

National Council on Disability Assesses Rehabilitation Act's Impact on Transition Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities

On October 28, 2008 the National Council on Disability (NCD) released a report titled "The Rehabilitation Act: Outcomes for Transition-Age Youth." The report is a comprehensive assessment of the impact of the Rehabilitation Act on the employment and postsecondary education outcomes of eligible transition-age youth.

According to NCD Chairperson John R. Vaughn, "While many current service delivery approaches hold promise, little empirical information is available that will allow VR agencies to accurately predict the amount and type of services required to assist transition-age youth to meet their employment goals, or the outcomes that should be anticipated for individuals served through the program."

The report includes 11 recommendations directed to the U.S. Congress and to the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), the Office of Special Education Programs, and the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research (NIDRR) within the U.S. Department of Education.

Recommendations to Improve VR Transition Outcomes Through Changes in Current Service Delivery Practices

The recommendations offered by the report fall into two main categories. Seven recommendations address changes to current service delivery practices that are designed to improve transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. These recommendations are derived directly from data collected through the series of structured interviews and review of promising practices and are consistent with the quantitative data reported above. In addition, four recommendations are offered to guide future research in a way that will lead to valid data that can be used to assess the success of further services, validate evidence-based practices, and create new service delivery approaches.

1. 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.
2. Congress should authorize and allocate sufficient funds to support the development of a multifunctional transition unit in each state VR agency.
3. 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 the "blending" of funds from VR, special education, postsecondary education, Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA), Veterans Administration, Social Security Administration, and other appropriate funding agencies.

4. Congress should mandate that RSA, NIDRR, and state VR agencies conduct rigorous evaluation studies that identify the transition program components that directly correlate with improved employment and postsecondary educational outcomes for transition-age youth.
5. 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.
6. RSA, NIDRR, and state VR agencies should develop, implement, and evaluate new service unit policies under which the services provided by VR counselors outside the individualized plan for employment (IPE), such as time spent in collaboration with other agencies, secondary and postsecondary schools, families, etc., are recognized as service units comparable to IPE services.
7. RSA, NIDRR, and state VR agencies should design, implement, and evaluate a tiered structure for services delivered by VR counselors working with transition-age youth.
8. RSA and state VR agencies should allocate additional staff development resources for the preparation of current and future rehabilitation counselors to meet the needs of transition-age youth, and target recruitment and professional development activities to attract qualified people with disabilities to the field.
9. RSA should coordinate its secondary transition efforts with those of other federal and state agencies implementing dropout prevention programs.
10. RSA, NIDRR, OSEP, and state VR agencies should collaborate to conduct a comprehensive review of existing VR transition programs, practices, and policies being implemented in each individual state.
11. RSA, NIDRR, OSEP, and state VR agencies should conduct a systematic program of future research to identify the characteristics and service needs of transition-age youth with disabilities currently unserved or underserved by VR.