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**The following document is a draft of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services' (DARS) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Section for the 2024-2027 Virginia Combined State Plan (CSP). This document is a preliminary draft and is being used to solicit input from the public on the CSP DARS' VR Section.**

**The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires that the Governor of each State submit a State Plan to the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor which outlines the State's four-year strategy for its workforce development system. States must have federally approved State Plans to receive funding for the WIOA six core programs in their workforce systems. States may submit a Unified or Combined State Plan that outlines the workforce strategy for the WIOA six core programs plus one or more of the Combined State Plan partner programs. Virginia has opted to submit a Combined State Plan.**

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## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

### Program-Specific Requirements for State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan must include the following descriptions and estimates, as required by sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA.

**(a) State Rehabilitation Council.** All VR agencies, except for those that have an independent consumer-controlled commission, must have a State Rehabilitation Council (Council or SRC) that meets the criteria in section 105 of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable, has (select A or B):  
 (A) is an independent State commission.  
 (B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council.

In accordance with Assurance 3(b), please provide information on the current composition of the Council by representative type, including the term number of the representative, as applicable, and any vacancies, as well as the beginning dates of each representative's term.

<b>Council Representative</b>	<b>Current Term Number/ Vacant</b>	<b>Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.</b>
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	1 <sup>st</sup> Term	10/1/2021
Parent Training and Information Center	2 <sup>nd</sup> Term	10/1/2022
Client Assistance Program	2 <sup>nd</sup> Term	10/1/2022
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Term	10/1/2022
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	Vacant	
Business, Industry, and Labor	1 <sup>st</sup> Term	10/1/2021
Business, Industry, and Labor	1 <sup>st</sup> Term	10/1/2023
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Business, Industry, and Labor	Vacant	
Disability Advocacy Groups	2 <sup>nd</sup> Term	10/1/2021
Disability Advocacy Groups	1 <sup>st</sup> Term	10/1/2022
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	2 <sup>nd</sup> Term	10/1/2021
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	1 <sup>st</sup> Term	10/1/2023
State Workforce Development Board	Vacant	
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)		

If the SRC is not meeting the composition requirements in section 105(b) of the Rehabilitation Act and/or is not meeting quarterly as required in section 105(f) of the Rehabilitation Act, provide the steps that the VR agency is taking to ensure it meets those requirements.

The Virginia State Rehabilitation Council (General) meets quarterly, as required in Section 105(f) of the Rehabilitation Act. Meetings are generally scheduled to occur at the Virginia DARS Headquarters, which is centrally located and provides ample space and administrative support. The location of the meeting is accessible. Interpreter services are provided, and other accommodations may be requested prior to the meeting. The Council, in partnership with Virginia DARS, and in collaboration with advocacy groups, consumers, and their families, continues to ensure quality services for Virginians with disabilities to achieve meaningful employment, self-sufficiency, and independence. Quarterly meetings remain an active and invaluable forum for the Council to provide advice, information, and support for Virginia DARS' vocational rehabilitation and supported employment programs.

Virginia DARS is currently engaging in active and ongoing recruitment efforts for interested individuals who meet the criteria for SRC membership vacancies to meet the composition requirements in Section 105(b) of the Rehabilitation Act. In Virginia, gubernatorial appointments are facilitated by the Secretary of the Commonwealth. The DARS' Commissioner's Office liaises directly with the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Office on SRC appointments and the SRC Administrator actively interfaces with interested individuals on the requirements associated with the application process. Throughout the agency, DARS staff encourages individuals who qualify for appointment by virtue of professional or personal position or experience to consider serving on the SRC. In Virginia, gubernatorial appointments are an ongoing process, with approximately 900 appointments made throughout the year. Virginia DARS will continue to encourage interested individuals to submit their applications to the Secretary of the Commonwealth to be considered for gubernatorial appointment to the SRC.

In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(21)(A)(ii)(III) of the Rehabilitation Act, include a summary of the Council's input (including how it was obtained) into the State Plan and any State Plan revisions, including recommendations from the Council's annual reports, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction and other Council reports.

Input from the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is essential to improving the provision of vocational rehabilitation services across the Commonwealth. Consulted regarding multiple aspects of the vocational rehabilitation program, the SRC is provided and requests information on a variety of issues including but not limited to the consumer satisfaction survey, reports on various agency initiatives, updates on WIOA performance measures as well as internal dashboards, the VR services portion of the combined state plan, collaborative efforts with workforce and community partners, and the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment. The SRC has played a critical role in providing input in these

areas as well as others. Through this process of sharing information and feedback the SRC developed the following recommendations that are also included in their annual report and the VR services portion of the combined state plan.

**SRC Recommendation 1:** The median hourly wage for vocational rehabilitation (VR) consumers for FFY 2022 was \$12.00 per hour in all districts but one, which is a marked improvement from previous years and continues to exceed the minimum wage. The SRC requests continued briefings and additional information on WIOA performance measures, including the goals and targets established for these measures and DARS' progress towards those goals. In particular, DARS should examine the median wage performance and performance gaps in each district, looking at the demographics of DARS clients, with the expectation that the median hourly wage increases to \$13.00 per hour (\$15 per hour in the Northern district) to best align with increases to the minimum wage and the current economy.

**DARS Response 1:** All districts, except New River (average \$12.50 per hour) reached this target during the program year. Northern district reached the target of \$15.00 per hour.

**SRC Recommendation 2:** Equity in the provision of VR services is imperative. In order to achieve successful closures, DARS should examine barriers, successes, and service delivery, paying particular attention to marginalized and underserved populations, as well as aligning efforts with available Census population and workforce participation data. DARS should:

- a. Target outreach toward marginalized and underserved populations, working consistently toward representative customer demographics— particularly with regard to race, ethnicity, age, and location.

**DARS Response 2(a):** All districts were required to implement and sustain community-based outreach to non-traditional referral sources. In the most recent program year, each district provided a variety of outreach events that were well attended by local community members. DARS offices, in partnership with DARS HR, are working to engage representative demographics in staff recruitment efforts. Partnerships with the Pathways grant includes targeted outreach and recruiting for bilingual staff.

Community PERT mobile units are being implemented to reestablish relationships between PERT and local school areas that are currently underutilizing DARS services. PERT staff traveled to King William County to provide an independent living exploration service to students at the local high school. This community effort provided two days of interest inventories, career awareness exposure, and independent living assessment. Independent living activities included developing a budget for real life situations, cooking, kitchen safety, medication management,

hygiene, self-esteem, and problem-solving assessments. Community PERT mobiles will result in additional services through PERT for students in these localities. In 2024, mobile visits are scheduled for Lancaster County, Northumberland County, Richmond County, and Westmoreland County.

In its second year, the Pathways to Careers grant is now in 15 offices and has worked with over 200 clients. DARS has partnered with the Department of Labor's Division of Registered Apprenticeship and Cyber Civilian to develop a peer recovery specialist registered apprenticeship and are beginning to assist clients enter this career. The Pathways grant is working on the development of a Spanish language job club and has targeted the grant's advisory workgroup to Hispanic participants to address this underserved population and increase the agency's effectiveness in serving this community. The grant has focused on creating a Hispanic Advisory board to better inform the grant team and reach unserved and underserved populations. Under the grant, data is shared with offices regarding who is being served and who is not being served. This approach is increasing counselor awareness of unserved and underserved populations.

- b. Continue to support and encourage interested applicants for appointment to SRC vacancies, including individuals from underserved populations, and collaborate constructively with the Secretary of the Commonwealth regarding such vacancies.

**DARS Response 2(b):** Recruitment for appointments to the SRC continues with an eye towards ensuring a diverse Council that ensures representation of underserved populations. Regular communications occur with the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office to meet this objective.

- c. Provide updates on the Commonwealth's Alternative Hiring Process and its impact on the employment of individuals with disabilities.

**DARS Response 2(c):** In FFY 2023, 1,083 individuals requested a Certificate of Disability (COD). Of those individuals who are not currently receiving VR services, 265 completed the process and were eligible to be issued a COD. As of July 1, 2023, current Classified/Full-Time Virginia employees became eligible to apply for a COD for the Alternative Hiring Process; 3 CODs have issued to current State Employees. Of COD applicants, 255 were referred to DARS' offices.

3For individuals currently receiving VR services, 381 CODs were issued to DARS clients and 18 to DBVI clients. These CODs were issued by the Vocational Counselors and not through the COD Link. Therefore, a total of 646 Certificates of Disability were issued in this Fiscal Year.

Prior to January 2023, neither DARS nor DHRM were able to obtain data on how many state applicants were hired through the Alternative Hiring Process, as the previous DHRM Recruitment Management System could not provide that data. More specific data should be available through the new DHRM system in the coming years.

Additionally, with regard to the employment of individuals with disabilities, over the past five years, representation of individuals with disabilities in the Executive Branch has increased from less than 1% to approximately 4%.

This improvement, in part, can be attributed to the requirement of an annual Statement of Commitment signed by each Executive Branch Agency Head and a comprehensive strategy, which includes communication, education and awareness, compliance and retention. In addition, and through the federal Pathways grant, DARS funds a full-time liaison position embedded within the Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) to focus solely on the employment of individuals with disabilities by state agencies. The incumbent in the position assisted with the design of the alternative hiring process, provides training and technical assistance to agency human resource (HR) offices, identifies jobs in state agencies for recruitment to people with disabilities, and collaborates with counselors in the DARS Vocational Rehabilitation offices to identify qualified applicants for state jobs.

DARS collaborated with DHRM to offer Windmills disability awareness training to the human resources community and agency hiring managers. This training focuses on the culture of disability in the workplace, change to attitudinal barriers, and creating new perspectives on the unique abilities of individuals; as well as increasing awareness of the role that attitudes play in the employment of individuals with disabilities to encourage the employment and advancement of individuals with disabilities.

DARS partnered with DHRM on an awareness campaign for National Disability Employment Awareness Month. This included a communication plan and outreach to Agency Heads of Executive Branch agencies and Agency HR Directors and HR staff. The social media campaign highlighted tools related to disability etiquette, hiring, and retaining employees with disabilities, making workplaces accessible, and job accommodations.

**SRC Recommendation 3:** The SRC recommends that DARS continues collaborative efforts with Centers for Independent Living, as well as other community partners and agencies, to offer financial empowerment education, skill-building opportunities, and career pathways education to clients.

**DARS Response 3:** DARS partnered with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) on the CFPB and VADARS Economic Reinforcement Network (CaVERN). DARS is completing its CaVERN curriculum with the Consumer Financial

Protection Bureau. The CaVERN program provided technical assistance and training on the “Your Money, Your Goals” toolkit. The program took place over the course of two years and was designed to incorporate financial literacy concepts into service provision. CFPB and DARS provided instruction on the Your Money, Your Goals curriculum, and materials, including sessions on paying bills, tracking income and benefits, and choosing financial products and services. Multiple supplemental sessions were held on topics including Racial Economic Equity and Tax Assistance for Lower-income Taxpayers. Incorporating financial empowerment concepts into service provision leads to greater client outcomes and helps increase opportunities for self-sufficiency, and the community created through the CaVERN program encourages networking, community building, and localized resource mapping. The final CaVERN session will be held before the end of 2023. This has been a joint project with Kevin Koziol, Center for Independent Living Coordinator for DARS. The focus has been on Center for Independent Living involvement.

**SRC Recommendation 4:** DARS is poised to play an important role in the Commonwealth’s continued focus on workforce services and development. The SRC requests that it be kept updated on these initiatives, as well as the ability to collect data on referrals through the Virginia Career Works Referral Portal.

**DARS Response 4:** In April 2023, the Virginia Career Works portal was launched as mandatory for all Field Rehabilitation Services (FRS) intake/eligibility clients. However, in July 2023, Workforce Portal implementation was suspended pending review and potential enhancements by the Secretary of Labor, Bryan Slater. FRS offices are not currently utilizing the Portal because of the suspension. FRS is accepting any referrals that still come through the portal and are assigned to offices for services. When the portal review is complete and active again, FRS will return to mandatory use of the Portal. No statistics are currently available due to the short implementation time prior to the suspension.

DARS is in the process of adding an additional Business Development Manager to improve district coverage. The team participated in a National Employment Team summit and began to coordinate employer engagement activities with their national counterparts, leading to increased opportunities for DARS clients who may find employment opportunities in neighboring states.

The DARS workforce programs unit has continued to promote and deliver Windmills training to employers and has added additional trainers to allow for training upon request. The DARS Business Services team and select placement counselors, vocational evaluators and assistive technology staff presented 52 Windmills trainings to over 1751 individuals with state and federal agencies, businesses, and community partners through the end of September 2023. The team added a module this year, “Taking Emotions out of Emotional Disabilities,” which explores the effects of employers’ reactions to emotional disabilities and how employers can offer

reasonable accommodations to create an emotionally neutral environment. DARS provided over 4,400 services to employers, including assistance with Work Opportunity Tax Credits, recruitment, consultation, labor market information, assessments, subsidized on the job training, and training in employment issues and pre-employment training.

**SRC Recommendation 5:** The SRC would like DARS, including WWRC, to expand virtual programs that deliver VR resources and education to those who could benefit from remote learning and services, while remaining mindful of technological literacy or access challenges that may prevent some Virginians from fully utilizing these options.

**DARS Response 5:** The Driving Program at WWRC is working on several initiatives that will enhance virtual service delivery along with the added positive result of increasing WWRC's ability to serve more clients across the state. Virtual services expanded during COVID, and providers have found that the virtual delivery of certain aspects of driver education can augment and facilitate instructional methods that are normally associated with an in-person classroom. WWRC is working to integrate and utilize CANVAS within the driving program to assist with organizing instructional materials and the potential to reach clients remotely. For the classroom component of driver's education, WWRC has provided one-on-one virtual instruction to a total of 46 clients since 2021 (by comparison, in-person training serves an average of 72 clients per year). The use of CANVAS will continue to allow for a more organized and efficient delivery method for both the client and the instructor, in-person and virtually.

WWRC is working on developing a virtual re-exam course to be approved by DMV. "Re-exam" refers to coursework that must be completed to allow a client to take the learner's permit test after 3 consecutive fails. Being able to offer a virtual re-exam class delivered via CANVAS will reach a larger number of clients in the state, many of whom it may not be easy to come to WWRC for in-person services.

The Communication Services Department at WWRC also developed virtual service delivery methods during the pandemic. Since 2020, 26 clients have received one-on-one virtual service for various needs such as evaluation/treatment, assistive technology (alternative and augmentative communication), and fluency. Therapists in this department are currently providing in-person instruction in the pragmatics of communication in all the vocational training programs and work readiness programs (WRP) at WWRC. The potential to offer this service virtually to other clients in the Commonwealth is being explored based upon need and staffing resources.

Virtual PERT is a service line that was originally developed when students were not able to come to WWRC during COVID closures. The virtual option continues to be beneficial for students who may live in more remote areas or who do not elect to



participate in campus-based programming. This program is best utilized by students early in the Transition process. The program uses common virtual technologies to deliver services to students originally in their homes and now mostly at their home school. Content for the virtual program consists of PowerPoint presentations, videos and interactions with PERT On-Site Rehabilitation Counselors and PERT Residential staff. To date, 552 students have been served.

WWRC is providing virtual case management services to DARS clients participating in the 11-week IT Essentials Bootcamp. The program prepares clients to sit for the A+ Certification test by participating in the CompTIA curriculum. In addition to the CompTIA coursework, clients also participate in curriculum to enhance their workplace readiness behaviors, study skills, and trade-related academic skills. At the conclusion of the bootcamp, case management responsibilities transfer to the DARS vocational rehabilitation counselor for transitional planning and job seeking services.

**SRC Recommendation 6:** The SRC recommends that DARS evaluate the quality and inclusion of career pathways in Individual Plans for Employment and ensure VR Counselors are empowered to advocate for services that result in career pathways being utilized and achieved. The SRC requests that data currently being collected on this objective be shared once it can be meaningfully reported.

**DARS Response 6:** There is not currently a way to show how IPEs result in career pathways without a year or more of data. By March 2024, statistics will be gathered to show how IPEs had an impact on career pathways for clients in successful rehabilitation.

**SRC Recommendation 7:** The SRC would like DARS to serve more transition age youth, particularly students with disabilities. DARS should continue to increase outreach to local education agencies, families, and students regarding the availability of and access to transition and Pre-ETS services. This should include collaboration between DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, other community partners, and especially local education agencies. DARS should identify local education agencies in which Pre-ETS services are under-utilized and conduct direct outreach. Data on referral sources to DARS (i.e., school or parent) for Pre-ETS or other transition services, types of services utilized, geographic trends, and information on the frequency with which students who receive Pre-ETS services move on to VR services should be evaluated.

**DARS Response 7:** While conducting outreach to local educational agencies, the DARS transition team has developed and participated in numerous events. These include CREATE Transition events in the Southwest and Hampton districts, presentations with other DARS staff including Connect for Success, Virginia Council of Administrators of Special Education (VCASE), Mission Transition Start on Success, and the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission (MIC3). The

presentations were attended by parent resource center personnel, special education directors, special education teachers, and military education leaders from across the Commonwealth.

A Model Interagency Pre-ETS Program collaborative with Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) has been initiated in Gloucester High School, and will be in Hampton and Phoebus High Schools, as well as Albemarle and Monticello High Schools. This multi-year project will be expanded to all six districts and will focus on the strategic training and enhancement of Pre-ETS through a professional development and support model. VCU will provide multistage training designed to enhance the knowledge and skills of DARS staff and Pre-ETS vendors, and improve communication and collaboration between DARS, schools, families, and Pre-ETS service providers. The components of the model will include: 1) annual regionally based training for DARS counselors and other staff; 2) the facilitation of a work-based learning course; 3) a framework to assess a student's level of needs and flow of service provisions; and 4) regional-specific technical assistance. These components will build upon each other, leading to multi-pronged development that will directly impact student outcomes.

The Transition Self-Assessment Tool (TSAT) has been e-mailed to every Special Education Director in Virginia's public high schools. The future quantitative results will be shared with the Council as well as the qualitative information obtained from identified focus groups.

DARS has entered into a several agreements to enhance services to underserved areas of the state and populations:

- Bloom Consulting has started to provide services in the Middle Peninsula, Northern Neck and other Fredericksburg Schools which have all been identified as underserved. In addition to Bloom Consulting, a Drone Academy Day has been marketed to appropriate DARS staff in these underserved areas.
- An updated contract with the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) to provide continued peer mentoring services to at-risk students is almost finalized. The continued contract was recommended based on positive feedback from DARS Offices in Northern Virginia, Harrisonburg and on the Peninsula.
- A contract with the Center for Family Involvement has been submitted to procurement for next steps. This collaborative partnership will provide services to culturally and linguistically diverse transition aged youth and their families with culturally sensitive information and strategies for navigating Pre-ETS. A goal of the program is to develop at least five products for culturally and linguistically diverse youth with disabilities and their families that considers preferred idioms, customs, literacy, and formats as well as generational preferences.

DARS has contracted with the National Technical Assistance Center-The Collaborative (NTACT-C) for technical assistance to ensure that internal processes

are in place to obtain needed data to make informed decisions regarding Pre-ETS and the continuum of transition services.

DARS has actively participated in the federally funded CAPE Youth project to increase collaboration and effectiveness in serving pre-ETS and transition cases. The Center for Advancing Policy on Employment for Youth (CAPE-Youth) is a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy, The Council of State Governments, and the K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University. The Center was created in 2019 by the U.S. Department of Labor. It seeks to improve employment outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities by helping states build capacity in their youth service delivery and workforce systems. As a result of this partnership, two CAPE-Youth fellows recorded a webinar for DARS counselors and clients on how to ask for accommodations in college. This recording is now available on our website. Additionally, DARS participated in a social network analysis through this project which has resulted in a planning meeting with other WIOA partners designed to increase collaboration and outcomes for transition, justice involved and out of school youth with disabilities. DARS has actively developed paid summer work experiences for transition students and paid work experiences for DARS clients with recently earned credentials but no work experience to add real experience to a resume.

**SRC Recommendation 8:** The SRC encourages DARS to examine opportunities for improved employee diversity in its workforce through increased recruitment efforts and to provide data-driven updates and objectives to the Council.

**DARS Response 8:** The Field Rehabilitative Services (FRS) Director is working with Human Resources in recruiting at historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), on talent development websites, and with colleges, universities, and organizations for diversity in the recruitment of qualified applicants. Data updates are unavailable at this time. Moving forward, the FRS Director and other program Directors will provide quarterly updates on these recruitment efforts.

**SRC Recommendation 9:** The SRC encourages DARS' continued development of an updated language and disability access policy to ensure increased access for all clients.

**DARS Response 9:** Policies have been updated to ensure interpretation and translation services can be accessed by clients. DARS Policy staff remains abreast of the disability access requirements in federal and state law and regulation.

**(b) Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA).** Section 101(a)(15), (17), and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to provide an assessment of:

(1) The VR services needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, including:

(A) Individuals with the most significant disabilities and their need for Supported Employment;

DARS concluded the most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in March 2022. The CSNA was conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center (VCURRTC). The CSNA is both a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the VR needs of individuals with disabilities. Specifically, the agency and the SRC focused on determining the needs of (1) individuals with most significant disabilities, including their needs for supported employment services; (2) individuals who are minorities, including individuals who been unserved or underserved; and (3) individuals who are served through other components of Virginia's statewide workforce development system. In addition, the need to establish, develop, or improve Employment Service Organizations, also known as community rehabilitation programs, that serve individuals with disabilities was assessed. In general, the process included: a review of pertinent literature; data analysis of internal DARS data via use of the RSA-911; analysis of statewide educational, business and demographic data; and focus groups with employment services organizations, DARS staff, Virginia Department of Education staff, individuals who have received services from DARS and their families. Sources for disability statistics included the American Community Survey (ACS), the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance (BRFSS), the Social Security Disability Benefits Database, and data from the Virginia Department of Education.

#### Virginia Population Estimates of Disability

The 2022 American Community Survey, indicated that the total non-institutionalized civilian population for Virginia in 2022 was estimated at 8,412,758, inclusive of all ages. Of these, 1,045,046 individuals reported a disability, which translates to a 12.4% prevalence rate (+/- 0.2 margin of error) within the state. Percent of disability reported in Virginia in 2022 was lower in comparison to the percent of individuals with a disability observed nationwide (16.3%) during the same year. Further, the Annual Disability Statistics Compendium (2023) reported on the difference in employment rates between people with and without disabilities.

Data from the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS-2022), collected by the United States Census Bureau, was used to summarize the most recent disability estimates and demographic information available for the state of Virginia. Findings on disability type from the ACS-2022 are presented by age group (i.e., under 18, ages 18-64, and 65 and older).

For individuals with a disability in Virginia under age 18, cognitive difficulty was the most prevalent (4.7%, n=66,394). Followed by self-care difficulty (1.4%, n=19,352), vision difficulty (0.9%, n=16,034), hearing difficulty (0.5%, n=10,006) and ambulatory difficulty (0.6%, n=8,867).

Among individuals between ages 18 and 64, cognitive difficulty was most prevalent (4.4%, n=224,993), followed by ambulatory difficulty (4.3%, n=223,972), independent living difficulty (3.4%, n=173,296), hearing difficulty (2.0%, n=102,872), vision difficulty (2.0%, n=101,569), and self-care difficulty (1.6%, n=81,200).

For those 65 and older, ambulatory difficulty was most prevalent in 2022 (19.6%, n=271,749) with rates for other disability types as follows: independently living difficulty (12.8%, n=177,762), hearing difficulty (12.6%, n=174,974), cognitive difficulty (7.2%, n=99,104), self-care difficulty (7.0%, n=97,350), and vision difficulty (6.2%, n=85,753).

In examining the gap in employment for those with a disability compared to those without a disability, Virginia ranked 25<sup>th</sup> among all 50 states regarding the size of gap. In terms of total employment rate for people with disabilities, Virginia ranked 22<sup>nd</sup> highest compared to all other states.

In FFY 2022, 88.5% of DARS clients served were classified as most significantly disabled. In FFY 2023, the percentage of most significantly disabled decreased 3.4% to 85.1%.

According to the RSA-911, Virginia had 37.6% in FFY 2022 and 36.8% in FFY 2023 of persons with most significant disabilities employed. It is estimated that 5,046 individuals with most significant disabilities will require supported employment services in 2024. The average cost per person in 2024 is estimated to be \$4,551.96 and the total cost is estimated to be \$22,969,190.16.

In the CSNA, Supported Employment was mentioned as the 6<sup>th</sup> top need of clients with 8.3% responding as such. DARS spends a large proportion of funds on supported employment and this need seems to be well met in relation to other client needs. The DARS staff focus group conducted as part of the CSNA found that 26.4% (n=31) of counselors stated that the population they worked with most frequently were the most significantly disabled.

- (B) Individuals with disabilities who are minorities and individuals with disabilities who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;

## Minority Demographics

Individuals with disabilities who are minorities were a special focus of the 2022 needs assessment.

Gender: Disability rates were slightly higher for females compared to males in both the U.S. and in Virginia according to the ACS-2022. The disability rates were higher in Virginia at 12.6% (n=544,323) compared to 12.2% (n=500,723) for males. The gender breakdown for clients served in 2022 is shown below:

- Male - # served (%) n = 11,816 or 59.6%
- Female - # served (%) n = 7,950 = 40.1%
- Does not wish to self-identify - # served (%) n= 57 or 0.3%

DARS served more males than females in 2022. While self-selection for DARS services has to be considered, females are underrepresented in the DARS population.

Race/Ethnicity: The highest percentage of disability within a minority racial category was observed for Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander persons in Virginia.

According to the 2022 American Community Survey, the racial breakdown for all Virginians with disabilities is shown below:

- Black/African American: 13.2% (n=216,157)
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino: 13.4% (n=667,686)
- Hispanic or Latino (of any race): 8.0% (n=68,243)
- American Indian and Alaska Native alone: 9.9% (n=3,543)
- Asian alone: 6.8% (n=39,237)
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone: 23.2% (n=1,799)
- Some other race alone: 7.4% (n=25,263)
- Two or more races: 10.2% (n=81,76)

Race/Ethnic Breakdown of Clients served by DARS in FFY22 are shown below:

- Black/African American: 33.2% (n=6,671)
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino: 54.6% (n=10,959)
- Hispanic or Latino (of any race): 5.61% (n= 1,137)
- American Indian and Alaska Native alone: 0.2% (n=34)
- Asian: 2.8% (n= 555)
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone: 0.2% (34)
- Some other race alone: 0.8% (n=484)
- Two or more races: 2.4% (n=29)

The minority race/ethnic groups that are underrepresented in the DARS population include; Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans/American Indians. Self-selection for DARS services may play a role in the race/ethnicity of clients served by DARS.

#### BARRIERS FOR MINORITIES/COMPREHENSIVE STATEWIDE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The CSNA sought to address the barriers and needs of minority populations. The results of the on-line survey resulted in 41.5% of respondents indicating that they thought there were racial or ethnic minority barrier differences to the general population of people with disabilities.

The CSNA identified several barriers and needs to accessing services by minority populations. The following list addresses identified needs and areas to address as they were identified as “often a barrier” by respondents and are listed from most frequently cited to least:

- Access to technology (Internet, text, phone, etc.)
- Knowledge of available DARS services and supports
- Accessibility to DARS (Limited public transportation)
- Limited understanding of how work impacts benefits
- Communication issues/language barriers
- Limited social/family supports
- Disability related transportation issues
- Client frustration with speed of service delivery
- Difficulty completing the application
- Limited interagency collaboration
- Developing, with clients, the tasks and supports needed to accomplish the vocational goal
- Limited services and supports in the DARS district
- Inadequate assessment
- Developing rapport with clients
- Difficulty completing the Individualized Plan for Employment
- Developing an achievable vocational goal with clients

- (C) Individuals with disabilities served through other components of the workforce development system; and

DARS is actively engaged at both the state and local level in the Workforce Development System. DARS is represented on the Virginia Board of Workforce Development. A memorandum of understanding is in place with each Local Workforce Development Board and DARS works closely with the American Jobs Centers (AJCs) to assure access to individuals with disabilities. The VR program currently is co-located as a One-Stop partner in Martinsville, Danville, and South Boston. DARS also has a physical presence in other Workforce Board AJCs. DARS

has also been supporting training on career counseling, motivational interviewing, as well as Customized Employment for our workforce partners.

In FFY 2022, the following number of DARS clients were served by the Virginia Workforce System:

- One-Stop Centers: n= 105
- Other WIOA Programs in Virginia: n= 1,100
- Wagner-Peyser: n=3
- Other Virginia State Agencies: n= 447

Results of the 2022 CSNA indicate that 36 percent of DARS staff work with the Workforce Development Centers on a consistent basis. The majority of respondents indicated that they worked with workforce development centers frequently (53.7%). The infrequent use of these centers may be related to staff's perceived effectiveness of the centers in working with individuals with disabilities.

The CSNA identified multiple barriers and needs to accessing services through workforce development centers and addressing the vocational needs of DARS VR clients. The following list addresses identified needs and areas to address as they were identified as "needs significant improvement" by respondents and are listed from most frequently cited to least:

- Staff training on how to work with individuals with disabilities
  - Communicating with DARS counselors
  - Partnering more effectively with DARS
  - Outreach to individuals with disabilities to increase/improve knowledge of services
  - Including individuals with disabilities when purchasing training for their clients
  - Programmatic accessibility
  - Communicating with clients who have language barriers
  - Physical accessibility
- (D) Youth with disabilities, including students with disabilities and their need for pre-employment transition services. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under IDEA.

Data from the Virginia Department of Education on students with disabilities (SWD) enrolled either public school, private school or home schooled for the 2022-2023 school year were obtained from the Virginia Department of Education. There were 162,708 students in grades nine through twelve who were considered



to have disabilities in the 2022-2023 school year. The breakdown by disability is shown in the table below:

Virginia Students with Disabilities Grades 9 to 12, 2022 to 2023 School Year

<b>Disability</b>	<b>Total</b>
Autism	7,451
Deaf-Blindness	*0
Developmental Delay	*0
Emotional Disturbance	3,882
Hearing Impairments	327
Intellectual Disabilities	3,714
Multiple Disabilities	1,018
Orthopedic Impairments	114
Other Health Impairments	13,420
Specific Learning Disabilities	21,034
Speech or Language Impairments	680
Traumatic Brain Injured	144
Visual Impairments	196
<b>Total</b>	<b>51,980</b>

\*Fewer than 10 students total across Virginia and are therefore reported at zero.

The largest percentage of students enrolled in school year 2022-23 in grades 9-12 have specific learning disabilities (40%), followed by other health impairments at 26%.

The pipeline of potential DARS clients, those enrolled in pre-K through 8<sup>th</sup> grade comprise 109,714 students. The majority (29%) of clients in grades pre-k through 8<sup>th</sup> grade have a specific learning disability, followed by other health impairments (20%), speech or language impairments (19%), autism (16%), developmental delay (6%), and emotional disturbance (3%).

#### DARS SERVICES TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Counting only cases of SWD using the variable “age at plan signature”, DARS served an average of 8,348 clients over the last three years. This is about 16.4% of all high-school aged SWD in Virginia according to the Virginia Department of Education. DARS can expect an increase in SWD through the 2023-2024 school year with an estimated 9,680 served. The number of SWD would then decline to 9,962 by 2025-2026.

Using a more strict definition of SWD including age, the SWD has a section 504 accommodation, or the SWD is receiving services under an Individualized Education Program (IEP), DARS has averaged 4,530 students over the last three years. This represents

about 6% of the total high school population. Assuming approximately 6%, DARS can expect to see an increase in clients over the next four years to around 5,732 SWD served. An increase to 5,798 would be expected by the 2025-2026 school year.

The types of impairment for Virginia’s students will also change over the next four school years. The number of clients with Autism, intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities are expected to decrease slightly while emotional impairments are expected to increase. This is depicted in the table below.

	<b>Autism</b>	<b>Emotional</b>	<b>Intellectual</b>	<b>Learning Disability</b>
2018	2,120	1,026	1,616	6,657
2020	1,398	1,065	825	5,580
2021	1,509	1,171	767	4,730
2022	1,685	1,345	823	4,728
2023	1,775	1,395	1,014	4,584

DARS continues to reserve and expend 15% of its VR grant funds on Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) services for students with disabilities and 50% of its Supported Employment funds for youth with the most significant disabilities.

The 2022 CSNA found that Virginia students with disabilities have met the state targets for enrolling in higher education or CIE within one year of leaving high school. (Goal >65%, Achieved 65.87%) They did not meet the target for enrolling in higher education. However, they were within less than one percentage point. (Goal >35%, Achieved 34.4%)

Pre-ETS offers students with disabilities an early start at career exploration and preparation for adult life. Beginning at age 14, students with disabilities can connect with VA DARS for Pre-ETS. DARS works with students, their families, their schools and community partners to enrich transition planning and support students with gaining knowledge and experiences necessary so they may make informed decisions about their future. Topics covered through Pre-ETS include: 1) career exploration; 2) work-based learning experiences; 3) exploration of education and training programs for after high school; 4) workplace readiness training to develop social and independent living skills; and 5) self-advocacy. The 2022 CSNA conducted a survey of transition educators focused on these five "required" activities of pre-employment transition services asking VA transition educators if these activities are 1) available, 2) accessible, and 3) coordinated. Questions also included asking educators about transition-age youth unmet needs.

Responding educators indicated that they thought the most unserved/underserved students were individuals with intellectual disabilities (21.6%), followed by individuals with learning disabilities (18.2%), and individuals with the most significant disabilities including individuals with multiple impairments (19.3%). The vast majority of respondents, 89.4%, reported that they support students who need DARS services. In

addition, the majority of respondents reported that they know who their school's DARS counselor is.

The CSNA identified unmet needs to Pre-ETS services through the survey of transition educators. The following lists Pre-ETS services identified as "an unmet need" by respondents listed from most frequently cited to least:

- Work-based learning experiences
- Workplace readiness training
- Job exploration counseling
- Instruction in self-advocacy
- Counseling on Educational and Training Options

The CSNA also identified multiple potential reasons for unmet needs to students accessing transition services. The following list addresses identified reasons as they were identified as "yes, this is a barrier" by respondents and are listed from most frequently cited to least:

- Need for training on Pre-ETS for families and students
- Limited internship and apprenticeship opportunities
- Limited work-based learning opportunities
- Need for training on Pre-ETS for teachers / school personnel
- Limited school personnel for transition planning
- Limited coordination of services between the school and DARS
- Communication / Collaboration with the Business Community
- Difficulty promoting career pathways for students
- Insufficient Funding
- Lack of communication between DARS and the schools
- Student disability barriers

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- Need for training on Pre-ETS for families and students
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- Need for training on Pre-ETS for teachers / school personnel
- Limited school personnel for transition planning
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- Communication / Collaboration with the Business Community
- Difficulty promoting career pathways for students
- Insufficient Funding
- Lack of communication between DARS and the schools
- Student disability barriers

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Through the Cooperative Agreement between DARS' and VDOE and the annual review of local agreements, transition career services and Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are coordinated under IDEA and seek to address the gaps and unmet needs identified above.

The local school division and DARS assign a representative whose responsibility includes transition planning. Secondary students with disabilities are informed of DARS and Pre-ETS available through DARS starting at age 14. This may occur by means of the student's IEP meeting and other appropriate methods/processes.

A DARS counselor may be invited to students' IEP meetings when VR transition services or Pre-ETS are discussed. When the counselor is unable to attend the meeting, other arrangements will be made for participation, such as a conference call or provision of written information regarding the student's current or planned transition services or Pre-ETS.

The school's primary transition contact and the primary DARS counselor assigned to the school coordinate regular meetings and communications. The school's contact will provide needed student records documenting a student's disability and a signed consent and information release.

The school's primary transition contact will assist DARS staff in accessing the school environment and identifying opportunities to work with students.

DARS is responsible for the coordination, provision, and/or payment of rehabilitative/transition goods and services for eligible or potentially eligible individuals with disabilities in accordance with applicable Federal and State laws, regulations, agency policies, and guidelines. If there are questions as to who pays for a service, DARS and the local school division personnel should discuss whether the purpose of the service is related to an employment outcome or education attainment; and whether the service is customarily provided by the school or by DARS.

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- (2) Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State.

According to the 2022 CSNA, the majority of both stakeholders (74%) and staff (75%) believed that Virginia's community rehabilitation programs, or Employment Services Organizations could enhance service options. Examples of service options requested that are allowed VR services included Customized Employment and Pre-ETS.

DARS will work collaboratively with the Employment Services Organization Provider Network. The network represents a cross-section of stakeholders and meets regularly to: (a) provide ideas and recommendations regarding program changes and procedures; (b) identify and address special regional needs, unique needs of rural, suburban and urban communities, and needs of different populations of individuals with disabilities; and (c) provide information to the Department and help develop priorities and initiatives.

**(c) Goals, Priorities, and Strategies.** Section 101(a)(15) and (23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe the goals and priorities of the State in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs. The goals and priorities are based on (1) the most recent CSNA, including any updates; (2) the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and (3) other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107 of the Rehabilitation Act. VR agencies must—

- (1) Describe how the SRC and the VR agency jointly developed and agreed to the goals and priorities and any revisions; and

Input from the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is essential to improving the provision of vocational rehabilitation services across the Commonwealth. Throughout the year they are consulted regarding multiple aspects of the vocational rehabilitation program including but not limited to the consumer satisfaction survey, WIOA performance measures, the CSNA, various agency initiatives, and collaborative efforts with workforce and community partners. The SRC provides formal recommendations annually which DARS works to address and provides updates to the Council. Based upon recommendations and feedback from the SRC throughout the year, current WIOA performance measures, a comprehensive analysis of data outcomes, and the CSNA; potential goals, priorities, and strategies were discussed with the SRC at the November 2023 Retreat and Quarterly meeting. During the meeting, the goals, priorities, and strategies were reviewed, discussed, edited by DARS staff and members of the State Rehabilitation Council. Based on those discussions, the goals, priorities, and strategies were revised and agreed upon to reflect the joint intent of DARS and the State Rehabilitation Council.

(2) Identify measurable goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs and the basis for selecting the goals and priorities (e.g., CSNA, performance accountability measures, SRC recommendations, monitoring, other information). As required in section 101(a)(15)(D), (18), and (23), describe under each goal or priority, the strategies or methods used to achieve the goal or priority, including as applicable, description of strategies or methods that—

- (A) Support innovation and expansion activities;
- (B) Overcome barriers to accessing VR and supported employment services;
- (C) Improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services); and
- (D) Improve the performance of the VR and Supported Employment programs in assisting individuals with disabilities to achieve quality employment outcomes. [text box: List and number each goal/priority, noting the basis, and under each goal/priority, list and number the strategies to achieve the goal/priority]

**Goal 1:** Discover and create new opportunities that expand employment options for our VR consumers and that are more effective in meeting our Commonwealth’s workforce demands.

Strategy 1.1: Work collaboratively with business and workforce development partners to identify the hiring needs of employers and match those needs with the knowledge, skills, and abilities of our VR consumers.

Strategy 1.2: Support and grow innovative career pipelines through the Pathways project, apprenticeships, and the state alternative hiring practice (AHP).

Strategy 1.3: Offering access and clear pathways to skills, training, and credentials that support good jobs in the community with family sustaining wages.

**Goal 2:** Prepare VR consumers for the current and future labor market.

Strategy 2.1: Provide services and supports leading to expanded education, training and employment opportunities for adult and youth VR consumers. Expand virtual programs that deliver VR resources and education to those who could benefit from remote learning and services, while remaining mindful of technological literacy or access challenges that may prevent some Virginians from fully utilizing these options.

Strategy 2.2: Ensure that VR consumers have the necessary credentials to compete for jobs in Virginia's new economy.

Strategy 2.3: Enhance the use of labor market and occupational information by VR staff and VR consumers for career planning and Employment Plan development.

**Goal 3:** Improve and expand opportunities for youth with disabilities, including students with disabilities, to promote future educational and employment success.

Strategy 3.1: Ensure federal and state funding are maximized by the reservation and expenditure of the required 15% of funds allocated to Pre-ETS.

Strategy 3.2: Maximize the use of talent and skills within the agency by reviewing existing vocational rehabilitation counselor (VRC), administrative, and other staff roles, making any necessary changes to improve the provision of services and outcomes.

Strategy 3.3: Implement improved training to ensure that new counselors have the skills necessary to effectively serve youth.

Strategy 3.4: Develop and revise processes, guidance, and internal controls for reviewing data as it applies to the 15 % reservation requirement. This includes monitoring expenditures, staff time for Pre-ETS, properly allocating services to Pre-ETS and other elements.

Strategy 3.5: Continue to onboard community rehabilitation providers to provide Pre-ETS.

Strategy 3.6: Maximize the use of Pre-ETS authorized activities.

Strategy 3.7: Expand work experiences for transition age youth, preferably while still in school, to improve employment outcomes at graduation.

Strategy 3.8: Develop a Youth Advisory Board to provide consultation to DARS to inform service delivery for Pre-ETS and employment services for students and youth with disabilities regarding gaps in services, including areas of the state the services are lacking.

Strategy 3.9: Identify best practices, create strategies, and partner with other agencies to better serve students and youth with disabilities to ensure a pathway and appropriate services to meet their employment goals.

**Goal 4:** Ensure accountability and effective performance management.

Strategy 4.1: Effectively and efficiently utilize personnel and fiscal resources to optimize agency performance and the availability of services for VR consumers including a review of staffing and administrative resource utilization.

Strategy 4.2: Provide services that result in meaningful and measurable outcomes through objective assessment of performance and ongoing innovation and process improvement.

**Goal 5:** Prioritize outcomes and employment in competitive integrated settings for unserved and underserved populations including, individuals transitioning out of subminimum wage or at risk of entering segregated settings after high school and those with mental health conditions.

Strategy 5.1: Develop sustainable services and supports for individuals transitioning out of subminimum wage or at risk of entering segregated settings after high school such as peer mentoring supports and family engagement services for VR participants transitioning out of subminimum wage or at risk of entering segregated settings after high school.

Strategy 5.2: Create an Integrated Resource Team (IRT) system to utilize wraparound supports in an organized manner.

Strategy 5.3: Improve employment outcomes for individuals with mental health conditions and substance use disorders by expanding innovative service delivery models such as Individual Placement Supports (IPS) and continue efforts with the US Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) ASPIRE Project.

**Goal 6:** Expand provider capacity and services to better support and improve outcomes for VR clients through partnerships with the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center, state and local agencies, community rehabilitation providers and other entities.

Strategy 6.1: Provide peer mentoring/support specialist services to improve engagement and outcomes for individuals with mental health conditions and substance use disorders including collaborating with the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to create a service definition for peer mentoring/support specialist, determine acceptable credential for peer mentor/support specialists, and create a system to onboard peer mentors/support specialists.

Strategy 6.2: Improve provider capacity for SE and Pre-ETS by providing training internally and externally to strengthen skills.

Strategy 6.3: Develop SE and Pre-ETS training based on gaps and needs identified in the comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA), Employment Services



Organization Performance Report, stakeholder feedback, and program evaluations.

Strategy 6.4: Expand services to areas across the Commonwealth that have limited choice of provider options by: (a) identifying areas of the state where SE services are not readily accessible and (b) establish initiatives to assist existing ESOs to expand into underserved areas.

Strategy 6.5: Increase access to Pre-Employment Transition Services through the expansion of Community Rehabilitation Providers including existing partners Centers for Independent Living (CILs), as appropriate.

Strategy 6.6: Identify and implement effective means to ensure seamless service delivery and supports among the partners, to include American Job Center and Centers for Independent Living.

**(d) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals.** For the most recently completed program year, provide an evaluation and report of progress for the goals or priorities, including progress on the strategies under each goal or priority, applicable to that program year. Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require VR agencies to describe—

(1) Progress in achieving the goals and priorities identified for the VR and Supported Employment Programs;

**Priority 1: Preparing VR consumers for the current and future labor market.**

Goal 1.1: Providing services and supports leading to expanded education, training and employment opportunities for adult and youth VR consumers.

The Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) continues to emphasize measurable skill gains (MSG PY22 statewide 77.6%) and credential attainment (PY22 statewide 32.3%) to reinforce our commitment to expanding education and training opportunities for VR clients. Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) support educational advancement and career-based skill upgrades that address individual consumer skill gaps as we work to prepare them for career employment.

Virginia VR works in close collaboration with American Job Centers and other state/local agencies to leverage community-based support for education, training and employment that benefits our consumers.

Through the Pathways grant, DARS has developed opportunities for participants to engage in IT skill development.

- The virtual WWRC IT Bootcamp had its inaugural class this fall. This 11-week class is a partnership with Pathways, WWRC and Adult Education. It provides virtual training in CompTIA Fundamentals.
- Some candidates require additional supports. Pathways has partnered with adult education to assist individuals that need foundational support training. Bridge work addresses digital literacy, customer service and trade related academics.
- Pathways has also partnered with Maxx Potential (employer in the Richmond area) to provide five-day career labs exploring the IT career field to include hands-on activities within team environments.

Pathways has developed a group, Work Wi\$e, to provide opportunities for participants recently employed to meet with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor in a group setting to discuss issues on the job. This has shown promise and provides opportunities for participants to work through challenges they may be facing.

Further expansion of the Pathways DIF grant has provided opportunities for consumers to engage in industry specific skill upgrade, rapid and intensive job stabilization as well as continuing to educate the VR workforce (Counselors, Job Placement and Employment Service Specialists) in business development, targeted outreach and how to leverage pathways to ensure consumers have 21st century skills to meet employer demand.

At Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) a new training program, Building Trades, was started in September 2023. In addition, the following credentials were implemented within the Building Trades program: OSHA 10, OSHA 30, and Fundamentals of Construction. In addition, in April 2023, a new program, the Workplace Readiness Program (WRP) was implemented to meet the needs of employers.

The Workplace Readiness Program is designed to introduce workplace readiness behaviors to assist consumers with transitioning into employment or further education/training opportunities. Consumers receive differentiated instruction in thirteen workplace readiness behaviors which consumers can apply to simulated workplace environments through pre-employment skills labs. Also, workplace readiness behaviors are supported by ancillary staff such as Occupational Therapy, Behavior Support Services, Communication Services, Residential Services and Recreational Therapy.

Goal 1.2: Ensuring that VR consumers have the necessary credentials to compete for jobs in Virginia's new economy.

DRS continues to emphasize measurable skill gains (MSG PY22 statewide 77.6%) and credential attainment (PY 2022 32.3%) to reinforce our commitment to expanding education and training opportunities for VR clients. Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE) support educational advancement and career-based skill upgrades that address individual consumer skill gaps as we work to prepare them for career employment. (also stated in Goal 1.1)

Further expansion of the Pathways DIF grant has provided opportunities for consumers to engage in industry specific skill upgrade, rapid and intensive job stabilization as well as continuing to educate the VR workforce (Counselors, Job Placement and Employment Service Specialists) in business development, targeted outreach and how to leverage pathways to ensure consumers have 21st century skills to meet employer demand. (also stated in Goal 1.1)

VR counselors and vocational evaluators have been trained on the current and future labor market, the availability of competitively waged jobs and the skills needed to obtain those jobs as well as industry-recognized credentials. This information is provided during Guidance and Counseling with consumers and their families as applicable.

DARS piloted and began implementation of iGREET, a comprehensive training program for all job placement counselors created through the Institute for Community Inclusion that focuses on the dual customer approach of business engagement. This training has been augmented with specific DARS services available to businesses and DARS internal processes to increase opportunities to engage with employers on behalf of DARS participants.

At WWRC, in every Vocational Training program, a WIOA recognized credential has been established. By offering recognized credentials, WWRC ensures that clients have a marketable and transferable credential that is recognized by employers in their chosen field of employment. Thus, increasing their employability, skills, and opportunity for advancement.

Goal 1.3: Enhanced use of labor market and occupational information by VR staff and VR consumers for career planning and Employment Plan development.

Vocational rehabilitation counselors utilize labor market information through the guidance and counseling process in the development of each IPE. This information is shared with consumers/families during plan development. As educational and employment plans are developed, areas with skill gaps are identified and addressed through this process. In addition, WWRC regularly reviews their credentialed programs to ensure they align with the needs of the labor market and DARS' clients. Programs have been added and removed to address changes in occupational demand.

**Priority 2: Discovering new opportunities that expand employment options for our VR consumers and that are more effective in meeting our Commonwealth's workforce demands.**

Goal 2.1: Working collaboratively with business and workforce development partners to identify the hiring needs of employers and matching those needs with the knowledge, skills, and abilities of our VR consumers.

DARS VR maintains a regularly scheduled staffing presence in all comprehensive American Job Centers across the Commonwealth and serves as a single point of contact for consumers with identified disabilities.

DARS VR has full office operations in several American Job Centers, statewide, and works collaboratively with center partners to share employer information across systems. VR Counselors utilize this information in guidance and counseling with consumers through the VR process.

DARS VR has an elected seat on each Workforce Development Board across the Commonwealth and maintains an active voice on behalf of VR services and people with disabilities.

Partnerships with employers continued by providing Windmills Training. This past year 52 trainings were offered on Windmills' disability awareness training, impacting 1,751 human resource professionals and/or employers. Additionally, DARS applied to be a Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) trainer so that when offering these trainings to HR professionals, they are able to receive continuing education credits to maintain their professional credentials.

A new training program, Building Trades, began in September 2023 at WWRC. In addition, in April 2023, a new program, the Workplace Readiness Program (WRP) was implemented to meet the needs of employers. The Workplace Readiness Program is designed to introduce workplace readiness behaviors to consumers to assist with transitioning into employment or further education/training opportunities. Consumers receive differentiated instruction in thirteen (13) workplace readiness behaviors which consumers can apply to simulated workplace environments through pre-employment skills labs. Also, workplace readiness behaviors are supported by ancillary staff such as Occupational Therapy, Behavior Support Services, Communication Services, Residential Services and Recreational Therapy.

**Priority 3: Partnering with the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center, state and local agencies, Supported Employment providers, and other entities in the integration of services for people with disabilities leading to competitive, integrated employment.**

Goal 3.1: To identify and implement effective means to ensure seamless service delivery and supports among the partners, to include American Job Centers.

DARS VR has full office operations in several American Job Centers, statewide and works collaboratively with center partners to share employer information across systems. VR counselors utilize this information in guidance and counseling with consumers throughout the VR process.

DARS VR maintains a regularly scheduled staffing presence in all comprehensive American Job Centers across the Commonwealth and serves as a single point of contact for consumers with identified disabilities.

DRS offices work collaboratively with WWRC in the referral and admissions process to technical education provided in this supported setting. Vocational rehabilitation counselors are part of discharge planning and work with WWRC to find and support employment post-graduation.

DRS offices build and sustain working relationships with Employment Service Organization (ESO) providers for job coaching and placement related services.

The Commonwealth of Virginia provides state funds to ESOs to increase the availability of extended services and reduce barriers to offering integrated, community-based employment options for persons with the most significant disabilities after the DARS time-limited services are completed. A total of \$8,952,766 in extended services will be available to Employment Services Organizations through DARS under the Long-Term Employment Support Services and Extended Employment Services programs as appropriated by the Virginia General Assembly.

DRS conducts district wide meetings designed to directly enhance the quality of supported employment services to consumers with the most significant disabilities. These sessions address increasing supported-employment options and consumer choice for meeting physical, behavioral, medical, and overall rehabilitation needs; and accessing and expanding placement resources.

DARS along with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), working with Griffin and Hammis, LLC provides training and technical assistance to Employment Service Organizations related to Customized Employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities. Training includes Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) certification in Basic Employment Services with an emphasis in Customized Employment as well as implementing a fidelity scale for Customized Employment services.

DRS continues to have a collaborative relationship with the Employment Service Organizations (ESO) through the ESO provider network and the Employment Services Organizations' Steering Committee (ESOSC). Through the ESOSC we receive stakeholder input from Employment Services Organizations' that provides the DARS' Commissioner

counsel on funding and policy issues related to community rehabilitation programs and the allocation of Long-Term Employment Support Services and Extended Employment Services state funds, as well as other services that impact providers, such as Supported and Customized Employment and Pre-Employment Transition Services. This fosters close working relationships between agency staff and Employment Services Organizations.

DRS continues to utilize the Employment Services Organization Outcome Report to assist Employment Services Organizations, VR counselors, and VR consumers in ensuring appropriate service provision. The outcome report is reviewed annually with ESOs to provide information and answer questions about service provision.

Goal 3.2: Offering access and clear pathways to good jobs in the community with family sustaining wages.

Virginia VR has steadily increased wages at placement to support living wage standards for consumers. Our internal standards/goals exceed state minimum wage and have included year over year increases since 2021. The current state wage goal/requirement for 2024 is \$15.00/hour with Northern Virginia at \$17.50/hour.

The Pathways Program provides a specialized focus on promoting and supporting clients in career fields where they can grow professionally. Examples of some positive outcomes from this program include:

- Four individuals have entered into the registered apprenticeship program for Peer Recovery Specialists. This position is for individuals with learned experiences to mentor others in their recovery process.
- Assisting individuals with work experiences. Five individuals participated in paid work experiences. (This number does not include all VR clients who participated in paid work experiences.) This provides candidates with 8-12 weeks (up to 29 hours a week) of paid work experiences in their field. Three of these candidates are currently employed.
- Increased knowledge of VR program field staff of Pathways opportunities, the importance of career paths, and resources to help support clients.

In 2022 DARS was one of 14 states awarded a discretionary grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, to develop and implement the Real Pay for Real Jobs, Education and Outreach, Partnership Development, Provisions of Individualized Services, and Capacity Building (RPRJ EPIC) Project. Nationally known as the Disability Innovation Fund Program - Subminimum Wage to Competitive Integrated Employment (SWTCIE), the aim of the RPRJ EPIC Project is to help individuals with disabilities currently engaged in subminimum wage employment transition to competitive integrated employment and to assist youth with disabilities at risk of entering subminimum wage employment when they transition from school to the workforce, engage in employment in the general workforce.

The RPRJ EPIC project will build capacity at a local level to improve and expand services to address the obstacles to employment faced by individuals with disabilities.

Transitioning from and preventing entrance into subminimum wage employment for project participants will be achieved by building local stakeholder capacity to provide improved services leading to competitive integrated employment outcomes. Activities will include 1) building partnerships in local communities including with businesses/employers, 2) increasing current 14(c) employers' capacity to provide evidenced-based services that lead to competitive integrated employment, 3) educating individuals with disabilities and their families about the benefits of employment, including building a family and peer mentor network and 4) engaging local agencies to secure wrap-around services.

The goal of the project is to develop sustainable services and supports to allow individuals with disabilities the opportunity to engage in employment in the general workforce that matches their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and provides compensation at customary wages for the positions.

Primary Project Objectives:

1. Assist individuals currently compensated below minimum wage transition to competitive integrated employment.
2. "Close the front door" for youth at risk of entering subminimum wage employment.
3. Support employers who hold 14(c) certificates to transition to a competitive integrated employment model.

Goal 3.3: Increase and improve competitive employment outcomes and career opportunities for unserved and underserved populations, to include veterans and individuals with sensory disabilities, mental illness, and developmental disabilities.

Through the Pathways DIF grant, vocational rehabilitation counselors and job placement counselors received intensive, data driven training on current unserved and underserved populations across the Commonwealth. Through this process local strategies were developed to increase targeted outreach. This process will expand through 2024-2027.

The Pathways grant has created a Hispanic/Latin X advisory board to better inform the agency of strategies needed to provide relevant services to this community.

Support has been provided from the Pathways grant to assist a VR counselor who will spearhead a Spanish Speaking job club.

Strategic planning processes occurred in each District. Targeted outreach plans were developed in late 2022-2023. These plans are still underway.

DARS has selected and trained key VR staff in key concepts to implement Customized Employment approaches to DARS clients exiting institutions, sheltered workshops, high schools, and adults for whom traditional Supported Employment services have not yielded successful outcomes. DARS in collaboration with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) continues to work to build the provider capacity for Customized Employment. Virginia has struggled to build capacity for this service. As a result, DARS has begun engaging providers to better understand the challenges that they have experienced in adopting this service model. The agency has been exploring provider experiences through training, mentoring, service provision, staffing, and administrative aspects of the model. The information and data gathered from each of the providers will then be compiled to identify common themes and means to capacity building while retaining fidelity to the model.

The DBHDS' Office of Substance Use Disorders has provided DARS with fiscal and personnel resources to support the co-location of VR counselors in the Community Services Boards (CSBs) since 1988. The resources contributed by DBHDS allow DARS to have dedicated specialty counselors to provide VR services to individuals that experience substance use disorders that also receive treatment services through the CSB service system. The program expanded in the middle of SFY 2000 from three counselors to nineteen counselors serving 18 of the forty CSBs. DARS also provides services to individuals with serious mental illness, most of who are also served by CSBs. In addition, DARS' staff serve on Virginia's Employment First Advisory Group and work closely with DBHDS on various work groups and initiatives that focus on recovery and the integration of work into the mental health service system. Consultants from both the Office of Substance Use Disorders and the Office of Behavioral Health collaborate with DARS in conducting annual meetings to provide program updates, provide in-service training opportunities, and regularly share information to promote a common understanding of the strategies and practices to serve individuals with substance abuse and/or serious mental illness. DARS has two employees who specialize in intellectual and developmental disabilities to provide technical assistance, guidance, and direction to VR counselors in serving this population.

In 2022, The U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) selected Virginia as one of seven state participants for the Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment (ASPIRE) initiative. The goal of ASPIRE is to support and expand competitive integrated employment for people with mental health conditions, through use of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model of supported employment. IPS is a model of supported employment for people with Serious Mental Illness (SMI). ASPIRE helps align state policy and funding to better promote competitive integrated employment for people with SMI that may include co-occurring Substance Use Disorders (SUD). The technical assistance cycle runs from January 2023 through September 2024. In FFY 23 one new program was created in far southwest Virginia. In FFY 24, we anticipate adding one to two additional IPS programs. New IPS programs receive training and technical assistance from the DRS IPS specialist and Trainer as well as national subject matter experts through the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy. IPS teams learn together to implement



the eight principles of IPS, leading to systemic change in how mental health services are delivered. Technical assistance and training will be individualized for each IPS Team based upon an IPS Readiness Checklist. DARS is working closely with DBHDS to collaborate on this program as well as to establish a value-based rate structure to incentivize outcomes for job seekers.

**Priority 4: Ensuring accountability and effective performance management.**

Goal 4.1: Effectively and efficiently utilize personnel and fiscal resources to optimize agency performance and the availability of services for VR consumers.

DARS/DRS will continue to utilize a quality assurance (QA) and accountability system that includes ongoing quarterly QA case reviews, consumer satisfaction assessments, performance evaluations and performance analysis to address effective consumer services and use of fiscal resources to ensure quality employment outcomes for our consumers.

Goal 4.2: Providing services that result in meaningful and measurable outcomes through objective assessment of performance and ongoing innovation and process improvement.

DRS has improved the data literacy of field leadership to enhance effectiveness in providing quality outcome driven services. A primary focus of this intervention is replication of innovative and successful service delivery methods which have improved financial and personnel resource allocation across the state.

**Priority 5: Enhancing services to students and youth with disabilities.**

Goal 5.1: Identify best practices, create strategies, and partner with other agencies to better serve students and youth with disabilities to ensure a pathway and appropriate services to meet their employment goals.

DARS has been diligently working to better serve students and youth with disabilities through the growth and improvement of current services and the expansion of new opportunities. This includes an internal review of administrative functions including staffing with the outcome of creating dedicated Transition Counselors (Student & Youth Counselor) to leverage expertise and focus on building/sustaining relationships with school districts, families and local communities. Continued and sustained work with ESOs is resulting in increased ESO vendor capacity to provide Pre-ETS services to local school districts. Work in this area will continue.

DARS continues to offer career cafes focusing on specific sectors and utilizing industry experts to inform students of potential career opportunities in high demand occupations. Students, teachers, and vocational rehabilitation counselors are invited to attend. These monthly sessions are recorded and archived on the DARS website.

At the request of the RSA Coordinator for Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center (PEATC), DARS created a webinar on how work impacts SSI benefits and work incentives that apply to transition-aged youth. The webinar was recorded and will be used as part of the resources PEATC uses going forward to educate parents on the impact of work on benefits, disposable income, and work incentives. This will increase transition age youth and their parents' knowledge of SSA work incentives and encourage earlier paid work experiences and the utilization of the Student Earned Income Exclusion.

DARS sponsored additional training for work incentive specialists through Cornell on youth work incentives to increase vendor understanding of this population and specific work incentives related to youth.

The PERT Program is a highly effective school-to-work transition initiative supported by the Virginia Department of Education (DOE) and administered through DARS at WWRC. It has ten service lines options and specialized programs: PERT comprehensive, situational exploration, SOL intake, Transition Academy, Community PERT, Independent Living Exploration Training, Career Day, Career Seminars, Virtual PERT, and Work Credential Week.

DARS continued to support transition age youth in on-the-job training experiences and with the numerous Project SEARCH sites across the State. DARS in collaboration with VDOE has established two additional Project SEARCH programs on Military Bases, Naval Air Station Oceana, and Fort Gregg-Adams. (Project SEARCH is a transition program for students with most significant disabilities. It is business led with a host business that offers hands on training with the main goal of competitive integrated employment.)

The Cooperative Agreement between DARS and the Department of Education was executed on February 25, 2017. Under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement, it is to be reviewed annually by both Agencies and remains in effect until altered by amendment or terminated by either Agency with no less than 30 days notice in writing. This Agreement may also be amended by mutual consent of both Departments, provided that any changes are agreed to in writing at least 30 days prior to the effective date of the change. A focus of the agreement is to provide collaborative training opportunities between school personnel and DARS Counselors to increase collaborative transition services which lead to improved outcomes for students with disabilities. Another focus of the agreement is the importance of sharing data between agencies.

Additionally, DARS works collaboratively with local education agencies to develop cooperative agreements. The cooperative agreements outline:

- Coordination and Collaboration –this discusses who is the lead agency for specific activities such as informing students of services available through DARS and determining eligibility for DRS services.

- Consultation and Technical Assistance – This section describes the consultation and technical assistance DARS provides to local school divisions to assist in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities (e.g., attending IEP meetings, person centered planning meetings, transition planning meetings, career fairs, transition fairs, etc.)
- Pre-ETS & VR Transition Services–These sections describe each of the services DARS provides in the continuum of transition services.
- Interagency Planning between VR and School Division Ensures students/families are informed about DARS and school responsibilities in referring/obtaining documentation for DARS services.
- Interagency Planning between VR, WWRC, and School Divisions focused on PERT planning and recruitment activities. Discusses the roles of LEA coordinators, DARS VRCs and WWRC admissions team.
- Cross-Training Opportunities –Outlines how staff members of each agency will provide regular training to the other agencies regarding services provided (i.e., in-service trainings at staff meetings).
- Financial Responsibilities - outlines the financial responsibilities of each agency regarding service provision.
- Dispute Resolution - outlines the process to resolve disputes related to financial responsibility of each agency.
- Youth and Subminimum Wage Employment – Affirms that neither agency will enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability receives or is compensated at subminimum wage. Furthermore, it outlines the documentation requirements of each agency to comply with the requirements set forth in 34 CFR § 397.10.

The DARS' Transition and Education Coordinator has also partnered with school division staff to plan summer program offerings. The offerings are based on students' needs and available resources in the local communities. Throughout the Commonwealth, the Department has had numerous summer programs provided by DARS' counselors and ESOs. Summer opportunities have included work-based learning experiences, both paid and unpaid, that may last for up to eight weeks. Other programs offered include the remaining four Pre-ETS standards. ESOs have developed programs lasting anywhere from one week to eight weeks of classroom-based instruction for groups of students as well as workplace experiences in areas where DARS may not have the capacity to provide those services. Pre-ETS summer offerings were not offered "in-person" during the summer of 2020 due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. DARS' staff provided Pre-ETS' services virtually or telephonically to students during this time to ensure students' safety while keeping them linked to Pre-ETS. During the summer of 2021, DARS offered in-person services to students due to the decline of COVID-19 cases in the Commonwealth. Over 300 students were able to participate in an onsite work experience.

When an IEP meeting invitation is received from a school division, DARS' staff responds to the invitation and participates in the meeting by attending in person, virtually, by

phone, or provides information that can be shared with students, staff, and parents/guardians (e.g., DARS' contact and program information). DARS' staff coordinate in the development of the IEP with the teacher, student and parent prior to the IEP Meeting for open cases, general information about Pre-ETS and VR Services can be provided during the IEP Meeting for potential new cases as well as by establishing open lines of communication with school staff and provides information on how DARS' counselors can work with school staff to provide activities related to individual transition goals and activities for post-secondary education /training, employment, and independent living. DARS' staff coordinate the need for Pre-ETS by:

- Communicating with school staff and providing information about Pre-ETS services and how they relate to transition goals and activities in students' IEPs;
- Participating in school division events;
- Participating as members of school division committees such as Transition Councils;
- Presenting on Pre-ETS services to staff; and
- Developing good working relationships with school division administrators.

DARS' staff, in conjunction with the IEP case manager, review the Transition Section of the IEP with the student, parent, and teacher during meetings at the school. Reviewing the goals on the IEP assists the Pre-ETS Counselor with identifying what services the school is providing to help the individual meet their transition goals. This information is utilized to help the team plan what services DARS could provide to assist the student achieve their transition goals. It is a best practice to make sure that input from the DARS' team members input is shared with the IEP teams prior to the school-based IEP meetings so that it can be used in developing ongoing IEP transition goals.

DARS' staff also identifies, and coordinates needed Pre-ETS for students with disabilities. DARS' counselors serving potentially eligible (PE) students collaborate with the student, the student's school, their family and, as applicable, other relevant team members to identify the topics and objectives team members have or will address with the student. The DARS' counselor then supports the student with receiving services to address the remaining topics. This promotes a truly collaborative approach to Pre-ETS and ensures DARS does not duplicate services. In addition, DARS' staff coordinates the need for Pre-ETS by communicating with school staff, providing information about Pre-ETS services and how they relate to transition goals and activities in the IEP, participating in school division events, being active members of school division committees such as Transition Councils, presenting about Pre-ETS to school division staff, and developing good working relationships with school division administrators.

DARS continues to be a stakeholder in the review of data that VDOE collects to report to the Office on Special Education Programs (OSEP) to support and accomplish respective post-school and employment outcomes required by the federal government and to provide meaningful data collection by each agency.

Additional DARS and VDOE collaborative activities include co-chairing statewide interagency collaborative groups. Representatives from DARS, VDOE, and the

Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) plan statewide trainings to discuss transition and vocational services and initiatives available to students with disabilities and federal and state regulations related to transition services. This activity provides a forum for transition practitioners and other interested stakeholders from school divisions, adult agencies, and community partners to engage in professional development activities, networking opportunities, and collaborative efforts that enhance the implementation of quality transition services for secondary school students with disabilities. The Community of Practice works to stay abreast of current transition information, to identify gaps in resources, and avoid duplication of transition services.

DARS has expanded the number of Start on Success Programs in Virginia. There are currently eight programs and Virginia is expected to have nine programs in the 2023-2024 school year. DARS counselors work closely with all projects and DARS provides for wage reimbursement for the first three years of each project.

Additionally, for many years the State Coordinator for the Deaf has served as a member of the Virginia Network of Consultants: Professionals Working with Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VNOC). This group was created by the Virginia Department of Education, in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Health, and the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University. While the members provide consultation to Virginia's school divisions to promote/enhance education services, DARS role is to foster collaboration and exchange information related to transition services for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. The Department's Deaf Services Program Staff also served as members of the planning team for Opening Doors - Unlocking Potential, which is Virginia's premier professional development in deaf and hard of hearing education. The Department's Deaf Services Program is an exhibitor and provides workshops at this annual event, as well as webinars sponsored through the Technical Assistance Center for Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. With the Technical Assistance Center and the Virginia School for the Deaf, the Department's Statewide Transition Specialist on Deafness is part of the statewide team coordinating outreach activities with Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing across the Commonwealth to connect them with the regional Rehabilitation Counselors serving students who are deaf and hard of hearing. This statewide team has also partnered with the state parent organization and developed virtual online activities for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The Department's Transition and Education Coordinator and expert field staff provide training to staff through in-person activities and virtual meetings. Training is provided to new counselors as part of the New Counselors Skills Training. This training provides information on how to provide Pre-ETS/Transition services to support a career pathways approach and how to evaluate and process VR training cases to ensure that employment goals meet the employment needs of our communities. Virtual meetings are used to streamline processes and improve communication with field staff involved with serving transition-age youth. The monthly meetings offer a time saving alternative to the standard face-to-face training approach while simultaneously saving agency

resources. Webinar topics are developed based on staff input, leadership recommendations, and developing issues.

For the past several years, the Commonwealth of Virginia participated in the National Deaf Center (NDC) “Engage for Change/state.” This collaboration focuses on critical issues in deaf education that address positive student outcomes, graduation and transition to post-secondary education and training. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, annual in-person summits were held by invitation only and included state leaders from deaf education and vocational rehabilitation agencies. The Department’s State Coordinator of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (SCD) and the Department of Education Specialist of Deaf and Hard of Hearing represented the state at the annual summit and convened local stakeholder meetings to review gaps in programs and services. The Department has also added to this team the Statewide Transition Specialist on Deafness. NDC is a national program funded by the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education. Their focus is to build capacity in states and support the exchange of information and strategies for improving educational programs, services and outcomes for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Since the creation of this postsecondary grant in 1996, the Department has been an active participant in roundtable discussions of state teams hosted by the grant on a regional and national level. Currently, the Department serves as a member of the Summer Program Workgroup modeling Virginia’s summer youth program. The Department’s Statewide Transition Specialist on Deafness serves on the Virtual Career Exploration and Work Based Learning workgroups. The Department has also convened, over the past several years, a one-day statewide summer youth event “Opening Doors to Life Beyond High School” for deaf and hard of hearing students, which was jointly held at the annual Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Professional Development Institute.

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program successfully held a three-day summer program for seven students who are deaf and hard of hearing in 2021 at WWRC. While this was the third annual event, it was held for the first time on the WWRC campus, with the residential support of the Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) Program Services. All DARS staff used American Sign Language and interpreters were provided for students who were not fluent signers; therefore, making the entire program a total immersion experience for all students. Sessions incorporated all five Pre-ETS core services with a focus of “Deaf at Work.” The Department’s Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf are part of the team in developing this program and the goal was to bring in Deaf Mentors (former consumers) to share stories about their journeys as they “mapped their future.” This program has continued with new and returning students. In 2022, there were five deaf students and in 2023 there were 11 deaf and hard of hearing students. The returning students were given leadership roles in several sessions. Additionally, the Program Director from the Technical Assistance Center for Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing became a part of the planning team and instructor in 2022. Based on students’ evaluations, plans for 2024 will expand the program to four days.

(2) Performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA for the most recently completed program year, reflecting actual and negotiated levels of performance. Explain any discrepancies in the actual and negotiated levels; and

Employment Rate, Median Earnings, Measurable Skills Gain, and Credential Attainment

DARS monitors their progress towards the WIOA accountability indicators monthly. Each month a scorecard is distributed to the DARS vocational services director, and district leadership so that outcomes at the state, district, office and counselor level can be assessed. The monthly report is conditionally formatted so that progress towards the measures can be easily determined and is color coded to provide information quickly.

DARS adds the measures achieved by the Department for the Blind and Visually Impaired (DBVI) for the final submission to RSA for the following measures: employment rate at 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter post exit, employment rate 4<sup>th</sup> quarter post exit, median earnings at 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter post exit, credential attainment and measurable skills gains.

The negotiated performance measures below were agreed upon in 2022.

Indicator	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2023 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	52.0%	53.0%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	50.0%	52.0%
Median Earnings (second Quarter After Exit)	\$3,600	\$3,800
Credential Attainment Rate	43.5%	45%
Measurable Skill Gains	89.0%	89.1%

Performance results for PY 22 are below:

Indicator	PY 2022 Negotiated Level	PY 2022 Results (DARS and DBVI)
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	52.0%	58.1%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	50.0%	55.7%
Median Earnings (second Quarter After Exit)	\$3600	\$4,123
Credential Attainment Rate	43.5%	61.3%
Measurable Skill Gains	89.0%	87.7%

Program year (PY) 2022 results exceeded all negotiated levels with the exception of measurable skill gains (MSG). Virginia VR has shown consistent improvement in all performance indicators areas since PY 20 with the exception of measurable skills gains (MSG) which fell from 92.3% in PY 2021 to 87.7% in PY 2022. It should be noted that Virginia still ranks amongst the top states for MSGs. Also, it is important to recognize that the Rehabilitation Service Administration (RSA) did not assess MSG in PY 2022.

DARS will continue our partnership with DBVI to extend the trajectory of these improved outcomes. It is assumed that the decrease in performance with MSG could be related to data input. This can be addressed through additional education of staff and a continued emphasis on the importance of data tracking.

### Effectiveness in Serving Employers

DARS has partnered with our Core Partners and the Virginia's Workforce Development Board to establish a baseline for each of the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA. The Commonwealth of Virginia selected Retention with the Same Employer and Employer Penetration Rate as the pilot measures to assess the Effectiveness in Serving Employers. The data collection efforts on employer services, which included activities supported by WIOA-funded programs and other non-WIOA funded workforce programs, shows that in PY 2022 there was a 64.5% retention rate for DARS.,

DARS monitors our progress towards attainment of these goals with monthly reports on the number and types of businesses served at the district, state, and office level. These reports are reviewed by our VR director and leadership team.

(3) The use of funds reserved for innovation and expansion activities (sections 101(a)(18) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act) (e.g., SRC, SILC).

The DARS workforce programs unit has continued to promote and deliver Windmills training to employers and has added additional trainers to allow for on demand in person trainings upon request. The DARS Business Services team and select placement counselors, vocational evaluators and assistive technology staff presented 52 Windmills trainings to over 1751 individuals with state and federal agencies, businesses, and community partners through the end of September 2023. The team added a module this year, "Taking Emotions out of Emotional Disabilities," which explores the effects of employers' reactions to emotional disabilities and how employers can offer reasonable accommodations to create an emotionally neutral environment.

DARS provided over 4,400 services to employers which included assistance with Work Opportunity Tax Credits, recruitment, consultation, labor market information,



assessments, subsidized on the job training and training in employment issues and pre-employment training.

The Pathways to Careers grant has completed year two of funding and increased to 15 offices and worked with over 200 clients. DARS has partnered with the Department of Labor's Division of Registered Apprenticeship and Cyber Civilian to develop a peer recovery specialist registered apprenticeship and are beginning to assist clients enter into this career. The Pathways grant is working on the development of a Spanish language job club and has targeted the grant's advisory workgroup to Hispanic participants to address this underserved population and increase our agency's effectiveness in serving this community.

**e) Supported Employment Services, Distribution of Title VI Funds, and Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services.**

(1) Acceptance of title VI funds:

- (A)  VR agency requests to receive title VI funds.
- (B)  VR agency does NOT elect to receive title VI funds and understands that supported employment services must still be provided under title I.

(2) If the VR agency has elected to receive title VI funds, Section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act requires VR agencies to include specific goals and priorities with respect to the distribution of title VI funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services. Describe the use of title VI funds and how they will be used in meeting the goals and priorities of the Supported Employment program.

Each year, DARS supplements its Title VI funding for supported employment with Title I funding. This strategy allows DARS to provide Supported Employment services to all clients who require that service to become successfully employed. During FFY 2023, 4,389 individuals received services through DARS Supported Employment programs via Title I case service funds (\$13,863,426.56). This includes Job Coach Training Services (JCTS).

The Employment Services and Special Programs team provides training and technical assistance to all DRS field offices. Technical Assistance for Customized Employment and Supported Employment is offered to individual counselors and in a group to field offices.

DARS will continue to reserve and expend a minimum of 50 percent of its Title VI funds on youth with the most significant disabilities. DARS' policies will allow for the provision of extended services for a period not to exceed four years and DARS will continue to utilize other funds (non-Title VI) for supported employment services for youth. These funds are utilized once the Title VI funds are exhausted. However, in the past four years, DARS has expended 100% of these funds on youth with the most significant disabilities. DARS

expects to continue to expend 100 percent of Title VI funds on youth with the most significant disabilities.

DARS will continue to improve the quality of supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities through training and technical assistance. DARS will continue its efforts to deliver quality supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities by: (a) providing ongoing training and technical assistance to VR staff and Employment Services Organizations on long-term follow along options; (b) conducting, on a regular basis, reviews of cases in long term follow along to ensure that appropriate quality services are being provided along with effective and efficient use of funds; and (c) developing guidance for, and training, counselors to use the annual Employment Services Organization Outcomes Report as an effective tool to assist clients in making Employment Services Organization choices.

The Commonwealth requires that each of Virginia's Employment Services Organizations approved to provide employment services be nationally accredited through CARF International (CARF). CARF accreditation provides a host of benefits to the Commonwealth as a state-funding source, as well as to DARS consumers, and taxpayers. In addition to assuring accountability and consistent quality levels, national accreditation allows DARS to focus on program expansion, improvement, and accountability. DARS currently purchases services through 62 Employment Services Organizations throughout the state. During FFY 2023, these organizations provided Supported Employment services to 4,389 individuals, including youth with the most significant disabilities. During FFY 2022, 5,380 individuals received services through DARS Supported Employment Program. The Department projects that it will serve this number of individuals in FFY 2024 and FFY 2025. The Employment Services Organizations provide both time-limited and extended services, which commence at the time of job placement. Supported employment services include extended services, follow-along services, individual, and group model supported employment services.

(3) Supported employment services may be provided with Title I or Title VI funds following placement of individuals with the most significant disabilities in employment. In accordance with section 101(a)(22) and section 606(b)(3) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe the quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities; and the timing of transition to extended services.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 defines Supported Employment as competitive work in integrated settings for individuals with severe disabilities for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred, or for individuals for whom competitive employment has been interrupted or is intermittent because of a severe disability, and who, because of the nature and severity of their disability, need ongoing support services to perform such work. Supported employment services are based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual as specified in the individualized plan for employment

(IPE). Supported employment services are provided by DARS for a period of not more than 24 months, unless there are special circumstances and the eligible individual, and the vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor jointly agree that an extension of time is necessary for the individual to achieve the employment outcome identified in their IPE. In FFY 2022 368 youth and in FFY 2023, 336 youth with most significant disabilities received services through supported employment programs funded by Title VI utilizing 100% of the Title VI funds allocated to the Department.

Transition to extended services from DARS supported time-limited services is accomplished after the consumer reaches stability in employment. During the 90 days before anticipated case closure, the counselor shall ensure stability based on the following:

1) funding for extended services has been secured; 2) job coaching and related interventions have decreased to a level necessary to maintain the client in employment and intervention has reached a plateau or leveled out; 3) client is emotionally or behaviorally stable; 4) client performs expected job duties; 5) supervisor reports satisfaction with client job performance; 6) client is satisfied with the job and work environment; 7) necessary modifications and accommodations have been made at the worksite; 8) client has reliable transportation to and from work; and 9) client is compensated at or above minimum wage but not less than the customary wage paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by employees without disabilities. Stability for those placed in competitive integrated group supported employment also includes the client completing a 60-day period of placement and training in which intervention is directed at training to maintain production rather than behavioral issues. After that time, the funding is transferred from the basic federal VR grant to the state-sponsored long-term follow along funding. Coordination with the service provider, the client's counselor, and the long-term support occurs to ensure that there is both timely and accountable transition to extended services.

(4) Sections 101(a)(22) and 606(b)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act require the VR agency to describe efforts to identify and arrange, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services. The description must include extended services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including the provision of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities in accordance with 34 CFR 363.4(a) and 34 CFR 361.5(c)(19)(v).

DARS maintains relationships with private non-profit, private for profit and Centers for Independent Living VR services providers.

DARS continues its collaborative relationship with the more than 59 Employment Services Organizations (ESOs) across Virginia that provide supported employment and customized

employment services to DARS' consumers. The Commonwealth requires ESOs to obtain specific CARF (the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) International accreditation standards in order to ensure quality in employment services for our consumers.

DARS receives and utilizes stakeholder input from the Employment Services Organization Steering Committee (ESOSC) that provides the DARS' Commissioner counsel on funding and policy issues related to the allocation of Long-Term Employment Support Services (LTESS) state funds, as well as other services that impact providers and fosters close working relations between agency staff and Employment Services Organizations. Additionally, DARS collaborates with ESOs through regional provider forums and statewide leadership forums.

The Commonwealth of Virginia provides state funds to ESOs to increase the availability of extended services and reduce barriers to offering integrated, community-based employment options for persons with the most significant disabilities after the DARS time-limited services are completed. A total of \$8,952,766 in extended services was made available by the Virginia General Assembly to Employment Services Organizations through DARS under the Long-Term Employment Support Services and Extended Employment Services programs.

DRS conducts district wide meetings designed to directly enhance the quality of supported employment services to consumers with the most significant disabilities. These sessions address increasing supported employment options and consumer choice for meeting physical, behavioral, medical, and overall rehabilitation needs; and accessing and expanding placement resources.

DARS along with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), working with Griffin and Hammis, LLC provides training and technical assistance to ESOs related to Customized Employment services for individuals with the most significant disabilities. Training includes the Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) certification in Basic Employment Services with an Emphasis in Customized Employment as well as implementing a fidelity scale for CE services.

DARS implements an annual Employment Services Organization Outcomes Report to provide information to VR counselors and their consumers on the performance of each Employment Services Organization to inform decisions regarding service provider selection.

DARS has also established cooperative agreements with the Virginia Department of Education (DOE), the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS), and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) around services for DARS VR clients. The agreements are periodically reviewed, updated, and renewed as needed.

**(f) Annual Estimates.** Sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(23) of the Rehabilitation Act require all VR agencies to annually conduct a full assessment of their resources and ability to serve all eligible individuals before the start of the Federal fiscal year. In accordance with 34 CFR § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

(1) Estimates for next Federal fiscal year— FFY 2025

(A) VR Program; and

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under VR Program	Costs of Services using Title I Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
MSD*	18,481	16,663	\$22,391,207.00	1,848
SD**	3,938	3,150	\$1,281,066.00	788
NSD***	243	214	\$94,947.00	29
Total	22,662	19,997	\$23,767,220.00	2,665

(B) Supported Employment Program.

Priority Category (if applicable)	No. of Individuals Eligible for Services	No. of Eligible Individuals Expected to Receive Services under Supported Employment Program	Costs of Services using Title I and Title VI Funds	No. of Eligible Individuals Not Receiving Services (if applicable)
MSD*	5,502	5,502	\$14,453,636.10	n/a

\* MSD = Most Significant Disability

\*\* SD = Significant Disability

\*\*\* NSD = All Other Eligible Individuals

**(g) Order of Selection.**

The VR agency is **not** implementing an order of selection and all eligible individuals will be served.

The VR agency is implementing an order of selection with one or more categories closed.

\* VR agencies may maintain an order of selection policy and priority of eligible individuals without implementing or continuing to implement an order of selection.

Pursuant to section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act, this description must be amended when the VR agency determines, based on the annual estimates described in description (f), that VR services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for and are determined eligible for services.

(1) For VR agencies that have defined priority categories describe—

(A) The justification for the order;

An Order of Selection is required under Section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, if a vocational rehabilitation agency determines that it is unable to provide services to all eligible individuals who apply for services. As of September 30, 2023, all categories remain open and DARS does not have clients on the Wait List for services under an Order of Selection. Notwithstanding, DARS maintains priority categories, cognizant of the fact that DARS' funding for its vocational rehabilitation services could change making DARS unable to provide services to all eligible individuals.

(B) The order (priority categories) to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services ensuring that individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and

The established priority categories are as follows:

Priority Category I: An individual with a most significant disability

Priority Category II: An individual with a significant disability

Priority III: All other individuals determined eligible for the VR program

Definitions and Terminology:

An individual with a significant disability means an individual with a disability:

Who has a severe physical or mental impairment which seriously limits one or more functional capacities (mobility, communication, self-care, self-direction, interpersonal skills, work tolerance, or work skills) in terms of an employment outcome;

Whose vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extended period of time; and

Who has one or more physical or mental disabilities resulting from amputation, arthritis, autism, blindness, burn injury, cancer, cerebral palsy, cystic fibrosis, deafness, head injury, heart disease, hemiplegia, hemophilia, respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction, intellectual disability, mental illness, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, musculo-skeletal disorders, neurological disorders (including stroke and epilepsy), paraplegia, quadriplegia and other spinal cord conditions, sickle cell anemia, specific learning disabilities, end-stage renal disease, or another disability or combination of disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause comparable substantial functional limitation.

An individual with a most significant disability is an individual with a significant disability that seriously limits three or more functional capacities.

Extended Period of Time: Needing services for a duration of six months or more.

Multiple Services: Two or more services needed to achieve a successful rehabilitation.

- (C) The VR agency's goals for serving individuals in each priority category, including how the agency will assist eligible individuals assigned to closed priority categories with information and referral, the method in which the VR agency will manage waiting lists, and the projected timelines for opening priority categories. NOTE: Priority categories are considered open when all individuals in the priority category may be served.

The following provides information on the service and outcome goals for individuals in the three Priority Categories: (1) Most Significantly Disabled; (2) Significantly Disabled; and (3) all other Eligible Individuals. Please note that the provided numbers for all categories are estimates and are difficult to predict accurately with the opening and closing of priority categories.

Priority Category 1: In FFY 2024, 17,190 individuals will be served; 15,471 will exit with employment after receiving services; 1,719 individuals who will exit without employment after receiving services. In FFY 2025, 17,017 individuals will be served; 15,315 will exit with employment after receiving services; 1,702 individuals who will exit without employment after receiving services. Cost of services: FFY 2024 \$20,827,058.00; FFY 2025 \$20,617,454.

Priority Category 2: In FFY 2024, 3,440 individuals will be served; 2,752 will exit with employment after receiving services; 688 individuals who will exit without employment after receiving services. In FFY 2025, 3,968 individuals will be served; 3,174 will exit with employment after receiving services; 794 individuals

who will exit without employment after receiving services. Cost of services: FFY 2024 \$1,119,062; FFY 2025 \$1,290,825.

Priority Category 3: In FFY 2024, 146 individuals will be served; 128 will exit with employment after receiving services; 18 individuals who will exit without employment after receiving services. In FFY 2025, 189 individuals will be served; 166 will exit with employment after receiving services; 23 individuals who will exit without employment after receiving services. Cost of services: FFY 2024 \$57,046; FFY 2025 \$73,848.

Depending upon agency resources, the categories are closed for services in order beginning with Priority Category III, then II and, finally Priority Category I. This policy does not affect consumers who began to receive services under an Individualized Plan for Employment prior to the implementation date of order of selection.

After a consumer is found eligible for VR services, an Order of Selection determination is completed. Additional evaluations or assessments to make the eligibility determination may be provided. The VR counselor, in collaboration with the consumer, determines the consumer's Priority Category by evaluating the consumer's serious functional limitations, anticipated services needed and the duration of those services.

When funding requires that clients be placed on a waitlist, all clients must be officially notified of their individual Order of Selection determination. All clients must be officially notified of their individual Order of Selection determination. Clients in closed categories are provided with referral services to the One-Stop Centers or other appropriate sources and are placed on the Wait List. After 12-months, consumers are contacted to determine if they wish to remain on the Wait List or have their case closed. If they do not notify their counselor that they wish to have their case closed, they remain on the Wait List. Consumers in closed categories may request a review of their priority category assignment by submitting evidence that their disability has become more severe. DARS does not anticipate anyone who applies and is determined eligible to be placed on the Order of Selection Wait List for both FFY 2024 and FFY 2025.

Currently, all categories remain open and DARS does not have any clients on the Wait List. Depending upon agency resources, the categories are closed for services in order beginning with Priority Category III, then II and, finally Priority Category I. This policy does not affect consumers who began to receive services under an Individualized Plan for Employment prior to the implementation date of order of selection.



Projected timelines for opening categories

Priority Category 1: FFY 2024 0 days; FFY 2025 0 days. Priority Category 2: FFY 2024 0 days; FFY 2025 0 days. Priority Category 3: FFY 2024 0 days; FFY 2025 0 days.

(2) Has the VR agency elected to serve eligible individuals outside of the order of selection who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment?

Yes

No

**(h) Waiver of Statewidness.** The State plan shall be in effect in all political subdivisions of the State, however, the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (Commissioner) may waive compliance with this requirement in accordance with section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act and the implementing regulations in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewidness or has a previously approved waiver of statewidness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewidness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 CFR 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewidness, please indicate “not applicable.”

Not applicable since DARS does not request a waiver.

**COOPERATION, COLLABORATION, AND COORDINATION (Section 101(a)(11) of the Rehabilitation Act)**

**(i) Coordination with Education Officials.** In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(D) of the Rehabilitation Act—

(1) Describe plans, policies, and procedures for coordination between the designated State agency and education officials responsible for the public education of students with disabilities, that are designed to facilitate the transition of the students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are available to students with disabilities. A student with a disability is an individual between the ages of 14 through 21. However, a student with a disability who has not earned a standard diploma, may be age 22 if the student is enrolled in a recognized education program and has not yet had their 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday before September 30. That student would then qualify to receive Pre-ETS through

the last day of that school year. The age range for Pre-ETS is based on the *Code of Virginia* and also aligns with the Virginia Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) policies established for Pre-ETS.

Vocational rehabilitation transition services are those coordinated activities for both students and youth (an individual with a disability between the ages of 14 to 24) designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities. Pre-ETS are only available to students with disabilities, whereas vocational rehabilitation transition services may be provided to both students and youth with disabilities (based upon eligibility requirements). All policies and practices are in alignment with those established by DBVI for the delivery of transition services.

During FFY 2023, DARS served approximately 4,632 students with disabilities. During FFY 2023, DARS opened 2,324 Potentially Eligible cases (i.e., students with disabilities who are potentially eligible for the VR program) and nearly 987 Potentially Eligible Students applied for VR services, which allowed them to access the full continuum of VR services. DARS provided 16,006 “in-house” Pre-ETS and approximately 412 students participated in Pre-ETS activities provided by DARS vendors. DARS anticipates services to continue to grow as the agency is currently serving over 2,733 students with disabilities.

Each local education agency (LEA) across the Commonwealth has at least one DARS counselor assigned to it. The counselor informs students, parents/guardians, and school staff about the continuum of services the agency offers and facilitates the opening of a Potentially Eligible case or an application for VR services. These counselors are actively engaged in the secondary schools throughout the Commonwealth to support students with receiving Pre-ETS prior to applying to the VR program, accepting referrals for VR services, developing Individualized Plans for Employment with those determined eligible for services, and providing information to school personnel, parents/guardians, and students on the value of services available through DARS. Other means to improve and expand services for students with disabilities include:

- Cooperating and coordinating with the Department of Education and LEAs to facilitate an effective continuum of transition services for students with disabilities, including Pre-ETS, so students are better prepared to engage in competitive, integrated employment, post-secondary education, and community living.
- Producing transition-related products (e.g., newsletters, brochures, PowerPoint presentations, and posters) with examples of best practices, services available, and problem solving.
- Collaborating with Employment Service Organizations and Virginia’s Centers for Independent Living to increase Pre-ETS activities offerings.

- Collaborating with Employment Service Organization staff to increase awareness of local vendor programs that could provide services to schools and transition age youth.
- Expanding the number of Project SEARCH sites in Virginia, as appropriate. DARS currently has 19 sites and is expected to have 20 sites during the 2024-2025 academic year.
- Expanding the number of Start on Success Programs in Virginia, as appropriate. There are currently 8 programs and Virginia is expected to have nine programs in PY 2024. DARS counselors work closely with each project and DARS provides for wage reimbursement for the first three years of each project.

DARS' policies require that for students with disabilities who i) are receiving special education services from a public school, and ii) also are determined eligible for VR services (and able to be served if DARS is under an Order of Selection), that the Individualized Plan for Employment (IEP) shall be completed and signed within 90 days of the eligibility determination and before the student leaves the school setting.

When an IEP meeting invitation is received from the school division, DARS' staff responds to the invitation and participates in the meeting by attending in person, virtually, by phone, or provides information that can be shared with students, staff, and parents/guardians (e.g., DARS' contact and program information). DARS' staff coordinate in the development of the IEP with the teacher, student and parent prior to the IEP Meeting for open cases. General information about Pre-ETS and VR Services can be provided during the IEP meeting for potential new cases as well as by establishing open lines of communication with school staff and provides information on how DARS' counselors can work with school staff to provide activities related to individual transition goals and activities for post-secondary education /training, employment, and independent living. DARS' staff coordinate the need for Pre-ETS by:

- Communicating with school staff and providing information about Pre-ETS services and how they relate to transition goals and activities in students' IEPs;
- Participating in school division events;
- Participating as members of school division committees such as Transition Councils;
- Presenting information about Pre-ETS services to staff; and
- Developing good working relationships with school division administrators.

DARS' staff, in conjunction with the IEP case manager, reviews the Transition Section of the IEP with the student, parent/guardian, and teacher during face-to face meetings at the school (which in light of the COVID-19 Pandemic may be conducted virtually). Reviewing the goals on the IEP assists the Pre-ETS Counselor with identifying what services the school is providing to help the individual meet their transition goals. This information is

utilized to help the team plan what services DARS could provide to assist the student achieve their transition goals. It is a best practice to make sure that the DARS' team members' input is shared with the IEP teams prior to the school-based IEP meetings so that it can be used in developing ongoing IEP transition goals.

DARS' staff also identifies, and coordinates needed Pre-ETS for students with disabilities. DARS' counselors serving potentially eligible (PE) students collaborate with the student, the student's school, their parent/guardian and, as applicable, other relevant team members to identify the topics and objectives team members have or will address with the student. The DARS' counselor then supports the student with receiving services to address the remaining topics. This promotes a truly collaborative approach to Pre-ETS and ensures DARS does not duplicate services. In addition, DARS' staff coordinates the need for Pre-ETS by communicating with school staff, providing information about Pre-ETS services and how they relate to transition goals and activities in the IEP, participating in school division events, being active members of school division committees such as Transition Councils, presenting about Pre-ETS to school division staff, and developing good working relationships with school division administrators.

DARS' Transition and Education Coordinator has also partnered with school division staff to plan summer program offerings. The offerings are based on students' needs and available resources in the local communities. Throughout the Commonwealth, the Department has had numerous summer programs provided by DARS' counselors and Employment Service Organizations. Summer opportunities have included work-based learning experiences, both paid and unpaid, that may last for up to eight weeks. Other programs offered include the remaining four Pre-ETS standards. Employment Service Organizations have developed programs lasting anywhere from one week to eight weeks of classroom-based instruction for groups of students as well as workplace experiences in areas where DARS may not have the capacity to provide those services.

DARS continues to be a stakeholder in the review of data that VDOE collects to report to the Office on Special Education Programs (OSEP) to support and accomplish respective post-school and employment outcomes required by the federal government and to provide meaningful data collection by each agency.

Additional DARS and VDOE collaborative activities include co-chairing statewide interagency collaborative groups. Representatives from DARS, VDOE, and the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired plan statewide trainings to discuss transition and vocational services and initiatives available to students with disabilities and federal and state regulations related to transition services. This activity provides a forum for transition practitioners and other interested stakeholders from school divisions, adult agencies, and community partners to engage in professional development activities, networking opportunities, and collaborative efforts that enhance the implementation of quality transition services for secondary school students with disabilities. The Community of

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Practice works to stay abreast of current transition information, to identify gaps in resources, and avoid duplication of transition services.

Additionally, for many years the State Coordinator for the Deaf has served as a member of the Virginia Network of Consultants: Professional Working with Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing (VNOC). This group was created by the Virginia Department of Education, in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Health, and the Partnership for People with Disabilities at Virginia Commonwealth University. While the members provide consultation to Virginia's school divisions to promote/enhance education services, DARS' role is to foster collaboration and exchange information related to transition services for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. The Statewide Transition Specialist also serves as a member of the planning team for Opening Doors - Unlocking Potential, which is Virginia's premier professional development in deaf and hard of hearing education. The Department's Deaf Services Program is an exhibitor and provides workshops at this annual event, as well as webinars sponsored through the Technical Assistance Center for Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing. With the Technical Assistance Center and the Virginia School for the Deaf, the Department's Statewide Transition Specialist on Deafness is part of the statewide team coordinating outreach activities with Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing across the Commonwealth to connect them with the regional rehabilitation counselors serving students who are deaf and hard of hearing. This statewide team has also partnered with the state parent organization and developed virtual online activities for students who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The Department's Transition and Education Coordinator and expert field staff provide training to staff through in-person activities and virtual meetings. Training is provided to new counselors as part of the New Counselors Skills Training. This training provides information on how to provide Pre-ETS/Transition services to support a career pathways approach and how to evaluate and process VR training cases to ensure that employment goals meet the employment needs of our communities. Virtual meetings are used to streamline processes and improve communication with field staff involved with serving transition-age youth. The monthly meetings offer a time saving alternative to the standard face-to-face training approach while simultaneously saving agency resources. Webinar topics are developed based on staff input, leadership recommendations, and developing issues.

For several years, the Commonwealth of Virginia participated in the National Deaf Center (NDC) "Engage for Change|State." This collaboration focuses on critical issues in deaf education that address positive student outcomes, graduation and transition to post-secondary education and training. The Department's State Coordinator of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (SCD) and the Department of Education Specialist of Deaf and Hard of Hearing represented the state at the annual summit and convened local stakeholder meetings to review gaps in programs and services. The Department team also includes the Statewide Transition Specialist on Deafness. NDC is a national program funded by the U. S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs and the Rehabilitation

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Services Administration. Their focus is to build capacity in states and support the exchange of information and strategies for improving educational programs, services and outcomes for students who are deaf and hard of hearing. Since the creation of this postsecondary grant in 1996, the Department has been an active participant in roundtable discussions of state teams hosted by the grant on a regional and national level. The Department also serves as a member of the Summer Program Workgroup modeling Virginia's summer youth program, as well as a member of the Virtual Career Exploration and Work Based Learning workgroups reviewing national programs. In the past, the Department has convened, a one-day statewide summer youth event "Opening Doors to Life Beyond High School" for deaf and hard of hearing students, which was jointly held at the annual Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing Professional Development Institute. The Department planned to relocate the summer deaf youth program in 2020 to the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC). However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sessions were held virtually.

The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program successfully held a three-day summer program for seven students who are deaf and hard of hearing in 2021 at WWRC. While this was the third annual event, it was held for the first time on the WWRC campus, with the residential support of the Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) Program Services. The PERT Program assists students in their transition from high school to post-secondary options. All DARS staff used American Sign Language and interpreters were provided for students who were not fluent signers; therefore, making the entire program a total immersion experience for all students. Sessions incorporated all five Pre-ETS core services with a focus of "Deaf at Work." The Department's Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf are part of the team in developing this program and the goal was to bring in deaf mentors (former consumers) to share stories about their journeys as they "mapped their future." This program has continued with new and returning students. In 2022, there were five deaf students and in 2023 there were 11 deaf and hard of hearing students. The returning students were given leadership roles in several sessions. The 2023 session included an outdoor scavenger hunt with items related to employment such as a brick bricklayer), matchbox cars (auto mechanics, auto detailing), coffee supplies (barista). Additionally, the Program Director from the Technical Assistance Center for Children who are Deaf and Hard of Hearing became a part of the planning team and instructor in 2022. Based on students' evaluations, plans for 2024 will expand the program to four days.

(2) Describe the current status and scope of the formal interagency agreement between the VR agency and the State educational agency. Consistent with the requirements of the formal interagency agreement pursuant to 34 CFR 361.22(b), provide, at a minimum, the following information about the agreement:

- (A) Consultation and technical assistance, which may be provided using alternative means for meeting participation (such as video conferences and conference calls), to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students

- with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including pre-employment transition services and other vocational rehabilitation services;
- (B) Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency personnel for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs (IEPs) under section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
  - (C) The roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services and pre-employment transition services;
  - (D) Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services and pre-employment transition services. Outreach to these students should occur as early as possible during the transition planning process and must include, at a minimum, a description of the purpose of the vocational rehabilitation program, eligibility requirements, application procedures, and scope of services that may be provided to eligible individuals;
  - (E) Coordination necessary to satisfy documentation requirements set forth in 34 CFR part 397 regarding students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment; and
  - (F) Assurance that, in accordance with 34 CFR 397.31, neither the SEA nor the local educational agency will enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity, as defined in 34 CFR 397.5(d), for the purpose of operating a program under which youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

DARS and VDOE have a formal agreement to provide cooperation and coordination among the two agencies to facilitate effective transition services for students with disabilities to engage in competitive, integrated employment, post-secondary education, and community living. VDOE is designated as the lead agency to ensure that students with disabilities are properly referred to DARS and DARS will serve as the lead agency to determine eligibility for VR services and to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Both agencies agree to:

- (1) Promote the development and expansion of collaborative structures for planning and evaluating transition services; share relevant data; share contact information on school divisions' special education directors and 504 coordinators; and explore new opportunities for collaboration regarding the provision of Pre-ETS, secondary transition, and vocational rehabilitation services and resources. Each agency will assign or designate primary program responsibility for transition to one individual within the agency.
- (2) Promote a comprehensive personnel development approach through the provision of collaboratively planned and jointly sponsored professional development activities. VDOE has the responsibility for ensuring the requirements for the provision of special education services by LEAs to students with disabilities in accordance with federal and state laws, regulations, agency policies and guidelines.
- (3) VDOE shall commit financial resources to: (a) teaching positions for Vocational Training, the Workplace Readiness Skills Program at Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation

Center (WWRC), (b) career and workforce development at WWRC, and (c) the Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation and Transition Program (PERT) program at WWRC.

(4) DARS commits financial resources to: (a) transition services, including Pre-ETS for students with disabilities. Activities include career counseling and exploration, vocational evaluation, case management, situational assessments, field transition consultant services, and technical assistance, as appropriate; (b) the Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation and Transition Program (PERT) at the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center; and (c) activities for the Community of Practice. DARS is responsible for the coordination, provision, and/or payment of rehabilitative/transition goods and services for individuals with disabilities in accordance with applicable federal and state laws, regulations, agency policies and guidelines.

The Cooperative Agreement between DARS and the Department of Education was executed on February 25, 2017. Under the terms of the Cooperative Agreement, it is to be reviewed annually by both Agencies and remains in effect until altered by amendment or terminated by either Agency with no less than 30 days' notice in writing. This Agreement may also be amended by mutual consent of both Departments, provided that any changes are agreed to in writing at least 30 days prior to the effective date of the change. A focus of the agreement is to provide collaborative training opportunities between school personnel and DARS Counselors to increase collaborative transition services which lead to improved outcomes for students with disabilities. Another focus of the agreement is the importance of sharing data between agencies. The cooperative agreement is currently under review to be updated with particular attention to addressing collaborative training opportunities.

VDOE and DARS will collaborate to disseminate information across their respective agencies and local offices pertinent to secondary transition and vocational rehabilitation services and resources. The agreement also confirms that DARS and LEAs will not enter into a contract or other arrangement with an entity as defined in 34 CFR 397.5 (d) for the purpose of operating a program under which a student with a disability is engaged in subminimum wage employment.

Both agencies will provide collaborative training opportunities for recertification points for counselors and teachers.

Each agency is responsible for collaborating in the coordination and/or provision of transition goods and services for individuals with disabilities, as well as the provision of technical assistance and dissemination of information to individuals with disabilities, parents, employers, service providers, and other community members. Grant opportunities with federal, state, and local agencies and other private and public partners will be jointly pursued.

Additionally, DARS works collaboratively with local education agencies to develop cooperative agreements. The cooperative agreement outline:



- Coordination and Collaboration –this discusses who is the lead agency for specific activities such as informing students of services available through DARS and determine eligibility for DRS services.
- Consultation and Technical Assistance – This section describes the consultation and technical assistance DARS provides to local school divisions to assist in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities (e.g., attending IEP meetings, person centered planning meetings, transition planning meetings, career fairs, transition fairs, etc.).
- Pre-ETS & VR Transition Services–These sections describe each of the services DARS provides in the continuum of transition services.
- Interagency Planning between VR and the School Division ensures students/families are informed about DARS and school responsibilities in referring/obtaining documentation for DARS services.
- Interagency Planning between VR, WWRC, and the School Division focused on PERT planning and recruitment activities. Discusses the roles of LEA coordinators, DARS VRCs and WWRC admissions team.
- Cross-Training Opportunities – Outlines how staff members of each agency will provide regular training to the other regarding services provided. i.e., in-service trainings at staff meetings, financial responsibilities - outlines the financial responsibilities of each agency in regard to service provision.
- Dispute Resolution - Outlines the process to resolve disputes related to financial responsibility of each agency.
- Youth and Subminimum Wage Employment – Affirms that neither agency will enter into an arrangement with an entity holding a special wage certificate under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability receives or is compensated at subminimum wage. Furthermore, outlines the documentation requirements of each agency to *comply with the requirements set forth in 34 CFR § 397.10.*

**(k) Coordination with Employers.** In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(E) of the Rehabilitation Act, describe how the VR agency will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of VR services; and transition services for youth and students with disabilities, including pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

The DARS' Workforce Development Unit coordinates and participates in activities to meet business needs. Activities include, but are not limited to, the assessment of job candidate's skills and abilities to meet job requirements. Businesses are offered disability etiquette

training on hiring persons with disabilities and educational training on Assistive Technology, on-the-job training, tax credits, work-site accommodations, and various other services needed to meet business needs. The Workforce Development Unit is seen as a single point of contact for businesses recruiting for job openings and hosts monthly/quarterly Commonwealth Business Network meetings where businesses are able to describe their job openings and job requirements to multiple organizations in one setting to recruit qualified job candidates. The DARS' Workforce Unit is actively working with the National Employment Team (The NET) through the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation using a Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP) where businesses may place job openings and select qualified candidates. The Unit also provides education to employers who are federal contractors (503) on hiring individuals with disabilities and assisting with recruitment efforts to meet business needs. The Unit is listed as the point of contact on all compliance letters sent to 503 employers in the Commonwealth from the Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs.

DARS works collaboratively with the Secretary of Health and Human Resources and multiple state agencies and partner organizations to enable persons with disabilities to participate fully and equally in the social and economic life of the Commonwealth and to engage in remunerative employment. The DARS' Workforce Unit will assist with identifying work experiences, paid internships, job shadowing, and mentoring opportunities. The Unit also will work with the Department of Human Resource Management in identifying the skill set needed for many hard to-fill positions within Virginia state employment and assist with recruiting qualified persons with disabilities to fill the positions. The Unit currently will continue to strengthen relationships with Economic Development Partnerships in Virginia, the Virginia Manufacturers Association, the Virginia Rural Summit, local government agencies, Virginia colleges and universities and Workforce Development Boards Business Services Teams to assist and promote hiring persons with disabilities in the Commonwealth's Workforce.

The DARS Business Services Team with the assistance of DARS Assistive Technology staff presented Windmills Training to state agencies, businesses, and community partners throughout 2023. The group offered 52 trainings to approximately 1,75 individuals. This program has been extremely successful, and the six originally trained staff has increased to over 50 DARS staff who have been certified to provide these trainings. There is now adequate coverage for in-person trainings across the Commonwealth. In 1982, the California Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities identified employer's attitudes and misconceptions as major barriers to increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities. With the support of a grant from the California Employment Development Department, the California Governor's Committee developed the concept of Windmills. Windmills is designed to increase awareness of the role that attitudes play in the employment of people with disabilities. DARS has received approval as trainers for all of the Windmills' modules through both Human Resources Certification Institute and Society for Human Resource Management credits which also expands DARS'

ability to market the training to employers. The DARS Windmills training is actively promoted by DHRM and the WIOA accessibility task force to increase staff proficiency in working with individuals with disabilities at state agencies and WIOA partners.

The modules presented include:

- Pick a Disability/Profiles – This examines the stereotypes associated with common disabilities that can affect employment decisions. It explores assumptions about “good” and “bad” jobs for certain disabilities and demystifies myths regarding people with disabilities in the workplace.
- Fact or Fiction – This teaches participants to anticipate situations that might occur in the workplace with people with disabilities. It also familiarizes individuals on the basics of disability law.
- Whose Fault – This exercise improves participants’ awareness of the different players and roles in a successful business program employing persons with disabilities and identifies more ways to effectively communicate with one another and resolve conflict.
- Assistive Technology and Reasonable Accommodations – This module acquaints participants with the creative process in identifying possible reasonable accommodations.

In 2023 a new module was added, “Taking Emotions out of Emotional Disabilities,” which explores the effects of employers’ reactions to emotional disabilities and how employers can offer reasonable accommodations to create an emotionally neutral environment. The DARS team regularly contributes to the quarterly community of practice meetings that includes state vocational rehabilitation agency business services staff from across the country.

The DARS Business Services team is frequently contacted for help and assistance from other certified Windmills trainers. Virginia law states that it is the policy of the Commonwealth to promote and increase the employment of individuals with disabilities directly employed at all levels and occupations by state agencies, institutions, boards, and authorities of the Commonwealth (Virginia Code § 2.2- 203.2:3). In 2021, Virginia enacted legislation to increase employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities by streamlining application processes for positions in Virginia state government (Virginia Code § 2.2-1213). This Alternative Application Process increases employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities on a permanent or temporary basis. Currently, Virginia’s Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM) and DARS finalized this process, and it went into effect April 5, 2022, allowing qualified individuals with disabilities access to high-quality positions within Virginia’s 252 state agencies. The Alternative Application Process has created additional partnerships with state agencies and driven additional referrals to local DARS offices. As of July 1, 2023, current state employees with disabilities are also allowed to utilize this process. DARS fielded 1083 requests for certificate of disability during the most recent Federal fiscal year and issued

646 while referring 255 individuals to DARS offices around the state for additional vocational rehabilitation services.

DARS, in partnership with other state agencies, received a \$9.2 million grant from the Rehabilitation Services Administration. The project, named "Pathways," serves Virginians with disabilities to acquire skills-based training and registered apprenticeships in high-wage, high-demand fields, including STEM and state government. In this five-year project, DARS will collaborate with multiple workforce agencies in Virginia, including the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI), Department of Human Resource Management (DHRM), and the Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI). This project also capitalizes on recent state legislation that facilitates the Alternative State Job Application Process for eligible individuals with disabilities, which is designed to increase access to services in an equitable manner. It also includes the creation of DARS staff positions, one embedded at DOLI and the other at DHRM to develop cross-agency policy and practices to increase recruiting, hiring, retaining, and promoting individuals with disabilities in these in-demand jobs.

Included in this project will be opportunities to facilitate the development of effective services for unserved and underserved populations. Examples of outreach activities include targeting traditionally unserved and underserved groups, sharing best practices for training, credentials and education, and activities leading to apprenticeship opportunities. This project will also serve to cement best practices from the previous Career Pathways for Individuals with Disabilities (CPID) grant and make them available statewide.

### **Transition Services, Including Pre-Employment Services, for Students and Youth with Disabilities**

During FFY 2022, 31.7% of DARS cases were 22 years of age or younger. During FFY 2023, 37.4% of DARS cases were 22 years of age or younger. All DARS counselors are trained to work with this population to prepare them for employment as many have exited or are preparing to exit the school environment. However, after reviewing outcomes and staffing patterns most offices have reinstated the use of dedicated transition counselors to work with youth to address their specialized needs and services. The DARS Development Managers and Placement Counselors work collaboratively with VR Counselors and consumers to design Employment Plans with services designed to lead to successful employment for this population, many of whom are first entering the job market.

**(I) Interagency Cooperation with Other Agencies.** In accordance with the requirements in section 101(a)(11)(C) and (K), describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are **not** carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system to develop opportunities for community-based employment in integrated settings, to the greatest extent practicable for the following:

- (1) State programs (designate lead agency(ies) and implementing entity(ies)) carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;

The Virginia Assistive Technology Systems (VATS) is housed at DARS and has a highly collaborative relationship with the VR Program. VATS regularly assists with training and technical assistance to enhance the knowledge of VR professionals in the use of Assistive Technology (AT) with VR consumers. In FFY 2022, VATS provided services to 7,491 older adults and Virginians with disabilities through the AT Act program. In FY 2021, 6,153 individuals were served. Services included AT device demonstrations, short-term equipment loans, durable medical equipment reuse, trainings, and information and assistance. Service recipients included an array of Virginians to include individuals with disabilities, family members, healthcare and allied health professionals, employers, educators, and representatives of community living services were provided statewide.

- (2) Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;

AgrAbility Virginia assists individuals and their families who farm, and have illnesses, injuries or disabilities that are impeding their ability to work safely, effectively, and productively. DARS has a strong collaborative relationship with this program and receives referrals from this project.

The DARS Rehabilitation Technology Services team meets virtually on a regular basis with the Virginia AgrAbility project to discuss potential referrals, program/agency updates and provide technical assistance. This cooperative relationship is working well.

- (3) Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth;

DARS works with Social Services, Adult Education, Community Services Boards, Virginia Board for People with Disabilities, Treatment Facilities like the AVALON Center in Williamsburg, and various other private or public community agencies to share information about services and accept referrals. Additionally, DARS collaborates with Brain Injury Clubhouses, Centers for Independent Living, and other non-profit organizations serving individuals with disabilities with referrals and services to out-of-school youth leading to their employment and independence

Local DARS Offices provide community mapping strategies to identify partners for comparable benefits, resources, and collaboration to assist out of school youth with service provision. An example of this took place in Martinsville, several years ago. DARS helped facilitate a program called Bridges Out of Poverty which essentially brought a community of agencies together to provide comprehensive services and supports for

out of school youth and other individuals partnering with the United Way of Henry County.

(4) State use contracting programs;

The Commonwealth of Virginia, as provided in Virginia Code § 2.2-1117, has a state use contracting program for services, articles and commodities performed or produced by persons, or in schools or workshops, under the supervision of the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired. In addition, Virginia Code § 2.2-1118 for the purchase of items or services from Employment Service Organizations without competitive procurement with certain requirements.

(5) State agency responsible for administering the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.);

In Virginia, the Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS) is the agency responsible for the State Medicaid Plan under Title XIX of the Social Security Act. DARS collaborates with DMAS to address the planning and coordination of services to individuals with most significant disabilities that leads to successful employment. In addition, DARS' staff serve on the Virginia Employment First Advisory Group where DARS and DMAS work collaboratively to implement Virginia's Strategic Plan for Employment First. Employment is the first and preferred option for Virginians with disabilities receiving assistance from publicly financed systems. Along with other state agencies, DARS and DMAS have partnered to improve employment opportunities for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Joint efforts include addressing the capacity of the Commonwealth's provider community that provide Individual Supported Employment services to persons with disabilities by providing technical assistance and training to both stakeholders and providers.

(6) State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities;

In Virginia, the agency responsible for the providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities and mental health services is the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS). DARS has a Cooperative Agreement with DBHDS which is in the process of being updated to develop opportunities for competitive-integrated employment for VR consumers. The Cooperative Agreement has been developed with respect to the delivery of VR services for individuals with the most significant disabilities who have been determined eligible for home and community-based services under a Medicaid waiver. The Cooperative Agreement addresses:

- consultation and technical assistance between the agencies to assist in the planning and coordination of services to individuals with most significant disabilities leading to successful employment;

- roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency;
- data sharing;
- procedures for outreach to and identification of potential VR consumers to receive services; and
- technical assistance to Employment Services Organizations regarding expectations of service delivery.

(7) State agency responsible for providing mental health services;

DBHDS is also the state agency responsible for providing mental health services. Accordingly, DBHDS, has provided DARS with fiscal and personnel resources to support the co-location of VR counselors in the Community Services Boards (CSBs) since 1988. The resources contributed by DBHDS allow DARS to have dedicated specialty counselors to provide VR services to individuals that experience substance abuse disorders that also receive treatment services through the CSB service system. DARS also provides services to individuals with serious mental illness, most of whom are also served by CSBs. In addition, DARS' staff serve on the Virginia Employment First Advisory Group and work closely with DBHDS on various work groups and initiatives that focus on recovery and the integration of work into the mental health service system. In addition, DARS collaborates with DBHDS to develop Individual Placement Supports Model of Supported Employment.

(8) Other Federal, State, and local agencies and programs outside the workforce development system; and

In addition to partnerships established and enhanced through development and implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) system in Virginia, DARS continues to emphasize the importance and necessity of cooperating with other community partners (federal, state, and local agencies and programs) to assist in providing comprehensive and effective services for VR customers. One of the most successful cooperative relationships has been with the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to provide services to individuals with substance abuse and with serious mental illness. The relationship with DBHDS continues to grow, and the data shows the success to our customers brought about by this relationship.

The DBHDS Office of Substance Use Disorders has provided DARS with fiscal and personnel resources to support the co-location of VR counselors in the Community Services Boards (CSBs) since 1988. The resources contributed by DBHDS allow DARS to have dedicated specialty counselors to provide VR services to individuals who experience substance use disorders and receive treatment services through the CSB service system. The program expanded in the middle of SFY 2000 from three counselors to nineteen counselors serving 18 of the forty CSBs. DARS also provides services to individuals with serious mental illness, most of whom are also served by CSBs. In addition, DARS' staff

serve on Virginia's Employment First Advisory Group and work closely with DBHDS on various work groups and initiatives that focus on recovery and the integration of work into the mental health service system. Consultants from both the Office of Substance Use Disorders and the Office of Behavioral Health collaborate with DARS in conducting annual meetings to provide program updates, provide in-service training opportunities, and regularly share information to promote a common understanding of the strategies and practices to serve individuals with substance abuse and/or serious mental illness. DARS has two employees who specialize in intellectual and developmental disabilities to provide technical assistance, guidance, and direction to VR counselors in serving this population.

(9) Other private nonprofit organizations.

Private non-profit, for-profit providers and Centers for Independent Living can apply to become DARS' VR employment service providers and providers of Pre-Employment Transition Services. Applicants' qualifications are evaluated based on services to be offered and criteria in the standard vendor agreement. DARS and each qualified provider establishes a written provider agreement. This agreement provides assurances to DARS that each organization complies with federal and state requirements for a community rehabilitation program. This agreement also clearly defines roles, expectations, and evaluation criteria.

Other mechanisms DARS utilizes to cooperate with private non-profit VR service providers include:

- Receiving stakeholder input from the Employment Services Organizations' Steering Committee (ESOSC) that provides the DARS' Commissioner counsel on funding and policy issues related to community rehabilitation programs and the allocation of Long-Term Employment Support Services and Extended Employment Services state funds, as well as other services that impact providers;
- Fostering close working relations between agency staff and Employment Services Organizations; and
- Utilizing the Employment Services Organization Outcome Report to assist Employment Services Organizations, VR counselors, and VR consumers in ensuring appropriate service provision. DARS has been convening regular webinars with Employment Service Organizations to provide information and answer questions about service provision.

Through the implementation of the Ticket to Work Program, DARS is actively working with multiple non-profit organizations, community rehabilitation programs and other groups to increase available services to DARS clients. The technical assistance provided by DARS to these organizations has increased their ability to access federal Ticket to Work funding to increase capacity and service delivery. Recently we have begun working with a Virginia faith-based employment network.



## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CERTIFICATIONS AND ASSURANCES

### CERTIFICATIONS

<b>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</b>	
1.	The (enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by title IV of WIOA, <sup>1</sup> and its State Plan supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act;
2.	In the event the designated State agency is not primarily concerned with vocational and other rehabilitation of individuals with disabilities, the designated State agency must include a designated State unit for the VR program (Section 101(a)(2)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act). As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the (enter the name of designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit) <sup>2</sup> agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan <sup>3</sup> , the Rehabilitation Act, 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c), and all applicable regulations <sup>4</sup> , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available to States under section 111(a) of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;
3.	As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency or the designated State unit when the designated State agency has a designated State unit, agrees to operate and is responsible for the administration of the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan <sup>5</sup> , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations <sup>6</sup> , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;

<sup>1</sup> Public Law 113-128.

<sup>2</sup> All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

<sup>3</sup> No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

<sup>4</sup> Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations at 34 CFR part 361.

<sup>5</sup> No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

<sup>6</sup> Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 CFR part 363.

<b>States must provide written and signed certifications that:</b>	
4.	The designated State unit, or if not applicable, the designated State agency has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, and is responsible for the administration of the VR program in accordance with 34 CFR 361.13(b) and (c);
5.	The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.
6.	All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.
7.	The (enter title of State officer below) has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;
8.	The (enter title of State officer below) has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services;
9.	The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement.

**ASSURANCES**

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner, that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a) and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances:

<b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b>	
1.	<b>Public Comment on Policies and Procedures:</b> The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.
2.	<b>Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement:</b> The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported

<b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b>	
	Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a Unified State plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 C.F.R. 76.140.
3.	<p><b>Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:</b> The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(a) the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(b) either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(c) consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(d) the financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3).</li> <li>(e) as applicable, the local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(f) as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(g) statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(h) the requirements for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(i) all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(j) the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> <li>(k) the compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</li> </ul>

<b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b>	
	<p>(l) the reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities as set forth in section 101(a)(18)(A).</p> <p>(m) the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
4.	<p><b>Administration of the Provision of VR Services:</b> The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:</p> <p>(a) comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(b) impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(c) provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act, as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services or, if implementing an order of selection, in accordance with criteria established by the State for the order of selection as set out in section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(d) determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(e) comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(f) comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(g) provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(h) comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by sections 101(a)(14) and 511 of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>

<p><b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b></p>	
	<p>(i) meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs.</p> <p>(j) with respect to students with disabilities, the State:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) has developed and will implement, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(A) strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and</li> <li>(B) strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and</li> </ul> </li> <li>(ii) has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25), and 113).</li> <li>(iii) shall reserve not less than 15 percent of the allocated funds for the provision of pre-employment transition services; such funds shall not be used to pay for the administrative costs of providing pre-employment transition services.</li> </ul>
5.	<p><b>Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:</b></p> <p>(a) The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(b) The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>
6.	<p><b>Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):</b></p> <p>(a) The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(H) and (I) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(b) The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services</p>

<b>The State Plan must provide assurances that:</b>	
	to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act.
7.	<p><b>Provision of Supported Employment Services:</b></p> <p>(a) The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p> <p>(b) The designated State agency assures that</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">the comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act an individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act , which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(7)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act.</p>

**Appendix 1: Performance Goals for the Core Programs**

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

Include the state's expected levels of performance relating to the performance accountability indicators based on primary indicators of performance described in section 116(b)(2)(A) of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

	Vocational Rehabilitation Program			
	Program Year: 2024		Program Year: 2025	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit) <sup>22</sup>	55%		57%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit) <sup>22</sup>	54%		56%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit) <sup>7</sup>	\$3,909		\$4,200	
Credential Attainment Rate	63%		66%	
Measurable Skill Gains	89%		91.5%	