a credential is formally adopted.

Advisory Councils - There is cross-representation of ACCES-VR and Office of Special Education on their respective Advisory Councils. ACCES-VR is represented on the Commissioner's Advisory Panel for Special Education Services, which functions in an advisory capacity to the Office of Special Education and advises the Board of Regents, Governor, Legislature and Commissioner on unmet needs in the education of children with disabilities. Its responsibilities are prescribed by section 4403 (6) of the State Education Law in accordance with section 612 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The Office of Special Education is represented on the SRC which functions in an advisory capacity to ACCES-VR and advises the Board of Regents, Governor, Legislature and Commissioner on the employment of individuals with disabilities as required by the 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act.

State Plan Priorities and Goals

ACCES-VR establishes a separate goal for youth to increase the percentage of youth with disabilities that achieve an employment outcome. This goal is consistent with the ACCES-VR State Plan Attachment 4.11(c)(1) State Goals and Priorities.

Goal 1.1.A Youth: Increase the percentage of youth with disabilities (applicants prior to age 22) exiting the VR Program after receiving services that achieve an employment outcome and exceed the national standard of 55.8 percent.

Baseline FFY 2010: 42.5 percent achieved an employment outcome; does not meet the RSA Performance Standard.

Performance for FFY 2011: 46.9 percent achieved an employment outcome; does not meet the RSA Performance Standard.

Performance for FFY 2012: 55.7 percent achieved an employment outcome; does not meet the RSA Performance Standard.

Performance Target: Meet or exceed the RSA Performance Standard of 55.8 percent.

Results: The percentage of youth with disabilities that achieved an employment outcome after receiving VR services has increased by 13.2 percentage points, a significant increase. In FFY 2012 ACCES-VR achieved a performance indicator of 55.7 percent which is just below the national standard of 55.8 percent by one-tenth of one percent.