



National Council on Disability

An independent federal agency making recommendations to the President and Congress to enhance the quality of life for all Americans with disabilities and their families.

Workforce Investment Act Reauthorization

National Council on Disability
March 23, 2010

TOPICAL BRIEF: Transitioning Youth

ISSUE 1: Transition age youth with disabilities on VR waiting lists

Recommendation:

Congress should broaden WIA adult services policies at One-Stop Career Centers to allow, for one year following completion of secondary education, direct referral and priority access to intensive and training services for transition age youth with disabilities found eligible but placed on waiting lists for VR services.

Summary of Concern:

A recent high school graduate with a disability deemed less significant by the standards of order of selection may be determined eligible for VR services but may be placed on a VR agency waiting list and never rise to the top for receipt of services. If one of these youth chooses not to pursue, or is not accepted into a two- or four-year academic program at a college or university, then he or she must often rely upon the workforce system for training and employment services. Adequate information is determined through the VR eligibility process to know whether a transition age youth with a disability needs services at the intensive level in the One-Stops or whether he or she would benefit more from being placed directly in a training program that matches previously identified interests and skills. Priority for employment services is needed so that these youth do not lose the knowledge and skills that they have acquired during their secondary education.

ISSUE 2: Availability and funding of Individual Training Accounts (ITAs)

Recommendation:

Congress should direct state and local Workforce Investment Boards to earmark additional ITAs in WIA funding allocations for use by transition age youth with disabilities deemed less significant by the standards of order of selection who choose not to pursue post-secondary education.

Summary of Concern:

Individual Training Accounts (ITAs), which pay for training services through the One-Stop system, are limited to the amount of funding allocated through the state and local

Workforce Investment Boards or that which can be leveraged by One-Stop partner agencies. The expectation of many of the partners in the workforce system is that if an individual has been assessed by VR and is placed on a waiting list, then these individuals remain the responsibility of the state VR agency no matter how long the wait for services may be. Youth who do not need specialized VR services should not have to wait for those services when what they need is available through the One-Stop system. Unfortunately, the availability of funds for training services through One-Stops is limited, and what funds are available are prioritized by Workforce Investment Boards for individuals who are most likely to successfully complete formal certificate or diploma programs in a very specific amount of time. These limitations often exclude individuals with disabilities from obtaining ITAs. If transition age youth with disabilities deemed less significant by the standards of order of selection are to be given priority for ITAs, then additional funding must be allocated and prioritized for One-Stop training services.

ISSUE 3: Information for special education teachers about the One-Stop system

Recommendation:

Congress should direct the Department of Labor and the Department of Education to ensure that special education teachers have adequate information about the One-Stop system in order to prepare transitioning students to use the services offered.

Summary of Concern:

Currently, Special educators have few opportunities to learn about WIA services. Teachers need to know what the expectations of the workforce system are to be able to incorporate academics and functional learning into their curricula to better prepare their students for employment opportunities in their locality. If special educators understand how the One Stop Career system works, they can teach their students how to take advantage of the services offered through both Youth and Adult Services. It is more likely that students will use the services if they are prepared in what to expect rather than just being told about service availability.

ISSUE 4: Provision of VR services before completion of secondary education

Recommendation:

Congress should change existing VR transition legislation and policy to require that VR services be made available to eligible youth no later than three years before an adolescent or young adult exits from secondary education.

Summary of Concern:

The limited time available to VR counselors to serve large numbers of transition age youth, and the need to meet performance outcome levels directly tied to successful job placements, has limited the inclusion of VR in the educational transition planning process in many localities until late in the transition planning process. Many promising practices are based on the concept that early intervention by VR will impact the educational and vocational experiences of adolescents and help prevent early exit from

school. Additionally, interventions focused on adolescents three years before exiting school are more likely to be of sufficient intensity and duration to have significant impacts on the employment outcomes of these youth.

ISSUE 5: Transition services units in state VR agencies

Recommendation:

Congress should authorize and allocate sufficient funds to support the development of comprehensive transition units in each state VR agency.

Summary of Concern:

VR service delivery is different for transition age youth who are still in high school than it is for adults who need immediate training and employment services. State VR agencies need specialized units of professionals experienced in the transition process from both the VR and educational perspectives, who can assist in developing and delivering staff development to VR counselors, monitor and evaluate the efficacy of new and ongoing service initiatives, and other related functions.

ISSUE 6: Blending of Federal funding for coordinated service delivery

Recommendation:

Congress should authorize and mandate the development and implementation of coordinated service delivery approaches specifically targeted to transitioning youth with disabilities that are based on “blending” of funds from VR, other WIA programs, special education, postsecondary education, Veterans Administration, Social Security Administration, and other appropriate funding agencies.

Summary of Concern:

In the current economy, there are not enough funds from WIA or any single federal agency or funding source to adequately support the service needs of transitioning youth. Blended funding approaches, such as the WIA Shared Youth Vision Collaborative Partnership, should be designed and delivered as formal demonstrations that would rigorously test the effectiveness of these intervention models. The blended funding programs need to be developed with sufficient resources to first validate their efficacy in local communities within an individual state, and then if successful, to expand to “full-scale” statewide demonstrations that determine the effectiveness of the interventions in multiple settings under varying conditions.

ISSUE 7: Identification of transition program components that directly correlate with improved employment and postsecondary outcomes

Recommendation:

Congress should mandate that the Rehabilitation Services Administration, the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, and state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies conduct rigorous evaluation studies that identify the

transition program components that directly correlate with improved employment and postsecondary outcomes for transition age youth with disabilities.

Summary of Concern:

The VR system's long-term reliance on program evaluation based on descriptive information and short-term outcomes does not allow a methodologically sound evaluation of the efficacy or cost-effectiveness of the different services that are provided to transition age youth. A systematic evaluation is needed that focuses on the intensity and duration of VR involvement in the transition process and specifically examines the differential effects of the delivery of Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) services versus other types of services provided to transitioning youth. The approach will require a net impact analysis that compares employment and educational outcomes of participants in a specific transition intervention with those of a statistically validated comparison group to determine, over time, the net impact of VR service provision on young adults with disabilities.

ISSUE 8: Efficacy of fully-developed transition programs, practices, and policies

Recommendation:

Congress should mandate and allocate funds to support the implementation of rigorous evaluation studies designed to establish the efficacy of fully developed transition programs, practices, and policies.

Summary of Concern:

Currently, it is difficult for VR agencies to identify programs and practices that may be associated with superior employment and education outcomes due to a lack of rigorous evaluation studies. While promising transition practices exist in a number of areas across the U.S., very few efficacy studies have been conducted to determine the extent to which these practices are successful with youth with disabilities transitioning from secondary education.

The National Council on Disability wishes to express its appreciation to Dr. Beth Bader and Dr. John Kregel of Virginia Commonwealth University for their assistance in developing this brief.