

The following document is a draft of the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services' (DARS) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Section for the 2026-2027 Virginia Combined State Plan Modification (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.

PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL)

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.

1. 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

(B) has established a State Rehabilitation Council

2. IN ACCORDANCE WITH ASSURANCE (A)(1)(B), IF SELECTED, 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.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Council Representative	Current Term Number/Vacant	Beginning Date of Term Mo./Yr.
Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC)	1st Term	10/1/2024

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Parent Training and Information Center	2nd Term	10/1/2025
Client Assistance Program	1st Term	10/1/2025
Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (Ex Officio if Employed by the VR Agency)	1st Term	10/1/2025
Community Rehabilitation Program Service Provider	1st Term	10/1/2023
Business, Industry, and Labor	1st Term	10/1/2023
Business, Industry, and Labor	1st Term	10/1/2024
Business, Industry, and Labor	1st Term	10/1/2024
Business, Industry, and Labor	2nd Term	10/1/2025
Business, Industry, and Labor	2nd Term	10/1/2025
Disability Advocacy Groups	1st Term	10/1/2024
Disability Advocacy Groups	2nd Term	10/1/2024
Disability Advocacy Groups	2nd Term	10/1/2025
Current or Former Applicants for, or Recipients of, VR services	2nd Term	10/1/2023
Section 121 Project Directors in the State (as applicable)		
State Educational Agency Responsible for Students with Disabilities Eligible to Receive Services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	1st Term	10/1/2023
State Workforce Development Board	1st Term	10/1/2023
VR Agency Director (Ex Officio)		10/1/2024

3. 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) currently meets the composition requirements in Section 105(b).

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.

4. 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: DARS shall continue to provide updates

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on WIOA performance measures, including the goals and targets established for these measures and DARS' progress towards those goals. DARS should provide detailed analysis of available data to the Council related to outcomes, occupations, and data with the expectation that the median hourly wage increases to \$16.00 per hour (\$17.50 per hour in the Northern district) to best align with increases in the minimum wage and the current economy, with the ultimate goal of a living wage of \$20.00 per hour for individuals who are not students with disabilities.

The Council requests that DARS provide a detailed analysis on data related to employment outcomes as broken down by occupation and industry sector at the first meeting of 2026.

SRC Recommendation 2: The Council continues to be interested in wage and earnings trends as impacted by clients' access to other benefits and wants individuals who receive DARS services to be empowered to make an informed choice regarding their employment and understand their options. DARS should report on ongoing benefits counseling services and outreach at the second meeting of 2026, including process details, current data, and historical trends. The Council requests that DARS monitor and report the SSI/SSDI status of individuals at application status as compared to closure.

The Council requests that DARS continue to provide and increase parent-focused education and awareness activities, including information about benefits counseling for students with disabilities, in collaboration with partner agencies/organizations (including VDOE and PEATC) and report baseline information to the Council, as available.

SRC Recommendation 3: In order to increase successful closures, DARS should systematically examine barriers to service delivery, paying particular attention to marginalized and underserved populations, including tribal populations, groups experiencing language barriers, rural communities with limited broadband and transportation access, and youth in transition. Targeted outreach should address language access through access to interpretation services and translated materials, technology and transportation support in underserved areas, and increased awareness among families and youth. These efforts, grounded in the CSNA findings, will drive progress toward representative customer demographics, geographic access, and responsive service delivery.

DARS should work to increase accuracy in reporting and directed delivery of services to clients who report a language other than English as their primary language with a goal of a 10% increase in services provided to this population.

DARS should work to establish an enhanced relationship with one Virginia-based tribe for the purpose of sharing information and improving access to VR services.

SRC Recommendation 4: DARS should increase by 40% the number of VR services, including Pre-ETS, provided by Centers for

SRC Recommendation 5: DARS will report on business development efforts including collaboration with ESOs, workforce development partners, and businesses that support the hiring of individuals with disabilities with an emphasis on the practices and procedures to onboard these partners at the third SRC meeting of 2026.

SRC Recommendation 6: The Council requests quarterly updates on the winding down of the Pathways grant and efforts to integrate Pathways activities into the VR program.

SRC Recommendation 7: The SRC would like DARS, including WWRC, to continue to expand virtual programs that deliver VR resources and education to those who can benefit from remote learning and services, while identifying and addressing access challenges (including technological literacy) that may prevent some Virginians from fully utilizing these options. The Council requests quarterly updates on the delivery of these services and the impact on credential and measurable skill gain measures.

SRC Recommendation 8: DARS should serve more students with disabilities and the Council requests that DARS provides quarterly reports on efforts to serve this population, particularly students with disabilities.

- a. *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. Increase collaboration between DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, other community partners including providers, and local education agencies.*
- b. *DARS should identify and report on local education agencies in which Pre-ETS is under-utilized and conduct direct outreach in order to increase service availability and delivery. DARS Transition Services should report on any barriers to continued outreach and contemplated or implemented solutions.*
- c. *Data on 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 and reported to the SRC.*
- d. *DARS should continue to expand work-based learning experiences for transition age youth. DARS should increase by 25% the number of transition age youth participating in work-based learning experiences, with deliberate efforts to achieve increases that are geographically and occupationally diverse.*

SRC Recommendation 9: DARS should review and strengthen its internal data collection processes to improve the accuracy and

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completeness of information reported to the Council, particularly data on client barriers such as foster care involvement, homelessness, and juvenile justice history.

5. PROVIDE THE VR AGENCY'S RESPONSE TO THE COUNCIL'S INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS, INCLUDING AN EXPLANATION FOR THE REJECTION OF ANY INPUT AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

List each recommendation/input followed by the VR agency response.

DARS seeks input, feedback, and recommendations from the SRC throughout the year, including holding a retreat where the SRC provides formalized recommendations annually. Below is the agency response to recommendations the SRC made at the end of 2024 and were applied in 2025.

SRC Recommendation 1: DARS shall continue to provide updates on WIOA performance measures, including the goals and targets established for these measures and DARS' progress towards those goals. DARS should provide detailed analysis of available data to the council related to outcomes, occupations, and data with the expectation that the median hourly wage increases to \$16.00 per hour (\$17.50 per hour in the Northern district) to best align with increases in the minimum wage and the current economy.

DARS Response 1:

The agency's reported WIOA Measures for PY23- July 2023- June 2024 are as follows:

2nd quarter after exit: 53% (goal 55%)

4th quarter after exit: 52% (goal 54%)

Median Hourly Earnings 2nd quarter after exit: \$4323 (goal \$3800.00)

Credential Attainment: 61% (goal 45%)

Measurable Skill Gain: 81.1% (goal 89.1%)

The agency's reported WIOA Measures for PY24- July 2024-June 2025 are as follows:

2nd quarter after exit: 54.4% (goal 59%)

4th quarter after exit: 53.9% (goal 57%)

Median Hourly Earnings 2nd quarter after exit: \$4314 (goal \$4173.00)

Credential Attainment Rate: 55.9% (goal 63%)

Measurable Skills Gain: 77.4% (goal 89.0%)

Median Hourly Wages ending September 2025: \$15.00 (same as

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2024). All Northern Virginian offices met a median hourly wage of \$16.00.

Primary jobs at Closure in 2025 include:

Stockers and Order Fillers; Customer Service Representatives; Janitors and Cleaners (Except Maids and Housekeeper Cleaners); Laborers and Freight; Stock and Material Movers; Fast Food and Counter Workers; Food Preps and Serving Related Workers; Office and Administrative Workers; Retail Salesperson; Helpers, Dishwashers, Dining Room and Cafeteria Attendant; Cashiers; Child Care Workers.

SRC Recommendation 2: To address the decreasing number of individuals seeking full-time employment, DARS shall seek to maintain the number of hours worked and full-time employment rate of adults who access DARS services with a goal of ensuring that individuals who receive DARS services understand their options through benefits counselling and are able to make an informed choice regarding their employment. DARS should report on benefits counseling services at the first meeting of 2025, including current data and historical trends.

DARS Response 2: Thirty percent (30%) of successful closures in 2025 obtained full-time employment. Benefit counseling continues to occur for each participant entering work activities and/or training.

Services are provided by Work Incentive Specialist Advocates (WISA). WISA are fee for service vendors with DARS/DRS.

There are seventeen (17) specific services a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) may authorize to assist a DRS participant with Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits.

Examples of services are WorkWORLD Analysis, Benefit Planning Query (BPQY), Student Earned Income Exclusion 1619(B), Medicaid Works, Impairment Related Work Expense, Overpayments, Financial Health Assessment (FHA), and Increasing Budgeting Skills Utilizing Financial Empowerment Tools.

Seventy-one percent (71%) of DRS participants receiving Work Incentive Specialist Advocates (WISA) services are employed, closed as rehabilitated, or actively engaged in VR services.

SRC Recommendation 3: 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. Outreach should be targeted toward marginalized and underserved populations, working consistently toward representative customer demographics— particularly with regard to race/ethnicity, age, and location. DARS should 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

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segregated settings, individuals with mental health conditions, and justice-involved individuals. DARS shall report on their assessment and efforts at the second 2025 SRC meeting.

DARS Response 3: Presentations were shared on this SRC recommendation at the second 2025 SRC quarterly meeting. Activities that occurred under this SRC recommendation are as follows:

The Pathways English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Specialist actively provides language translation, community engagement, and workshop services aimed at supporting our underserved ESOL populations. The Pathways ESOL Specialist also created a Spanish Disability Guide, updated and proofread agency documents to ensure accurate translation.

DRS staff utilize interpreter services through Proprio interpreting services to ensure communication is delivered in the preferred or native languages of participants.

DRS has dedicated Regional Counselors for the Deaf, who communicate in American Sign Language and carry caseloads specifically within this diverse population.

DARS continues to increase access to Individual Placement Supports (IPS) for Virginians with a serious mental health conditions through partnerships with Fairfax Community Service Board (CSB), Chesterfield CSB, Frontier Health, and Henrico CSB.

The Behavioral Health Services Team continues to work with district leadership for collaboration, training, and technical assistance to improve outcomes for individuals with behavioral health conditions. Training opportunities offered and provided include: highlighting criteria, training, resources and employment opportunities for Peer Recovery Specialist (PRS); serving justice involved individuals; as well as affordable housing and housing resources in Virginia.

In September 2022, DARS was one of fourteen (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. The purpose of the RPRJ EPIC Project is to help individuals with disabilities currently engaged in subminimum wage employment transition to competitive integrated employment (CIE) and to assist youth with disabilities at risk of entering subminimum wage employment when they transition from school to engage in employment in the general workforce.

Accomplishments through September 30, 2025 are as follows: 16 participants enrolled, 8 adults have achieved CIE, 3 youth have been diverted to CIE, 5 participants have been closed Rehabilitated (successful employment).

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SRC Recommendation 4: Increase the number of VR services, including Pre-ETS, provided by Centers for Independent Living across the Commonwealth.

DARS Response 4: Information on this SRC recommendation was shared each quarter at the SRC meetings. DARS has been working diligently to strengthen partnerships with the CILs and this effort is apparent in the growing service numbers.

This is a review of services provided each year from SFY 2022-SFY 2025:

PE Pre-ETS Services at CILs by Year	SFY 2022	SFY 2023	SFY 2024	SFY 2025
Access Independence, Inc.	0	0	32	83
Endependence Center Inc	1	12	3	20
Endependence Center Of N Va	11	109	165	190
Valley Associates For Independent Living	0	0	104	122
Total	12	121	304	415
VR Pre-ETS Services at CILs by Year	SFY 2022	SFY 2023	SFY 2024	SFY 2025
Access Independence, Inc.	0	20	14	50
Clinch Independent Living Services	0	0	0	6
DisAbility Resource Center	0	0		0
Endependence Center Inc	2	4	4	7
Endependence Center Of N Va	99	205	397	351
Valley Associates For Independent Living	0	47	104	129
Total	101	276	519	543

SRC Recommendation 5: DARS shall serve more students with disabilities and requests that DARS provide quarterly reports on efforts to serve this population, particularly students with disabilities.

DARS Response 5: DARS successfully increased the number of students with disabilities receiving services, particularly pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS). Updates for this recommendation were shared at each SRC quarterly meeting by the DRS Transition teams from both field services and Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC).

- a. *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. Increasing collaboration between DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, other community partners including providers, and local education agencies.*

The manager of the Career and Workforce Development Division at the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC),; the DARS Statewide Transition Specialist for Staff Development); ,the DARS Statewide Transition Specialist for Deaf Services;; and the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) Community Engagement Coordinator, presented at the Parent Education Advocacy Training Center (PEATC) Parent and Youth Empowerment

Summit. The goals of the Summit were to increase parents' capacity to help their children with disabilities improve their post-secondary outcomes and to increase the capacity of youth to be effective self-advocates. PEATC is committed to reaching all families, educational institutions, and communities to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. PEATC builds positive futures by empowering individuals with disabilities through education and training.

Further partnerships saw WWRC and Division of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) staff present at the VCU Partnership for People with Disabilities (PPD) Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Summer Institute Team Training Cohort XV in collaboration with the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). The goal of the presentation was to highlight the postsecondary transition program options at WWRC in addition to the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) services DARS provides to school divisions throughout the State.

Further outreach was conducted during the summer with the Associate Director for Curriculum, Instruction, and Innovation, Office of Career and Technical Education (CTE) at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), touring WWRC. with the goal of the tour being to support the possible creation of a specialized VDOE teaching license for WWRC, due to its status as a State Operated Program (SOP).

The Manager of the Career and Workforce Development Division, and the Director of the Postsecondary Education Rehabilitation Transition (PERT) program at the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC); the Assistant Commissioner for Developmental Services at the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Development Services (DBHDS); the Director of Employment Services and Special Programs at the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS); and the Director of Employment Services at SOAR 365 presented at the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) Special Education Leaders Academy in Richmond, Virginia.

They were part of a panel presentation to twenty special education leaders and administrators from school divisions throughout the Commonwealth of Virginia. The focus of the panel was the Virginia Employment and Education/Training Transition Initiatives at the K-12 public schools, WWRC (Vocational Evaluation, PERT, Workplace Readiness Program, and Vocational Training), DARS, and DBHDS. WWRC was a main focal point of this panel with its initiative on having an industry recognized credential

in every workforce driven vocational training program and aligning PERT and the Workplace Readiness Program with pre-ETS.

The Statewide Transition Specialist, participated in the State and Local Advisory Team (SLAT) meeting where representatives from state and local agencies that provide children's services meet to discuss initiatives, policy and legislative information.

Additional DARS staff participate in the Family Engagement Network (FEN). They work collaboratively with the FEN to increase awareness of DARS for parents of children with disabilities who may benefit from DARS services.

- b. DARS should identify local education agencies in which Pre-ETS is under-utilized and conduct direct outreach.*

The Transition Team works with the field staff, the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), Gear Up Virginia/State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), and the Training and Technical Assistance Centers (TTAC's) to identify underserved areas.

Targeted outreach was held with Transition Day Events planned for Lancaster and King and Queen High Schools for September and October 2025. Also, addressing unmet need, Alleghany High School now has a designated DARS counselor.

DARS hosted a Virginia Capacity Building Institute, in the Summer of 2025. Teams from seventeen (17) school divisions along with the corresponding DARS local field offices came together for two days at WWRC to build relationships and plan services for Students with Disabilities (SWDs) using the Model Best Practices Implementation guide developed by Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) for DARS. The guide can be found at www.Preets.org. Schools were invited based on the need to increase Pre-ETS and transition services to SWDs.

The Deaf & Hard of Hearing Coordinator (DHHC) identified gaps in service areas and developed outreach opportunities through direct engagement. This included initiating and leading meetings between Regional Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) and local schools to foster understanding and build stronger collaborative relationships essential to Pre-ETS success.

The DHHC acted as a liaison to improve coordination between schools and DARS staff, helping both parties recognize shared goals and align their efforts in support of students. These efforts facilitated staff

involvement with the VCU project.

- c. *Data on 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 and reported to the SRC.*

This information was reported at each quarterly SRC meeting.

Final FFY2025 highlights through September 2025 include:

- 1301 Pre-ETS cases moved from Potential Eligible (PE) to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) compared to 914 Pre-ETS cases moved from PE to VR in FFY2024. (approximately 42.34% increase)
- 3652 Pre-ETS applications were taken in FFY2025 compared to 3474 Pre-ETS applications taken in FFY2024. (approximately 5.12% increase)
- 26,131 Pre-ETS services provided in FFY 2025 compared to 22,915 Pre-ETS services provided in FFY2024. (approximately 14.03% increase)

- d. *DARS should expand work-based learning experiences for transition age youth, preferably while still in school, to improve employment outcomes at graduation.*

DARS recognizes the value of work-based learning experiences and has diligently sought opportunities to expand this service. Updates were provided at the quarterly SRC meetings.

The first Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) Pre-ETS Academy was completed during the week of June 16-20, 2025.

The 1-week Academy focused on the following Pre-ETS standards: Job Exploration Counseling, Work-Based Learning Experiences, Counseling on Educational and Training Options, Workplace Readiness Training, and Self-Determination.

The Transition Team onboarded three new Pre-ETS providers to expand the ability to offer paid Work Experiences to the Southwest District.

The Transition Team coordinated summer work-based learning opportunities with Rappahannock Community College (one week culinary and welding academies) (<https://preets.vcurrtec.org/beaconsofexcellence/>), Virginia Space Consortium (one week drone academy and drone days), and Intellectual Point (one week virtual STEM academies).

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DARS consulted with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition. The Collaborative (NTACT:C) team offered support and technical assistance to field staff to facilitate and increase work-based learning and summer work experiences for students.

DARS also hosted a quarterly Pre-ETS Community of Best Practice meeting for DARS staff. At these events staff had the opportunity to share ideas, plans, successes and challenges in relation to expanding work-based learning experiences for students. These meetings fostered an environment for staff to brainstorm and solve problems to improve services and outcomes.

SRC Recommendation 7: DARS shall define its existing workforce and examine opportunities for improved employee diversity with respect to populations served, while also recognizing recruitment and retention challenges among its highly skilled direct service workforce.

DARS Response 7:

In partnership with DARS Human Resources, DRS continues to expand outreach efforts to diverse populations in recruiting efforts by utilizing a variety of local sources to promote opportunities. This includes college/university collaboration for our Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor classification. Recruitment in different publications for targeted audiences has also been pursued.

The Alternate Hiring Process (AHP) is another method state agencies like DARS may use to help increase the number of individuals with disabilities employed by their agency and increase the diversity of their labor force. DARS not only uses the AHP process for recruitment but is an active participant in the AHP process.

AHP has received over 3955 requests for an AHP Letter (formerly Certificate of Disability) as of August 2025. The Pathways staff at DARS has attempted to contact these candidates, via phone and/or email, since April 2022 to help candidates understand the Alternative Hiring Process and process their letters.

Through the DHRM/ Pathways collaborative model non-DARS candidates that received an AHP are invited to attend an AHP and DARS overview. These overviews started in February 2025. This 2-hour Zoom overview covers the Alternative Hiring Process, DARS services, how to navigate the Virginia Jobs website, guidance on job seeking strategies, and how to organize their job search. Afterwards, the participants receive a follow-up email with helpful job seeking strategy links and attachments. Over Federal Fiscal Year 2025, there were 1282 AHP letter requests and 684 issued from DARS/DBVI and non-VR participants. Seventy-one (71) new Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) cases were opened based off referrals stemming from AHP requests. AHP hiring through March 2025 is as follows: 156 total AHP hires through Executive Branch agencies in the

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Commonwealth; 45 total AHP hires through Virginia Community College Systems (2 individuals with disabilities); 2 AHP hires from George Mason University. Executive Branch agencies participating in the AHP hiring process include DARS.

SRC Recommendation 8: DARS will report on business development efforts including collaboration with Employment Service Organization (ESOs), workforce development partners, and businesses that support the hiring of individuals with disabilities with an emphasis on the practices and procedures to onboard these partners at the first SRC meeting of 2025.

DARS Response 8: In keeping with SRC Recommendation 8, presentations were made quarterly to the SRC.

DARS continues to promote Windmills by offering monthly and customized sessions. DARS is sponsoring an Innovative Guided Rehabilitation Employer Engagement Training (IGREET) training for ESO staff on the dual customer approach to business development. Seventy-six (76) ESO staff have registered to complete the four sessions facilitated by DARS Business Development Managers (BDMs) beginning in November 2025. Through the Department of Workforce Development and Advancement (Virginia Works) the Pathways collaborative model has worked towards increasing knowledge of Registered Apprenticeship (RA) for individuals with disabilities. Over the last six months of FFY2025, the following occurred: training on the Pathways grant and DARS services with new Virginia Works consultants; multiple meetings to discuss braided funding and resources; and sharing employer contacts for RA advancement.

Virginia Works and the DARS Pathways to Career Grant have been working on expanding the strength of the partnership which would include access to the National Apprenticeship software (Rapids) for the RA Liaison. This will enable the RA Liaison to have access to employee information across the state that has RAs. The Memorandum of Understanding has been drafted, reviewed and signed by both agencies.

In Celebration of National Apprenticeship Week, Pathways in partnership with Virginia Works, Shenandoah Valley Workforce Development Board, and staff from the Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) and Wilson Workforce Rehabilitation Center (WWRC) provided a tour for twenty-four (24) participants, including representatives from ComSonics, Colonial Webb, Plumbers & Pipefitters Union Local 10, Atlantic Outreach Group, and Southern Aire. The tour provided an overview of workforce training programs and an opportunity to demonstrate how these programs are meeting the evolving training needs of businesses and to explore potential partnerships that support apprenticeship and pre-apprenticeship pathways.

Fourteen (14) DARS and former DARS participants will begin a registered Apprenticeship in November 2025 through Enabled Intelligence in geospatial data annotation with an included federal

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security clearance paid for by Enabled Intelligence.

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 2025. The CSNA was conducted by the Interwork Institute at San Diego State University. The CSNA was conducted using quantitative and qualitative methods of inquiry. The purpose of the CSNA was to identify and describe the vocational rehabilitation (VR) needs of individuals with disabilities residing in Virginia. In particular, the CSNA provides information on: 1) the overall performance of DARS as it relates to meeting the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities in the Commonwealth; 2) the rehabilitation needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their needs for supported employment (SE) services; 3) the rehabilitation needs of individuals who are minorities, and those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program; the rehabilitation needs of youth and students with disabilities in transition, including their need for pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS); 4) the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; 5) the need to establish, develop and/or improve community rehabilitation programs within the Commonwealth; and 6) the needs of businesses in recruiting, hiring, accommodating, and retaining individuals with disabilities.

The Interwork Institute project team reviewed a variety of existing data sources for the purposes of identifying and describing demographic data within Virginia.

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 have 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

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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.

In conducting their survey, the Interwork Institute issued and highlighted the following findings and recurring themes when looking at the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment:

1. Lack of transportation is a major barrier to employment for individuals with disabilities, especially in rural areas. Transportation was described as a struggle all over, even though Virginia has some large urban areas where public transportation is more prevalent. There are many rural areas of the state where public transportation is nonexistent. Once consumers find employment, sustainable transportation becomes a challenge due to the cost.
2. Common VR needs identified across all research methods for individuals with the most significant disabilities include:
 - a. Need for job skills/work experience.
 - b. Need for education or training.
 - c. Need to address employer perceptions about employing people with disabilities.
 - d. Mental health concerns.
 - e. Lack of soft skills.
 - f. Concern over benefit loss from working.
3. DARS operates the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC), which provides independent living and vocational training services to individuals with the most significant disabilities in a residential setting. WWRC is an important and essential program for individuals who need intensive workplace readiness training to reenter the workforce.
4. DARS serves a large number of individuals with substance use disorders and mental health impairments. The common VR needs of these individuals include:
 - a. Rapid engagement.
 - b. Training to improve their skills for employment.
 - c. Resources or training to pursue self-employment.
 - d. Connections to resources for housing and other services.
 - e. Job placement assistance, often to address criminal history.
 - f. Transportation.
 - g. Medication maintenance.

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h. Placement assistance.

5. Homelessness has become a major barrier for individuals with disabilities in Virginia. The issue became magnified with the onset of the pandemic and has not improved since, especially related to the increase in housing costs. Many individuals cannot afford housing, which affects their ability to engage in employment.

6. There is a need to expand customized employment (CE) in Virginia as a service option for individuals with the most significant disabilities. The agency is working to scale-up this service as part of Real Pay for Real Jobs Education and Outreach, Partnership Development, Provisions of Individualized Services, and Capacity Building (RPRJ EPIC) project, but it has been a challenge to expand and sustain the service.

7. DARS provides extensive supported employment (SE) services to individuals with severe mental illness (SMI). DARS is able to use long-term employment support services (LTESS) funds for extended services for SE. There is a long wait list for Medicaid waiver services in the state, so the availability of LTESS funds is critical for the SE program and timely services to individuals with the most significant disabilities that have a dual diagnosis of a significant mental illness and an intellectual or other developmental disability.

8. There is a need for basic computer skills training for many DARS consumers. The lack of broadband internet service in some rural areas, and the lack of exposure to computer training can be a significant barrier to being qualified for even entry-level employment.

Virginia Population Estimates of Disability

The United States Census Bureau July 1, 2023 Annual Population Estimates of the Resident Population indicated that the total non-institutionalized civilian population for Virginia was estimated at 8,715,698, inclusive of all ages. Of these, 1,106,894 individuals reported a disability, which translates to a 12.7% prevalence rate (+/- 0.2 margin of error) within the state. The percentage of disability reported in Virginia in 2023 was lower in comparison to the percentage of individuals with a disability observed nationwide (13.4%) 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 (4.9%). Followed by self-care difficulty (1.2%), vision difficulty (0.8%), ambulatory

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difficulty (0.7%) and hearing difficulty (0.4%).

Among individuals between ages 18 and 64, cognitive difficulty was most prevalent (4.7%), followed by ambulatory difficulty (4.2%), independent living difficulty (3.6%), hearing difficulty (2.0%), vision difficulty (1.9%), and self-care difficulty (1.5%).

For those 65 and older, ambulatory difficulty was most prevalent in 2024 (19.2%) with rates for other disability types as follows: independent living difficulty (12.4%), hearing difficulty (12.3%), cognitive difficulty (7.2%), self-care difficulty (6.5%), and vision difficulty (5.2%).

The National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research released the 2024 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium in March 2024. The Compendium found that in 2022, Virginia's employment rate for individuals with disabilities, ages 18 to 64 was 44.4 percent and the employment rate was 78.8 percent for individuals without disabilities. The employment gap for Virginia was 34.4 percent. Compared to the 50 states, Virginia's employment gap ranked 18th in the nation (lowest rate to highest rate rank order). In PY 2023, 89.3% of DARS clients served were classified as most significantly disabled. In PY 2024, the percentage of most significantly disabled decreased 1.5% to 82.4%.

In FFY 2024, Virginia had 2,367 cases closed after successful employment for individuals with most significant disabilities. It is estimated that 6,014 cases served would receive supported employment services in FFY 2027, 28.7% of all cases served. The estimated cost per person for supported employment services in FFY 2027 is \$2,276.37, for a total of \$13,690,106.81 (48.8% of total spending).

The 2025 CSNA highlights that DARS provides extensive Supported Employment (SE) services to individuals with severe mental illness (SMI). The data supports this conclusion as DARS provides as much or more SE services than the largest VR programs in the nation. Extended services in SE are provided through ESOs which includes Community Service Boards (CSBs). Some of the vendors are preferred over others due to the quality of their services. The providers who are known for the quality of their services often have waiting lists.

DARS is able to use long-term employment support services (LTESS) funds for extended services for SE. There is a long wait list for Medicaid waiver services in Virginia, so the availability of LTESS funds is critical for the SE program and timely services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

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 2025 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-2023. The disability rates were higher in Virginia at 12.5% compared to 12.0% for males. The gender breakdown for clients served in Virginia in 2024 is shown below:

- Male - # served (%) n = 14,195 or 60.4%
- Female - # served (%) n = 9,127 or 38.9%
- Does not wish to self-identify - # served (%) n = 89 or 0.4%

DARS served more males than females in 2024. 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 estimated average rates of disability among ethnic categories in Virginia is shown below:

- Black/African American: 14.6%
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino: 13.6%
- Hispanic or Latino (of any race): 8.1%
- American Indian and Alaska Native alone: 15.7%
- Asian alone: 6.9%
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone: 16.5%
- Two or more races: 10%

Race/Ethnic Breakdown of Clients served by DARS in PY 2024 are shown below:

- Black/African American: 32.5%
- White alone, not Hispanic or Latino: 53.1%
- Hispanic or Latino (of any race): 7.0%
- American Indian and Alaska Native alone: 0.2%
- Asian: 2.9%
- Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone: 0.1%
- Multiple races identified: 2.8%

The minority race/ethnic groups that are underrepresented in the DARS population include Asians, Hispanics, and Multi-Race individuals. 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 employment needs of minority populations. Surveys of individuals, community partners, and DARS staff were conducted. For individuals they were asked a question regarding their preferred language for communication. DARS staff and community partners were provided a list of 23 barriers and asked to identify the barriers to achieving employment goals for clients who were racial or ethnic minorities.

Ninety-five community partners responded to the survey. The first ranking item, “lack of reliable transportation” was selected by about 64 percent of the partners as a barrier to achieving employment goals for minorities. “Limited job skills/work experience” and “lack of education or training” were ranked second and third as barriers to employment goals for minorities by community partners. The top two barriers identified by community partners are the same top two barriers the community partners cited for the general population of DARS’ clients.

Staff selection of barriers to achieving employment goals for minorities had a limited number of differences from DARS staff choices for the general population of DARS clients. Additionally, staff and partners differed slightly in their ranking order of barriers that prevent clients who are racial or ethnic minorities from achieving their employment goals. One hundred eleven staff members responded to the survey, and an equal number of staff selected “language barriers” and “lack of reliable transportation” as a barrier to achieving employment goals for those who are racial or ethnic minorities. “Limited job skills/work experience” and “lack of education or training” rounded out the top four most frequently cited responses by staff. The following is a list of all barriers to employment cited by community partners and staff for clients who are racial or ethnic minorities with ranking from most frequently cited to least by community partners:

- Lack of reliable transportation
- Limited job skills/work experience
- Lack of education or training

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- Lack of job search/interview skills
- Language barriers
- Employers' perceptions about employing persons with disabilities
- Lack of soft skills
- Lack of cultural competence
- Other transportation issues
- Concern over loss of Social Security benefits, or other benefits such as Medicaid, due to working
- Lack of available jobs
- Lack of technology skills
- Mental health concerns
- Lack of housing
- Lack of childcare
- Criminal record
- Lack of disability-related accommodations at work
- Lack of Internet access
- Substance abuse
- Other
- Lack of assistive technology
- Other health concerns
- Lack of attendant care

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.

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

In FFY 2024, the following number of DARS clients were served by the Virginia Workforce System:

- American Job Centers: n= 201
- Other WIOA Programs in Virginia: n= 1,277
- Wagnor-Peyser: n=29
- Other Virginia State Agencies: n= 37

DARS staff continues to work with the Workforce Development Centers on a consistent basis, however, the 2025 CSNA found that there is variable quality and integration with the Virginia Works program across the state. Co-location appears to contribute to improved and increased instances of braided funding. In addition, the partnership with Virginia Works is strong among substance use and behavioral health counselors. . The infrequent use of these centers may be related to staff's perceived effectiveness of the centers in working with individuals with disabilities since Virginia Works frequently refers individuals who self-identify as having a disability directly to DARS.

The CSNA identified multiple barriers and areas for improving services in cooperation with other Components of the Statewide Workforce Development System including: . :

- 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
- Highlighting successes
- Improve the use of braided funding
- Partner to develop customized training opportunities with employers

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 on students with disabilities (SWD) enrolled either in public school, private school or home schooled for the 2023-2024 school year were obtained from the Virginia Department of Education. There were 185,651 students in grades nine through twelve who were considered to have disabilities in the 2023-2024 school year. The breakdown by disability is shown in the table below:

Disability	Total
Autism	30,468

Disability	Total
Deaf-Blindness	23
Developmental Delay	15,299
Emotional Disturbance	8,603
Hearing Impairments	1,138
Intellectual Disabilities	8,797
Multiple Disabilities	2,732
Orthopedic Impairments	441
Other Health Impairments	36,525
Specific Learning Disabilities	54,526
Speech or Language Impairments	26,161
Traumatic Brain Injured	415
Visual Impairments	523
Total	185,651

The largest percentage of students enrolled in school year 2023-2024 in grades 9-12 have specific learning disabilities (30%), followed by other health impairments at 20%.

There are 129,835 students between pre-K and 8th grade in Virginia with a

documented disability. A plurality (25.2%) of these students have a specific learning disability, followed by those with a speech or language impairment (18.4%), autism (18.3%), other health impairments (17.7%), and developmental delay (11.3%). A smaller number of students have documented intellectual disabilities (3.6%), emotional disturbance (3.2%), or multiple disabilities (1.1%).

DARS SERVICES TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

From FFY 2023-2025, DARS served an average of 5,058 students with disabilities annually. This represents approximately 9.4% of all 9th through 12th grade students with disabilities in Virginia during this time period, according to numbers from the Virginia Department of Education. Assuming similar populations over the next few years, DARS could expect to serve 4,914 students with disabilities during the 2026-2027 school year, and 4,884 students with disabilities during the 2027-2028 school year, based on projections by the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Services. During this period, DARS also opened an average of 3,150 Potentially Eligible cases (students with disabilities who are potentially eligible for the vocational rehabilitation program) each year, with an average of about 1,334 Potentially Eligible students moving on to apply for full vocational rehabilitation services.

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:

Year/Disability	Autism	Emotional	Intellectual	Learning Disability
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
2024	1,793	5,021	1,384	1,130

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 2025 CSNA found that individuals with disabilities for the total civilian noninstitutionalized population ages 25 and older have higher educational attainment than their peers without disabilities for those who have graduated high school (includes equivalency)(31.7% versus 22.3%) and those who have attended college or have an associate's degree (27.7% versus 24.9%). For those with a bachelor's degree or higher, individuals with disabilities in this population have lower educational rates than their peers without disabilities (24.5% versus 45.9%).

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 2025 CSNA conducted a survey of community partners and DARS staff and were asked to indicate the barriers to achieving employment goals for youth in transition from school from a list of 26 barriers. The top three most frequently cited barriers to employment that the Community Partners cited were: limited job skills/work experience; lack of job search/interview skills, and lack of reliable transportation. These barriers are listed in the top four of the most common barriers Community Partners identified for the general population of DARS' clients. Four of the nine narrative comments received in the category "Other" cited "unknown/I do not provide services to youth." The remaining five comments cited lack of family support, uncertain career path to choose, lack of desire to work, parents' unreasonable expectations, and poor DARS counselors. A total of 103 Community Partners responded to the survey.

The top three most frequently cited barriers to achieving employment goals that the DARS Staff cited were parental concerns, limited job skills/work experience and lack of reliable transportation. Three of the top five most frequently cited barriers to employment cited by the Staff are listed in the top five barriers Staff identified as common barriers to employment for the general population of DARS clients. Two of the top five barriers Staff cited are identified in the Community Partners' top five barrier choices and the items are in a

different rank order. Sixteen comments were received in the category “Other”. Two comments indicated that the respondent did not work with youth. Five comments cited the youth’s difficulties transitioning into making adult decisions, lack of motivation and unreasonable expectations regarding work. Three comments cited lack of parental support, and one comment cited parental expectations of a high salary for the child. Two comments indicated the lack of school involvement and referrals from schools starting at 12th grade instead of 9th grade.

The 2025 CSNA identified the needs of youth and students with individuals in transition. All five of the required Pre-ETS services were repeatedly cited as needed for students with disabilities throughout Virginia. Work-based learning experiences were identified as the most needed Pre-ETS service. The CSNA also found that reliable transportation is a major need for transition-age youth. The lack of transportation in rural areas especially was a primary reason for the inability of youth to participate in a vocational rehabilitation plan or Pre-ETS. There is also a need to increase student and family awareness of DARS services, including the possibility of supporting postsecondary education after graduation, if needed to support their employment goal. Finally, the CSNA found that students and youth with disabilities have a greater need for mental health services since the onset of the pandemic.

Through the Cooperative Agreement between DARS and VDOE and the annual review of local agreements, transition career services and 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.

2. IDENTIFY THE NEED TO ESTABLISH, DEVELOP, OR IMPROVE COMMUNITY REHABILITATION PROGRAMS WITHIN THE STATE.

The 2025 CSNA identified the need to establish, develop or improve community rehabilitation programs (CPRs) in Virginia that serve individuals with disabilities. CRPs in Virginia are referred to as Employment Service organizations, or ESOs.

The following themes emerged in the area of the need to establish, develop, or improve ESOs serving individuals with disabilities in Virginia: 1) DARS relies heavily on ESOs to provide a wide range of employment services to their consumers. There are areas of the state, like Fairfax, where there is a proliferation of ESOs. There are other more rural areas where there are few service providers and some services, like supported employment, are lacking; 2) There is a need to improve the quality of job placements by ESOs. Employment needs to be consistent with the abilities and capabilities of consumers; 3) DARS is embarking on a VBP model geared towards rewarding ESOs for high quality placements; 4) Many ESOs have experienced high turnover, which affects their ability to serve DARS consumers in a timely manner; 5) There is a lack of bilingual staff to provide services at ESOs, which contributes to the low number of Hispanic individuals receiving services; 6) There are very few ESOs currently providing customized employment. It has been a real challenge to implement customized employment in Virginia. Once staff are training, they leave and there is no one left to provide the service; 7) There is a need for more vocational evaluators in the northern Virginia area. Clients can wait six to eight weeks to see an evaluator after being referred by a

counselor. This can delay services for individuals desperate to go to work and is not congruent with rapid engagement; 8) There is a need for more workplace readiness services and work adjustment services for consumers, especially those with behavioral health disabilities; and 9) There is a need to expand financial literacy and empowerment services, which are valuable services for consumers, especially related to benefits planning.

Individual Survey Results: Service Providers and Vendors

Individual survey respondents were asked a series of questions identifying their use of DARS referrals; the quality, effectiveness, and responsiveness of their service provider or vendor; and whether or not they would recommend their service provider or vendors to others.

Use of a DARS Referral

The first question asked individual survey respondents to indicate whether or not they received services from a service provider or vendor that they were referred to by DARS. A total of 63 respondents answered the question. Fifty-four percent of respondents indicated that they received service provider or vendor services recommended/referred to by DARS.

Quality of Service from Service Provider or Vendor

Individuals were asked to rate the quality of service from the service provider or vendor. A total of 33 responses were received and 42.4% indicated that the quality of service from the service provider or vendor was “good”.

Effectiveness of Service Provider Services or Vendor

Individuals were asked to rate the effectiveness of the services from the service provider or vendor. The majority rated the services from the service provider as “effective”. One-third of the respondents indicated that the services were either somewhat ineffective or ineffective.

Responsiveness of Service Provider or Vendor

Respondents were also asked to rate the responsiveness of the service provider or vendor. The margin of difference between “good” and “excellent” in response to the question is narrow (n=1). The majority of respondents rated the responsiveness of the service provider as “good”. An equal number of respondents (n=6) cited either “fair” or “poor” response to the question.

The final question asked of respondents was whether they would recommend their service provider or vendor to others served by

DARS. Over 60% of the respondents indicated that they would recommend their service provider or vendor to others.

Community Partner Results: Service Providers and Vendor

Partner survey respondents were asked a series of questions regarding vocational rehabilitation service provider services in order to identify the availability of services to consumers and whether or not the services are meeting the consumers' needs.

Services Readily Available to DARS Consumers

Partners were provided with a list of 18 items and asked to select the services that are readily available to DARS consumers. One hundred twenty-seven partners responded to the question. Four items were cited by over 82% of partners as services that are readily available to DARS consumers (job search/placement/retention, pre-employment transition services, supported employment, job training). Maintenance or income assistance was cited the least number of times by partners in response to the question.

Services Not Readily Available to DARS Consumers

Partner survey respondents were also asked to indicate which services are not readily available in the area of the state where the respondent works. There was no limit to the number of services that could be chosen. The top five answers for services that are not readily available to DARS consumers are: housing, maintenance or income assistance, health insurance, personal care attendants, and vehicle modification.

Service Providers Meeting Consumer Needs

Partner survey respondents were asked to identify how frequently services providers in the Commonwealth of Virginia were able to meet DARS consumers' vocational rehabilitation needs. Roughly 47% of the partner respondents indicated that service providers are able to meet the needs of DARS consumers "most of the time". The next most frequently selected choice of the partners was "some of the time".

Services That Providers Are Most Effective In Providing to DARS Consumers

Partners were provided a list of 18 items and asked to identify the services that service providers were most effective in providing DARS consumers. There was no limit to the number of services that could be chosen. One hundred and eight partners responded to the question. Seventy-three percent of respondents selected supported employment as the service that service providers are most effective in

providing to DARS consumers. Job search/placement/retention, pre-employment transition services, job training and disability benefits counseling rounded out the top five responses.

Consumer Needs Services Providers are Unable to Meet

Partner survey respondents were given an open-ended question and asked to identify the vocational rehabilitation needs that service providers were unable to meet in their area. Fifty-eight respondents provided a narrative response indicating various service gaps. The following specific services were noted three or more times in the comments received and a collection of quotes in response to the question; transportation, customized employment, long term support, in-school programming for students and families, benefits counseling, services for individuals with significant disabilities, pre-ETS and mental health.

Primary Reasons Service Providers are Unable to Meet Consumers' Needs

Partners were provided with a list of five reasons and asked to identify the primary reasons why vocational rehabilitation providers were unable to meet consumers' needs. Partners were able to select more than one item if desired. Ninety-four partners answered the question.

In response to the question, 60.6% agreed that there are not enough service providers available in their area. Fifty-five percent cited clients barriers that prevent interactions with service providers that service providers are unable to meet consumers' needs. Twenty-seven comments were received in the category "other" and items cited include lack of communication by DARS counselors with consumers and service providers; lack of individualized services, person-centered plans, and vocational counseling; staff turnover at DARS; transportation; lack of partnerships with employers; and employment budget and willingness to work with DARS.

Top Three Changes that Enable Partners to Better Serve DARS Consumers

Partner survey respondents were presented with a list of thirteen options and asked to identify the top three changes that would enable them to better assist their DARS consumers.

A total of one hundred and two partners provided a response to this question. "More streamlined processes" was the most frequently cited item (36%). "Improved communication with referring DARS counselor" and "smaller caseload" rounded up the top three changes

that would enable partners to better serve DARS consumers. Increased options for technology used to communicate with clients was the least frequently cited item in response to this question.

Staff Survey Results: Service Providers and Vendors

Services Readily Available to DARS Consumers

Staff survey respondents were asked a series of six questions regarding rehabilitation service provider and vendor services. The purpose of the questions was to identify the availability of services that DARS refers or recommends to clients and to understand whether or not the services are meeting the clients' needs.

Staff were provided with a list of 19 items and asked to select the services that are readily available to DARS clients. A total of 146 staff responded to the question.

Staff and partner results in response to the question are similar, with a slightly different rank order. Seven items were cited by over 83 percent of staff as services that are readily available to DARS clients (supported employment, pre-employment transition services, job search/placement/retention, vocational/postsecondary education, disability benefits counseling, job training, assistive technology).

Services Not Readily Available to DARS Consumers

Staff were asked to indicate what services were not readily available in the area of Virginia where they work. There was no limit to the number of services that could be chosen. A total of 66 staff respondents answered the question.

Over 79% of staff respondents cited "housing" as the top service not readily available to DARS consumers. Maintenance or income assistance, customized employment, personal care attendants and transportation assistance rounded out the top five services that staff cited as not being readily available to DARS consumers.

Staff survey respondents were asked to identify how frequently service providers in the Commonwealth of Virginia were able to meet DARS clients' rehabilitation service needs.

The majority of respondents (67.4%) indicated that service providers were meeting the needs of DARS clients "most of the time". A significantly lower rate of respondents indicated that service providers are meeting the needs of clients "some of the time" (28.3%).

Service Providers Meeting Consumers' Needs

Staff survey respondents were asked to identify how frequently service providers in the Commonwealth of Virginia were able to meet

DARS consumers' rehabilitation service needs.

The majority of respondents (67.4%) indicated that service providers were meeting the needs of DARS consumers "most of the time". A significantly lower rate (28.3%) of respondents indicated that service providers are meeting the needs of clients "some of the time".

Service Needs that Service Providers Are Unable to Meet

Staff respondents were provided a list of 19 items and asked to identify the service needs that vocational rehabilitation service providers were unable to meet. There was no limit to the number of services staff could choose. One hundred and fourteen respondents participated in answering this survey question.

Staff cited "housing" as the top service need that vocational rehabilitation service providers are unable to meet. "Customized employment" ranked in the second position by a difference of 14.1% (n=16) from the top item "housing." Although roughly two-thirds of staff (66.4%) identified "mental health treatment" as a readily available service to DARS consumers, almost 30 % of staff identified the service as one of the service needs that rehabilitation service providers are unable to meet.

Four comments were received in the category "other" and one comment contained the phrase "I don't know." The phrase "helping clients actually apply for jobs" and "work adjustment training" were cited one time. An appeal for DARS to examine services for the deaf and hard of hearing was identified in the remaining comment.

Primary Reasons Service Providers are Unable to Meet Consumers' Needs

Staff were provided with a list of six reasons and asked to identify the primary reasons why VR service providers were unable to meet clients' service needs. Respondents were able to select more than one item if desired. A total of one hundred and eighteen staff answered the question.

Staff (78%) selected "not enough service providers are available" as their first choice of primary reasons why service providers are unable to meet consumers' vocational rehabilitation needs and 42.4% selected "consumer barriers prevent successful interactions with service providers" as their second reason for why services providers are unable to meet consumers' needs. Slightly more than one-fourth of staff cited the item "burden caused by administrative processes" as a primary reason why service providers are unable to meet clients' needs. Comments received in the category "other, please describe" cited items such as transportation, staffing turnover at DARS and with ESOs, agency policies, housing and long waitlists as primary reasons

why the service needs of clients are not met by providers.

Most Important Change Service Providers Could Make to Support Consumer Efforts to Achieve Employment Goals

Staff respondents were asked an open-ended question to identify the most important change that service providers could make to support consumers' efforts to achieve their employment goals. A total of 94 responses were received. Content analysis indicated consistent themes regarding improving communication with DARS; addressing transportation needs; hiring more job coaches and improving the quality of the job coaches; DARS creating and providing in-house job coaches; hiring more counselors at DARS; increasing the number of service providers; developing employer relationships and increasing connections with in-demand industries; and DARS hiring staff with ASL fluency and deafness knowledge, skills and abilities instead of paying for a service provider (job coach), interpreter, and their travel times.

The 2025 CSNA identified a need to establish, enhance, or expand community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) in Virginia that serve individuals with disabilities. In Virginia, CRPs are referred to as Employment Service Organizations (ESOs).

DARS relies heavily on ESOs to deliver a wide range of employment services. While areas like Fairfax have numerous ESOs, rural regions lack providers and critical services such as supported employment. There is also a need to improve job placements to ensure they align with consumers' abilities and capabilities. To address this, DARS is implementing a Value-Based Purchasing (VBP) model to incentivize ESOs for high-quality placements.

High staff turnover among ESOs impacts timely service delivery, and a shortage of bilingual staff limits services for Hispanic individuals. Few ESOs offer customized employment, and staff attrition after training hinders implementation. Northern Virginia faces a shortage of vocational evaluators, causing delays of six to eight weeks for assessments and slowing rapid engagement efforts.

Additionally, there is a need for more workplace readiness and work adjustment services, particularly for individuals with behavioral health disabilities. Expanding financial literacy and benefits planning services is also essential to empower consumers.

Individual Survey Results: Service Providers and Vendors

Respondents were asked about their experience with DARS-referred service providers and vendors, including service quality, effectiveness, responsiveness, and likelihood of recommendation. Of 63 respondents, 54% received services from providers referred by DARS. Among 33 responses on service quality, 42.4% rated it as "good." Most respondents found services effective, though one-third rated them somewhat ineffective or ineffective. Responsiveness was generally rated as "good," with a narrow margin between "good" and "excellent," while six respondents cited "fair" or "poor." Over 60% indicated they would recommend their provider or vendor to others.

Community Partner Survey Results: Service Providers and Vendors

The partner survey assessed the availability and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services for DARS consumers. Of 127 respondents, over 82% reported that job search, pre-employment transition services, supported employment, and job training are readily available, while maintenance or income assistance was least available. Conversely, housing, income assistance, health insurance, personal care attendants, and vehicle modification were most frequently cited as unavailable.

Partner survey results indicate that approximately 47% of respondents believe service providers meet DARS consumers' vocational rehabilitation needs "most of the time," while the next most common response was "some of the time." When asked which services providers deliver most effectively, 73% identified supported employment, followed by job search and placement, pre-employment transition services, job training, and disability benefits counseling.

Despite these strengths, partners reported various gaps in services. Commonly cited unmet needs include transportation, customized employment, long-term support, in-school programming for students and families, benefits counseling, services for individuals with significant disabilities, pre-employment transition services, and mental health support.

The primary barriers to meeting consumer needs include insufficient providers (60.6%) and client-related challenges (55%). Additional issues noted were poor communication, lack of individualized services, staff turnover, transportation, limited employer partnerships, and budget constraints. When asked about changes to improve service delivery, partners most frequently cited streamlined processes (36%), improved communication with DARS counselors, and smaller caseloads.

Staff Survey Results: Service Providers and Vendors

The staff survey examined the availability and effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation services recommended by DARS. Of 146 respondents, over 83% reported that supported employment, pre-employment transition services, job search and placement, vocational education, disability benefits counseling, job training, and assistive technology are readily available. Conversely, housing was identified as the most unavailable service, followed by income assistance, customized employment, personal care attendants, and transportation.

When asked about service effectiveness, 67.4% indicated providers meet consumer needs "most of the time," while 28.3% said "some of the time." Housing was again cited as the top unmet need, with customized employment ranking second. Despite mental health treatment being widely available, nearly 30% reported gaps in this area. Additional comments highlighted issues such as lack of job application support, work adjustment training, and services for individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing.

The primary barriers to meeting consumer needs include insufficient providers (78%), consumer-related challenges (42.4%), and administrative burdens. Other concerns included transportation, staff turnover, agency policies, housing shortages, and long waitlists. When asked about the most important changes providers could make, staff emphasized improving communication with DARS, addressing transportation needs, hiring and training more job coaches, increasing the number of counselors and service providers, strengthening employer partnerships, and hiring staff with ASL fluency and expertise in deafness.

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 2025 Retreat and Quarterly meeting. Based on those discussions, the goals, priorities, and strategies were revised 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, POST-SECONDARY 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.

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

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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: Offer 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 support 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.

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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 support 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).

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.

Goals are necessary for the improvement of any program. To ensure that goals are being met their must be a way to assess if DARS is on track to meet those goals. DARS will continue to

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employ a variety of tracking and measuring mechanisms to determine if the agency is on track. Many of the strategies listed above have direct measurable elements that will be used to determine if goals are on track or if the agency needs to reevaluate its current position. For example, several strategies, such as credential attainment, are gathered through WIOA measures. Other information is collected and provided to the field on a monthly basis through a scorecard of various measures. In addition, Virginia is preparing to embark on a new CSNA which will provide additional information on the current landscape and where the agency needs to go in the future. DARS also conducts assessments of provider enrollment, business development, client outcomes, and seeks regular input both formally and informally from various stakeholders. Trainings are tracked and regularly reviewed to ensure they are meeting the needs of those attending.

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;

List the goals/priorities and discuss the progress or completion of each goal/priority and related strategies

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

Goal 1.1: Providing services and support 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.

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Pathways has developed a group, Work Wi\$, 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, 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 April 2023, a new program, the Workplace Readiness Program (WRP) was implemented to meet the needs of employers. WRP 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

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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 one-stop 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 one-stop 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 one-stop centers.

DARS VR has full office operations in several one-stop centers, statewide and works collaboratively with center partners to share employee information across systems. VR counselors utilize this information in guidance and counseling with consumers throughout the

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VR process.

DARS VR maintains a regularly scheduled staffing presence in all comprehensive one-stop 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 ESOs through the ESO provider network and the Employment Services Organizations' Steering Committee (ESOSC). Through the ESOSC we receive stakeholder input from ESOs 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 ESOs.

DRS continues to utilize the Employment Services Organization Outcome Report to assist ESOs, 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 \$16.00/hour.

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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 to 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.

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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/Latinx 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 2023 one new program was created in far southwest Virginia. In FFY 2024, 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 (VDOE) 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

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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 2nd quarter post exit, employment rate 4th quarter post exit, median earnings at 2nd quarter post exit, credential attainment and measurable skills gains.

The negotiated performance measures below were agreed upon in 2024.

Indicator	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2025 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	59%	59.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	57%	57.5%
Median Earnings (second Quarter After Exit)	\$4,173	\$4,200
Credential Attainment Rate	63%	66%
Measurable Skill Gains	89%	91.5%

Performance results for PY 2024 are below:

Indicator	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2024 Results (DARS and DBVI)
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	54.2%	54.5%
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	53.9%	53.9%

Indicator	PY 2024 Negotiated Level	PY 2024 Results (DARS and DBVI)
Median Earnings (second Quarter After Exit)	\$4,274.48	\$4,366
Credential Attainment Rate	32%	56.8%
Measurable Skill Gains	72.4%	77.8%

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 2024 there was a 69.3% 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 49 Windmills trainings to over 2030 individuals with state and federal agencies, businesses, and community partners over PY 2024. .

The Pathways grant has completed the first four years of funding and will move to statewide rollout this year. After four years, over 1,400 participants have been served, meeting the goal of numbers served for the grant. In addition, there have been 471 successful closures with an average hourly wage of \$20.76 and weekly hours averaged 32 per week. There have been a total of 1,987 referrals filed, but not all of those received Pathways services. Total requests for Alternative Hiring (AHP) letters from DARS, DBVI, and non VR individuals is 4,053. This includes 1,051 non VR participants who received letters. Not every request resulted in a letter as some were not eligible for the AHP. From these requests, 569 were referred to DARS and 335 chose to open cases with DARS to receive services. This has resulted in 175 AHP executive hires and an additional 49 hires through VCCS, who adopted the AHP process more recently. These numbers may be low, as the Commonwealth has moved to Page Up where tracking is more reliable. These numbers include DARS and non DARS participants.

Funds continue to support Virginia's Statewide Independent Living Council (SILC) and DARS' State Rehabilitation Council (SRC). Innovation and expansion funds for the SILC are used to assist in the maintenance of Council operations as well as to partially fund two Part B

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subrecipient grant awards. The SRC uses funding to also support Council operations, including the ability to meet in various geographic locations around the state. The SRC also holds an annual retreat that coincides with the regularly scheduled November meeting. Funds may also be used to support SRC member attendance at educational and networking opportunities such as the National Council of State Rehabilitation Councils.

**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.

**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 2024, 3,605 individuals received services through DARS Supported Employment programs via Title I case service funds (\$12,127,672.13). 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 five 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 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 2024, these organizations provided Supported Employment services to 4,389 individuals, including youth with the most significant disabilities. During FFY 2023, 3,605 individuals received services through DARS Supported Employment Program. The Department projects that it will serve this number of individuals in 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 1 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 2023, 336 youth and in FFY 2024, 415 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 arises to ensure that there is both a 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 C.F.R. § 363.4(A) AND 34 C.F.R. § 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 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 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 state general funds were made available by the Virginia General Assembly for extended services provided by 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), is working with Griffin and Hammis, LLC to provide training and technical assistance to ESOs

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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.

DBHDS and DARS specifically coordinate around the provision of VR and Medicaid waiver services to ensure that VR clients are receiving the support they need to attain and maintain employment. Policies and agreements are in place to ensure that clients receive services and referrals in the most appropriate manner including when categories are closed under Order of Selection and when clients need long term supports.

The Virginia Department of Education has actively funded the PERT (post- secondary education rehabilitation training) program at the Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center. The program focuses on youth with disabilities and fosters career exploration through pre-ETS and career academies. DARS and DOE also collaborate on multiple other projects coordinating opportunities for shared clients.

DARS local offices work closely with local entities such as community services boards (CSBs), WIOA Youth Programs, local departments of social services, the ARC, Adult Education, community colleges, and the CILs. Each of these programs has their own set of funding, services, and eligibility criteria and so staff help to identify these resources and refer youth clients based upon their needs.

American Job Centers (AJCs) are also an important partner in the provision of services to youth with disabilities. AJCs have funds specifically set aside to serve youth. DARS has developed a partnership where local AJCs will actively recruit VR clients to participate in training and activities specifically designed for this age group.

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 C.F.R. § 361.29(b), annual estimates must include the following projections:

1. ESTIMATES FOR NEXT FEDERAL FISCAL YEAR—

A. VR PROGRAM; AND

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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*	19,439	19,439	\$ 26,517,144.81	0
SD**	3,589	3,589	\$ 1,456,313.05	0
NSD***	142	142	\$ 76,107.27	0
Total	23,170	23,170	\$ 28,049,565.12	0

*MSD = Most Significant Disability

**SD = Significant Disability

*** NSD = All Other Eligible Individuals

B. SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM.

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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*	5,463	5,463	\$ 12,209,670.97	N/A

G. ORDER OF SELECTION

1. 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.

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

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

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2. 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 an order of selection policy and priority categories, cognizant of the fact that if trends hold, DARS anticipates that funding for its vocational rehabilitation services will not be sufficient to provide services to all eligible individuals in the future. Based upon the growing number of participants and expenditures along with analysis of historical trends, DARS anticipates potentially closing categories in FFY 2026.

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 PY 2026, 16,834 individuals will be served; 2,470 will exit with employment after receiving services; 3,533 individuals will exit without employment after receiving services for a total of 6,003 closed after receiving services, 10,831 will remain open. In PY 2027, 17,137 individuals will be served; 2,570 will exit with employment after receiving services; 3,607 individuals will exit without employment after receiving services for a total of 6,177 closed after receiving services, 10,960 cases will remain open. Cost of services: PY 2026 - \$26,206,817.74; PY 2027 - \$26,393,568.37.

Priority Category 2: In PY 2026, 3,477 individuals will be served; 519 will exit with employment after receiving services; 795 individuals will exit without employment after receiving services for a total of 1,314 closed after receiving services, 2,163 will remain open. In PY 2027, 3,540 individuals will be served; 540 will exit with employment after receiving services; 812 individuals will exit without employment after receiving services for a total of 1,352 closed after receiving services, 2,188 cases will remain open. Cost of services: PY 2026 - \$2,162,560.42; PY 2027 - \$2,177,970.90.

Priority Category 3: In PY 2026, 143 individuals will be served; 31 will exit with employment after receiving services; 39 individuals will exit without employment after receiving services for a total of 70 closed after receiving services, 73 will remain open. In PY 2027, 145 individuals will be served; 32 will exit with employment after receiving services; 40 individuals will exit without employment after receiving services for a total of 72 closed after receiving services, 73 cases will remain open. Cost of services: PY 2026 - \$85,364.23; PY 2027 - \$85,972.53.

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

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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 2026 and FFY 2027.

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 2026 0 days; FFY 2027 0 days. Priority Category 2: FFY 2026 0 days; FFY 2027 0 days. Priority Category 3: FFY 2026 0 days; FFY 2027 0 days.

3. 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.

H. WAIVER OF STATEWIDENESS.

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 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is requesting a waiver of statewideness or has a previously approved waiver of statewideness, describe the types of services and the local entities providing such services under the waiver of statewideness and how the agency has complied with the requirements in 34 C.F.R. § 361.26. If the VR agency is not requesting or does not have an approved waiver of statewideness, please indicate "not applicable."

Not applicable since DARS does not request a waiver.

I. COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT.

In accordance with the requirements in Section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act, the VR agency must develop and maintain annually a description (consistent with the purposes of the Rehabilitation Act) of the VR agency's comprehensive system of personnel development, which shall include a description of the procedures and activities the State VR agency will undertake to ensure it has an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professionals and paraprofessionals that provides the following:

1. ANALYSIS OF CURRENT PERSONNEL AND PROJECTED PERSONNEL NEEDS INCLUDING—

- A. THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL CURRENTLY NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL CATEGORY; AND
- B. THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF PERSONNEL THAT ARE EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY IN THE PROVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES, INCLUDING RATIOS OF QUALIFIED VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS;
- C. PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL, BROKEN DOWN BY PERSONNEL

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CATEGORY, WHO WILL BE NEEDED BY THE VR AGENCY TO PROVIDE VR SERVICES IN 5 YEARS BASED ON PROJECTIONS OF THE NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED, INCLUDING INDIVIDUALS WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES, THE NUMBER OF PERSONNEL EXPECTED TO RETIRE OR LEAVE THE FIELD, AND OTHER RELEVANT FACTORS.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Personnel Category	No. of Personnel Employed	No. of Personnel Currently Needed	Projected No. of Personnel Needed in 5 Years
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor - VRC	172 (including WWRC)	10	185
Placement Counselor	24	1	30
Vocational Evaluator	9	1	14
Program Support	29	0	29
Other Service Staff	71	7 (Total 78)	78
Managers	35	1	36

D. RATIO OF QUALIFIED VR COUNSELORS TO CLIENTS:

1:123

E. PROJECTED NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS TO BE SERVED IN 5 YEARS:

23,000

2. DATA AND INFORMATION ON PERSONNEL PREPARATION AND DEVELOPMENT, RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION, AND STAFF DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING THE FOLLOWING:

A. A LIST OF THE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE STATE THAT ARE PREPARING VR PROFESSIONALS, BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS ENROLLED AT EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS, BROKEN DOWN BY TYPE OF PROGRAM; AND THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS WHO GRADUATED DURING THE PRIOR YEAR FROM EACH OF THOSE INSTITUTIONS WITH CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, OR WITH THE CREDENTIALS FOR CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE, BROKEN DOWN BY THE PERSONNEL CATEGORY FOR WHICH THEY HAVE RECEIVED, OR HAVE THE CREDENTIALS TO RECEIVE, CERTIFICATION OR LICENSURE.

Select 'Edit' to edit the narrative.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

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Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
Virginia Commonwealth University	Rehab Counseling		46
	Clinical Mental Health	19	

Institute of Higher Education	Type of Program	No. of Students Enrolled	No. of Prior Year Graduates
	Dual RC + MH	58 30	
George Washington University	Rehab Counseling	33	6
West Virginia University	Rehab Counseling	69	19
Norfolk State University	Rehab Counseling	No information	No information
Winston Salem State University	Rehab Counseling	No information	No information

B. THE VR AGENCY'S PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT, PREPARATION AND RETENTION OF QUALIFIED PERSONNEL, WHICH ADDRESSES THE CURRENT AND PROJECTED NEEDS FOR QUALIFIED PERSONNEL; AND THE COORDINATION AND FACILITATION OF EFFORTS BETWEEN THE VR AGENCY AND INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS TO RECRUIT, PREPARE, AND RETAIN PERSONNEL WHO ARE QUALIFIED, INCLUDING PERSONNEL FROM MINORITY BACKGROUNDS AND PERSONNEL WHO ARE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

The Division for Rehabilitative Services (DRS) is committed to a highly qualified and diverse talent pool that is reflective of the diversity of our communities and customers. To achieve this goal, DRS in partnership with DARS Human Resources has continued our recruitment plan that includes outreach to all surrounding University Rehabilitation programs and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), comprehensive internship programs as well as mentorship programs with particular emphasis on attracting and retaining candidates from minority backgrounds and those with disabilities. These efforts include targeted marketing to student groups representative of diverse backgrounds, direct work with University ADA and disability advocate personnel as well as continued leveraging of our Disability Innovation Grant – PATHWAYS. The opportunity ensures priority application screening for personnel from minority backgrounds and individuals with disabilities in the hiring process. This opportunity continues to open doors for apprenticeship hiring for staff in our agency. Pathways affords collaboration and staff embedded in the State Department of Human Resource Management and the Virginia Department of Labor and Industry.

The comprehensive Personnel Plan and agency recruitment and selection policies assure that all newly recruited staff meet minimum state requirements. Information from the Comprehensive Personnel Plan is also used to refine job classifications, job descriptions, and performance standards. DARS Management conducts annual reviews of performance standards to ascertain whether the standards continue to meet requirements and needs and offer recommendations, as appropriate.

DARS cooperates with Virginia colleges, universities, and higher education institutions in other states to place student interns in VR counselor, vocational evaluator, physical/occupational therapy, audiology, nursing and other appropriate professional positions. Paid internships are

provided to graduate students, when possible, along with unpaid practicum and internship placements. Since 2022, fourteen internships were initiated which resulted in two students securing full time VR counselor employment with the agency. The Department is committed to continuing formal and informal internship programs as a workforce planning tool in an effort to attract and retain qualified professionals.

C. DESCRIPTION OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND ACTIVITIES THAT ENSURE ALL PERSONNEL EMPLOYED BY THE VR AGENCY RECEIVE APPROPRIATE AND ADEQUATE TRAINING AND CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS:

I. PARTICULARLY WITH RESPECT TO ASSESSMENT, VOCATIONAL COUNSELING, JOB PLACEMENT, AND REHABILITATION TECHNOLOGY, INCLUDING TRAINING IMPLEMENTED IN COORDINATION WITH ENTITIES CARRYING OUT STATE PROGRAMS UNDER SECTION 4 OF THE ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY ACT OF 1998; AND

II. PROCEDURES FOR THE ACQUISITION AND DISSEMINATION OF SIGNIFICANT KNOWLEDGE FROM RESEARCH AND OTHER SOURCES TO VR AGENCY PROFESSIONALS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS AND FOR PROVIDING TRAINING REGARDING THE AMENDMENTS TO THE REHABILITATION ACT MADE BY THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT.

Staff development is critical to providing quality services. From new counselors to seasoned staff, ensuring professional growth and up to date knowledge is necessary for the success of DARS' VR clients. To ensure new counselors have the knowledge and tools they need to succeed, New Counselor Skills Training (NCST) was redesigned in 2023. This training is required of all Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) staff and is offered to any other field staff who would benefit from attending.

A well-designed and quality training program is an essential part of the onboarding process with new employees, while aiding in staff retention. With creating a new and streamlined curriculum, new employees receive a more focused and strategic training that increases competency, confidence, and retention. Having an established training guide, managers and supervisors save time and ensure new staff are onboarded consistently and comprehensively across the Commonwealth. The training model is comprised of Foundational Learning (to be completed within the first 3 months of hire) followed by four strategically developed Units covering various topics of the VR Process from Application to Closure. Each Unit encompasses four sections; consisting of pre-work designed for completion prior to the in-person training, a 2 day in-person training, homework to promote application/practice and ending with a virtual check-in with the trainers to follow up on any concerns/issues that may have risen. This re-designed training structure moves from four intensive days to six months of intensive training conducted in a variety of adult learning methods. Providing this unified robust training curriculum, new hires should receive a comprehensive streamlined training to enhance their learning within the state VR program.

DARS provides a comprehensive in-service training program for VR staff with the use of VR funds earmarked for training purposes. The training programs planned in a given year are identified from training needs assessments, information from the VR consumer satisfaction survey, and discussions with agency management and the State Rehabilitation Council. DARS utilizes the training funds for training activities to include, but not limited to, professional and leadership development, assistive technology, caseload management, job development and

placement, and Pre-employment and transition services for youth with disabilities. Internal and external staff training opportunities are communicated to staff on a weekly basis. These trainings include nationally based opportunities as well as Virginia VR specific topics that focus on process improvement and quality assurance. Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credits are offered as appropriate. VR staff also acquire knowledge of research activities with their involvement with the National Rehabilitation Association and are provided information and guidance around Virginia Rehabilitation Association membership.

VR Rehabilitation Technology Services (RTS) and AT Act Program/Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) staff work collaboratively to address the assistive technology equipment and service needs of VR participants and staff which includes ensuring that VR staff are educated on AT needs and options. VATS staff are collocated in VR offices and have a highly collaborative relationship with the VR Program to improve access to and acquisition of AT devices and services for VR staff and clients. VATS' statewide AT Lending Library is also collocated with the VR program's Northern Virginia AT Lab. In addition to the main AT library, VATS maintains partnerships with several disability service organizations, to include DARS AT Labs, to provide statewide access to equipment for constituent training, demonstration and/or loan. VATS makes equipment available at DARS AT Labs for State Level and State Leadership activities that VR would not normally provide or to implement a pilot program.

VATS participates in weekly DARS AT Specialist and bi-weekly Sensory Processing virtual meetings to discuss new and emerging technologies, constituent needs, and services. VATS collaborates with the VR Rehabilitation Technology Services (RTS) team to provide hands-on AT demonstrations and trainings regionally for new and seasoned VR staff to improve access to VATS services and to keep staff engaged with AT and rehabilitation engineering services. VATS collaborates with VR RTS staff to address AT access and training needs of cohorts of VR clients in Time Management trainings, College Preparation seminars, and a Sensory Processing Group. In addition, VATS and VR RTS staff collaborate to develop an AT training at Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center for VR staff.

3. DESCRIPTION OF VR AGENCY POLICIES AND PROCEDURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PERSONNEL STANDARDS CONSISTENT WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B) TO ENSURE THAT VR AGENCY PROFESSIONAL AND PARAPROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL ARE ADEQUATELY TRAINED AND PREPARED, INCLUDING—

A. STANDARDS THAT ARE CONSISTENT WITH ANY NATIONAL OR STATE-APPROVED OR -RECOGNIZED CERTIFICATION, LICENSING, REGISTRATION, OR OTHER COMPARABLE REQUIREMENTS THAT APPLY TO THE PROFESSION OR DISCIPLINE IN WHICH SUCH PERSONNEL ARE PROVIDING VR SERVICES; AND

B. THE ESTABLISHMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF EDUCATION AND EXPERIENCE REQUIREMENTS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 101(A)(7)(B)(II) OF THE REHABILITATION ACT, TO ENSURE THAT THE PERSONNEL HAVE A 21ST CENTURY UNDERSTANDING OF THE EVOLVING LABOR FORCE AND THE NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES.

To comply with the qualified personnel requirement of the Rehabilitation Act DARS requires VR counselors to possess “a master's or doctoral degree in a field of study such as vocational rehabilitation counseling, law, social work, psychology, disability studies, business administration, human resources, special education, management, public administration, or another field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector, in a disability field, or in both business-related and rehabilitation-related field...” (34 C.F.R. § 361.18 (c)(1)(ii)(B)).

A DARS' vocational rehabilitation counselor will be considered qualified personnel for the purposes of determining eligibility for the VR program. (34 CFR §361.42)

DARS operates a tiered structure for VR counselors' qualifications. This leveled approach seeks to address challenges in hiring and retaining qualified and effective VR counselors. VR Counselors 1 are required to hold a Master's Degree in a field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector, in a disability or human services field, or in both business-related and rehabilitation-related field (including degrees listed in 34 C.F.R. § 361.18 (c)(1)(ii)(B). VR Counselors 2 hold a Master's Degree, as previously noted, and possess the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credential. To recognize and reward the highly valued CRC credential, DARS will utilize an incentive plan, if feasible, to encourage staff to obtain and maintain their CRC credential.

To ensure that Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors have the appropriate 21st Century knowledge related to the evolving labor force and needs of people with disabilities, DARS provides access to national training provided by CSAVR and University based programs through our 'Training Tuesday' all staff updates. Staff are encouraged to register for and attend relevant training to increase their knowledge base and functional abilities. Labor market training is also included in our New Counselor Skills (NCST) curriculum. All Virginia VR offices are connected to American Job Centers (Virginia Works) across the Commonwealth and in many locations, are co-located. In addition, VR leadership has an active seat on our Workforce Development Boards (WDB) to ensure that local labor market and employer information is shared. This arrangement provides staff with access to labor market trends and career-cluster based employment with targeted industries. In partnership with our Business Development Managers, who work closely with employers to understand the accommodation needs of people with disabilities, we are able to successfully meet the unique employment needs of VR clients. Our Business Development Managers and Job Placement Counselors work closely with VRC staff to ensure up to date understanding of the labor market and to provide access to employers on behalf of our VR consumers.

4. METHOD(S) THE VR AGENCY USES TO ENSURE THAT PERSONNEL ARE ABLE TO COMMUNICATE IN APPROPRIATE MODES OF COMMUNICATION WITH OR IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE OF APPLICANTS OR ELIGIBLE INDIVIDUALS WHO HAVE LIMITED ENGLISH SPEAKING ABILITY.

DARS continues to address the communication needs of consumers by having counselors who specialize in caseloads serving individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing and has other employees who can communicate in sign language. There are nine "dedicated" Regional Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (RCDs) across the Commonwealth, which include several Rehabilitation Counselors who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing. In addition, there is a statewide Transition Specialist for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, who also serves as the statewide consultant on Pre-ETS/Transition issues. WWRC also has sign language interpreters for clients and employees in need of these services. Sign language and foreign language interpreters and translators are also contracted as needed for employees and clients in need of these services. Counselors use other resources, including assistive technology, to communicate with consumers with individualized needs. All VR forms used by the public have been translated into Spanish and are posted on the Internet for public use. In addition, these forms may be translated into other languages based upon client need.

There are also videophones located in each Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (RCDs') office, State Coordinator for the Deaf, Statewide Transition Specialist for the Deaf, and in the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services Unit at Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation

Center (WWRC). This allows staff and consumers to access Video Relay Services and for consumers to call in “point to point” to discuss their services with counselors.

The agency is always reviewing evolving communication technology and continues to work with state and national community partners (Workforce Development Centers, Community Services Boards, the Department for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired, Local Deaf Service Centers and CSAVR Deaf Professionals Network) to pilot software to enhance telecommunications and accommodation needs of staff via text and video services.

The agency continues to develop and implement plans to enhance outreach and services to individuals with disabilities from different ethnic backgrounds, including those with limited English proficiency. DARS has a number of regional and statewide resources available to address the unique service needs of this population, particularly as it relates to interpreting and translation services. In addition, DARS has several Spanish-speaking counselors.

5. AS APPROPRIATE, DESCRIBE THE PROCEDURES AND ACTIVITIES TO COORDINATE THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT'S COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM OF PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT WITH PERSONNEL DEVELOPMENT UNDER THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is the state agency responsible for implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004. The DARS and VDOE cooperative agreement outlines collaborative practices on respective policies, eligibility criteria, information requirements, agency programs and services and the coordination of transition 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 a statewide Community of Practice on Transition. Representatives from DARS, VDOE, local education agencies (LEAs), and the Department for the Blind and Vision Impaired (DBVI) conduct meetings and trainings across the Commonwealth to discuss transition and vocational services available to students with disabilities. This collaboration and flow of communication allows for improved partnerships, creative responses to identified needs, and recommendations for future efforts.

The State Coordinator for the Deaf serves 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 on Deafness and a Regional Counselor for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing also served 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 Statewide Transition Specialist on Deafness is part of the statewide team coordinating outreach activities with Teachers of the Deaf/Hard of Hearing 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 Transition and Education Services Manager utilizes an interactive webinar series to streamline processes and improve communication to/from field staff involved with serving students with disabilities. The webinar series offers 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. Similar technology is also used for meetings with local office and school division staff. The DARS Transition and Education Services Manager and other staff facilitate meetings by using the Zoom Meeting platform. This enables teams to meet online and collaboratively discuss partnerships and programming.

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. Prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic, annual in-person summits were held, and participants 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 Commonwealth 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 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 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 work groups 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 (Opening Doors – Unlocking Potential). After the COVID 19 pandemic in 2020 the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Program successfully held a three-day summer program for students who are deaf and hard of hearing in 2021 at WWRC. This 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. 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.

J. 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 22nd 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 2025, DARS had 3,036 Potentially Eligible cases (i.e., students with disabilities). PE applications increased by 7% over SFY 2024 and we had a higher percentage of SWDs moving from Potentially Eligible to VR cases – from 26% in October 2024 to 36.3% in July 2025. DARS provided 25,694 Pre-ETS services for SFY 2025.

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 in 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.

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- Collaborating with Employment Service Organizations and Virginia's Centers for Independent Living to increase Pre-ETS activities offerings that would assist in improving the LEA, DARS and student connections and outcomes.
- Collaborating with Employment Service Organization staff to increase awareness of local vendor programs that could provide services to schools and transition age youth.
- Previously DARS had 20 Project SEARCH sites in Virginia. Currently there are 17 active Project SEARCH sites in Virginia.
- Expanding the number of Start on Success Programs in Virginia, as appropriate. There are currently 8 programs and Virginia is expected to have ten programs in PY 2025. DARS counselors work closely with each project and DARS provides 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 school-based IEP meetings so that they 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 Services Manager 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 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 Services Manager 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 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.

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 C.F.R. § 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

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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 C.F.R. PART 397 REGARDING STUDENTS AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES WHO ARE SEEKING SUBMINIMUM WAGE EMPLOYMENT; AND

F. ASSURANCE THAT, IN ACCORDANCE WITH 34 C.F.R. § 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 C.F.R. § 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

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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

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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

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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 and select placement counselors, facilitated 49 Windmills trainings to over 2030 individuals this performance year, to state and federal agencies, businesses, and community partners. Attendees of this training have been over 42 state agencies including but not limited to Department of Human Resource Management, Department of General Services, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Social Services, Virginia Department of Transportation, Department of Emergency Services, Department of Behavioral Health, Department of Taxation, Virginia Courts, VA Medical Center, Department of Corrections, Department of Health, Department of Education, Virginia Community College Systems, Department of General Services, Virginia Employment Commission (Virginia Works), VPOR, DEQ, Virginia Department of Accounts, Department of the Treasury, Virginia Lottery, Eastern and Western State Hospital and Virginia State Corporation Commission. Businesses that have attended are but not limited to Huntington Ingalls/Newport News Shipbuilding, Colonna's Shipbuilding, Sentara Health Systems, Food City, Carilion Health, Carter Machinery, Virginia Marine Institute, Virginia Credit Union, Federal Reserve Bank, JMU, VCU Health, Foster Fuels, PCSI, Richmond SHRM, Fredericksburg SHRM and Goodwill. Community partners include but not limited to Adult Education, Sportability, Versability, Brain Injury Services, Career Support Services, RSVP. Volunteers of America, The Choice Group and Build Smart Institute. Windmills is designed to increase awareness of the role that attitudes play in the employment of people with disabilities. Developed in California in 1982, Windmills consists of modular exercises that can be arranged for one to eight one-hour training sessions. Over 72 DARS staff are now certified trainers, whose function is to facilitate exercises and guide group discussions. Year to date, the Business Development Managers and DARS team have facilitated over 235 trainings for 8872 individuals.

Windmills Modules presented:

Perspectives: Examining stereotypes associated with common disabilities.

Profiles: Examine how stereotyping of persons with disabilities may impact employment decisions.

Fact or Fiction: Teaches individuals to anticipate situations that might occur in the workplace with individuals with disabilities.

Whose Fault: Improves individual's awareness of the different players and roles in a successful business practice and to identify more effective ways to communicate and resolve conflict.

Assistive Technology and Reasonable Accommodations: Acquaints individuals with a creative process in identifying possible reasonable accommodations needed.

Taking Emotions out of Emotional Disabilities: Provides suggestions to businesses to consider reasonable accommodations for persons with emotional disabilities in an emotionally neutral environment.

Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI): Explores the assumptions and beliefs about how TBI affect job performance and identify ways to accommodate employees with TBI.

All of the Windmills' modules are approved for both Human Resources Certification Institute and Society for Human Resource Management credits and also expands DARS' ability to

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market the training to employers.

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 2023, 37.4% of DARS cases were 22 years of age or younger. During FFY 2024, 39.3% 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 reinstituted 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.

L. 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 21st Century Assistive Technology Act;

The Virginia Assistive Technology System (VATS) is a statewide program authorized and funded by the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act, which amended the Assistive Technology Acts of 1998 and 2004. The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) is the lead agency and administers Virginia's AT Act program. Under section 4 of the 21st Century Assistive Technology Act, VATS provides State Level and State Leadership activities which include the following assistive technology (AT) services: device demonstration, short-term equipment loans, durable medical equipment reuse, training, information and assistance, technical assistance, and public awareness.

VATS staff are collocated in VR offices and have a highly collaborative relationship with the VR Program to improve access to and acquisition of AT devices and services for VR staff and clients. VATS' statewide AT Lending Library is also collocated with the VR program's Northern Virginia AT Lab. In addition to the main AT library, VATS maintains partnerships with several disability service organizations, to include DARS AT Labs, to provide statewide access to equipment for constituent training, demonstration and/or loan. VATS equipment is available at disability service organization AT access points to extend its capacity to provide statewide services. VATS makes equipment available at DARS AT Labs for State Level and State Leadership activities that VR would not normally provide or to implement a pilot program.

VATS participates in weekly DARS AT Specialist and bi-weekly Sensory Processing virtual meetings to discuss new and emerging technologies, constituent needs, and services. VATS collaborates with the VR Rehabilitation Technology Services (RTS) team to provide hands-on AT demonstrations and trainings regionally for new and seasoned VR staff to improve access to VATS services and to keep staff engaged with AT and rehabilitation engineering services. VATS collaborates with VR RTS staff to address AT access and training needs of cohorts of VR clients in Time Management trainings, College Preparation seminars, and a Sensory Processing Group. VATS collaborates with VR to develop an AT Training at Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center for VR staff.

In FFY 2024, VATS provided services to 7,352 older adults and Virginians with disabilities through the AT Act program. Services included State Level and State Leadership activities to include 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. VATS contracts with VR to provide primary and back-up gently used durable medical equipment for VR program participants with limited resources. In FFY 2024, VATS served eighty-three (83) DRS clients in DME Reuse Program. Since 2010, VATS' reuse program has provided 1,210 DARS clients with primary or back-up equipment needed to maintain or obtain employment.

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

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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 Residential Facilities such as the Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center. DARS also works with 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 support 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 providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities and mental health services is the Department of Behavioral Health and

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Developmental Services (DBHDS). DARS has a Cooperative Agreement with DBHDS 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; AND

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 use 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.

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 use disorders 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

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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 use disorders 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.

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:

The VR agency must select the “Edit” button to review and agree to the VR State plan Assurances.

The State Plan must include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: 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. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: 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 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 CFR 76.140.
3. Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan: The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to:

The State Plan must include
3.a. the establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.b. either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.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.
3.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).
3.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.
3.f. as applicable, the shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.g. statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.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.
3.i. all required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.j. the requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act.
3.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.
3.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).
3.m. the submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:
4.a. comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(E) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.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.
4.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

The State Plan must include
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.
4.d. determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.e. comply with the requirements for the development of an individualized plan for employment in accordance with section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act.
4.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
4.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.
4.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.
4.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.
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,
4.j.i. has developed and will implement,
4.j.i.A. strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and
4.j.i.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
4.j.ii. has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15), 101(a)(25) and 113).
4.j.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.
5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement to the State plan:
5.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.
5.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

The State Plan must include
receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.
6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program (Title VI):
6.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.
6.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 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. Provision of Supported Employment Services:
7.a. The designated State agency assures that it will provide supported employment services as defined in section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act.
7.b. The designated State agency assures that 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.

Do you attest that these assurances will be met?

Yes

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (COMBINED OR GENERAL) CERTIFICATIONS

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

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[1], AND ITS STATE PLAN SUPPLEMENT UNDER TITLE VI OF THE REHABILITATION ACT;

^[1] Public Law 113-128.

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR DESIGNATED STATE UNIT, AS APPROPRIATE

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

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 (DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY OR THE DESIGNATED STATE UNIT WHEN THE DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY HAS A DESIGNATED STATE UNIT)[2] 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[3], THE REHABILITATION ACT, 34 CFR 361.13(B) AND (C), AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[4], 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;

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] 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.

[4] 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 C.F.R. part 361.

ENTER THE NAME OF DESIGNATED STATE AGENCY

Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services

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[5], THE REHABILITATION ACT, AND ALL APPLICABLE REGULATIONS[6], 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;

[5] 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.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

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

DRAFT

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 THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE 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;

ENTER THE NAME OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Kathryn A. Hayfield

8. THE (ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW) HAS THE AUTHORITY TO SUBMIT THE VR SERVICES PORTION OF THE UNIFIED OR COMBINED STATE PLAN AND THE SUPPLEMENT FOR SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES;

ENTER THE TITLE OF AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE BELOW

Kathryn A. Hayfield

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.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Public Law 113-128.

[2] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[3] 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.

[4] 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 C.F.R. part 361.

[5] 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.

[6] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 4, as well as Supported Employment program regulations at 34 C.F.R. part 363.

CERTIFICATION SIGNATURE

To review and complete the Certification section of the VR portion of the State plan, please select the "Edit" button.

Note, please do not edit the table header or formatting. Only edit the table contents.

If you accidentally edit the table headers and structure, open this link to the blank table. You can copy and paste the table into the narrative field, and start over if needed.

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	
Title of Signatory	Commissioner
Date Signed	

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

After the Unified or Combined State Plan submission, each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan's approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

In the final rule implementing WIOA, the Departments indicated that they would initially implement this indicator in the form of a pilot to test the feasibility and rigor of three proposed approaches. During Program Year (PY) 2022, the Departments initiated the rulemaking process to establish a standard definition of Effectiveness in Serving Employers. States will continue to report two of three proposed approaches until the Departments issue the final rule and implement the indicator.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	59%		59.5%	

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	57%		57.5%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$4,173		\$4,200	
Credential Attainment Rate	63.0%		66.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	89.0%		91.5%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION

EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

- Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.
- Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.
- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY.

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

Virginia General Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) operates under the mission of the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) which states; "*DARS' mission: to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families.*" To this end, the Vocational Rehabilitation program ensures quality and equitable access to people with disabilities seeking career/vocational advancement by providing active outreach to marginalized communities, ensuring the availability of our offices/staff in every city and county in Virginia as well as co-locating many of our offices, and providing services in all of the American Job Centers. Through our partnerships with local educational school districts, pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) are available in every school district ensuring that equitable access occurs through K-12 educational

programming. These services are also available to charter and alternative schools and by direct parent referral of a student aged 14-22. DARS VR actively partners with the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to ensure services are available through our Community Service Boards (CSBs) serving every locality in the state. Through state grant funding, specialized vocational rehabilitation counselors (VRCs) serve substance abuse and mental health consumers. These services are available statewide.

Virginia General Vocational Rehabilitation is committed to equitable consumer participation based on the unique and individual needs of consumers. This commitment is outlined and further described in our state VR policies, that ensure equitable access to the vocational rehabilitation program across populations represented in Virginia. Our administration routinely reviews statewide demographic and consumer access data and creates district benchmarks to increase accessibility and outreach to representative populations. To further ensure access to services for all consumers, policies have been updated to ensure interpretation and translation services can be accessed by all consumers. Additionally, DARS Policy staff remains abreast of the disability access requirements in federal and state law and regulation.

2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE
EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER
BENEFICIARIES?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

Virginia General VR is committed to the provision of equitable access to all eligible consumers, and we continue to strategize operational enhancements to address barriers as they are identified. Identified barriers include:

- Geographic proximity to services for consumers

- Qualified vendor capacity to provide Supported and Customized Employment and Pre-Employment Transition Services.
- Individual school/district interest/capacity in partnering with VR for services to students with disabilities.

3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

Geographic proximity to services: Virginia General VR maintains fully staffed, full-service offices (30 statewide). Many are rural in designation and/or are co-located within one-stop centers to ensure the widest coverage and availability of services statewide. Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling staff are assigned individual schools to provide required Pre-ETS activities and outreach to surrounding communities. General VR Counselors are assigned by county and/or specific territory in urban areas. The use of community-based internet sites ensures that VR staff can work in the closest proximity to assigned caseloads. In addition, the use of video conferencing as well as payment of consumer transportation costs can mitigate consumer equity and access to services.

The Driving Program at Wilson Workforce and Rehabilitation Center (WWRC), Virginia's comprehensive rehabilitation center, 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 95 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 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, 143 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, 574 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.

Qualified vendor capacity to provide Supported and Customized Employment and Pre-Employment Transition Services: DARS continues to partner with Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), including Employment Service Organizations (ESO) statewide to build and sustain quality Pre-ETS programming/Work Based learning for student and youth populations. This capacity building has expanded to CRPs that provide services across state lines which has resulted in new providers with strong reputations for service excellence moving into broader communities in our southern most points of the state. We will continue to support growth and expansion.

DARS VR maintains a regularly scheduled staffing presence in all comprehensive one-stop 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 one-stop 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 49 trainings were offered on Windmills' disability awareness training, impacting 2,030 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.

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 DARS receives 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 outcomes report is reviewed annually with ESOs to provide information and answer questions about service provision.

Individual school/district interest/capacity in partnering with VR for services to students with disabilities: Following the pandemic, access to some schools/districts had been restricted as relationships between Virginia VR and educational districts needed to be strengthened and rebuilt. 2024-25 outreach activities continued and included the first annual Capacity Building Institute in Virginia. DARS and seventeen school districts across Virginia came together to enhance relationships and develop plans to improve student transition activities.. VR districts hold events focused on services to students with disabilities that are well attended by educators and partners. These efforts brought increased VR visibility and educator engagement in the collaborative process. These efforts will continue and expand with the Virginia Department of Education Transition staff who have jointly held meetings with Special Education Directors (SPED), special education teachers and Virginia VR statewide. In 2025

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DARS partnered with the Virginia Association of Centers for Independent Living to improve access to Pre-ETS services for underserved students, including just involved youth. 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 final year, 2026, the Pathways to Careers grant has expanded to all field offices statewide. 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 has developed 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.

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 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.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

Virginia VR began efforts to mitigate identified barriers in 2022 following the pandemic and as operations expanded. Community outreach and efforts targeted on increasing agency visibility are a key priority of all statewide field offices. These efforts will continue and will be sustained ongoing as an effort to increase public perception and general knowledge of the contribution the VR process makes to strengthening the lives and employment outcomes for people with disabilities of all ages.

Targeted community outreach to increase visibility and equity of service access begun in 2023 have led to an increase in VR applications statewide. These efforts will continue and will be expanded based on demographic and service data as it informs our current efforts.

The continuing expansion of Pre-ETS services for students with disabilities is the focus of our efforts in 2026-27. Increasing visibility, access to quality programming, expanding relationships with special education transition and school personnel as well as increasing vendor capacity as well as full utilization and expenditure of Pre-ETS set aside dollars are outlined in our corrective action plan.

GEPA 427 FORM INSTRUCTIONS FOR APPLICATION PACKAGE - SUPPORTED EMPLOYMENT
EQUITY FOR STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, AND OTHER PROGRAM BENEFICIARIES

OMB Control Number 1894-0005 Expiration 02/28/2026

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA Section 427 Form Instructions for State Applicants

State applicants must respond to the following four questions:

1. Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.
2. Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?
3. Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?
4. What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

- Applicants identify any barriers that may impede equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity, including, but not limited to, barriers based on economic

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disadvantage, gender, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, disability, age, language, migrant status, rural status, homeless status or housing insecurity, pregnancy, parenting, or caregiving status, and sexual orientation.

- Applicants use the associated text box to respond to each question. However, applicants might have already included some or all this required information in the narrative sections of their applications or their State Plans. In responding to this requirement, for each question, applicants may provide a cross-reference to the section(s) in their State Plans that includes the information responsive to that question on this form or may restate that information on this form.
- Applicants are not required to have mission statements or policies that align with equity to apply.
- Applicants that have already undertaken steps to address barriers must still provide an explanation and/or description of the steps already taken in each text box, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.
- Applicants that believe no barriers exist must still provide an explanation and/or description to each question to validate that perception, as appropriate, to satisfy the GEPA Section 427 requirement.

Please refer to GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

1. DESCRIBE HOW YOUR ENTITY'S EXISTING MISSION, POLICIES, OR COMMITMENTS ENSURE
EQUITABLE ACCESS TO, AND EQUITABLE PARTICIPATION IN, THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR
ACTIVITY.

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The first of four questions is:

Describe how your entity's existing mission, policies, or commitments ensure equitable access to, and equitable participation in, the proposed project or activity.

Virginia General Vocational Rehabilitation operates under the mission of the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) which states; "*DARS' mission: to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families.*" To this end, the Vocational Rehabilitation program, including the Supported Employment program ensures quality and equitable access to people with disabilities seeking career/vocational advancement by providing active outreach to marginalized communities, ensuring the availability of our offices/staff in every county in Virginia as well as co-locating many of our offices, and providing services in all of the American Job Centers. Through our partnerships with local educational school districts, pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) are available in every school district ensuring that equitable access occurs through K-12 educational programming. These services are also available to charter and alternative schools and by direct parent referral of a student aged 14-22. DARS VR actively partners with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS) to ensure services are available through our Community Service Boards (CSBs)

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located across the state. Through state grant funding, specialized Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) serve substance abuse and mental health consumers. These services are available statewide.

Virginia General Vocational Rehabilitation, including the Supported Employment program, is committed to equitable consumer participation based on the unique and individual needs of consumers. This commitment is outlined and further described in our state VR policies, that ensure equitable access to the vocational rehabilitation program and supported employment program across all populations represented in Virginia. DARS routinely reviews statewide demographic and consumer access data and creates district benchmarks to increase accessibility and outreach to representative populations. To further ensure access to services for all consumers, policies have been updated to ensure interpretation and translation services can be accessed by all consumers. Guidance for policies related to services for individuals who experience substance use disorders and serious mental illness were updated to ensure that abstinence and stability requirements are applied consistently to allow an individual to start services regardless of length of abstinence. Additionally, DARS Policy staff remains abreast of the disability access requirements in federal and state law and regulation.

**2. BASED ON YOUR PROPOSED PROJECT OR ACTIVITY, WHAT BARRIERS MAY IMPEDE
EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS, EDUCATORS, OR OTHER
BENEFICIARIES?**

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The second of four questions is:

Based on your proposed project or activity, what barriers may impede equitable access and participation of students, educators, or other beneficiaries?

Virginia General VR is committed to the provision of equitable access to all eligible consumers, and we continue to strategize operational enhancements to address barriers as they are identified. Identified barriers include:

- Geographic proximity to services for consumers
- Qualified vendor capacity to provide Supported and Customized Employment and Pre-Employment Transition Services.
- Individual school/district interest/capacity in partnering with VR for services to students with disabilities.

**3. BASED ON THE BARRIERS IDENTIFIED, WHAT STEPS WILL YOU TAKE TO ADDRESS SUCH
BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED PROJECT OR
ACTIVITY?**

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The third of four questions is:

Based on the barriers identified, what steps will you take to address such barriers to equitable access and participation in the proposed project or activity?

Geographic proximity to services: Virginia VR maintains fully staffed; full-service offices (30 statewide) many are rural in designation to ensure the widest coverage and availability of services statewide. Two VR offices are collocated within American Job Centers. Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling staff are assigned individual schools to provide required Pre-ETS activities and outreach to surrounding communities. General VR Counselors are assigned by county and/or specific territory in urban areas. The use of community-based internet sites ensures that VR staff can work in the closest proximity to assigned caseloads. In addition, the use of video conferencing as well as payment of consumer transportation costs can mitigate consumer equity and access to services.

DARS will 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.

Qualified vendor capacity to provide Supported and Customized Employment and Pre-Employment Transition Services: DARS continues to partner with Community Rehabilitation Providers (CPRs), including Employment Service Organizations (ESO) statewide to build and sustain quality Pre-ETS programming/Work Based learning for student and youth populations. This capacity building has expanded to CRPs that provide services across state lines which has resulted in new providers with strong reputations for service excellence moving into boarder communities in our southern most points of the state. We will continue to support growth and expansion.

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 and fostering close working relations between agency staff and Employment Services Organizations.

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

Regional meetings designed to directly enhance the quality of supported employment services to consumers with the most significant disabilities are conducted across regions. 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 continues to provide 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. Recently mentoring and technical assistance has been added to help develop the proficiency of provider staff to provide Customized Employment.

Implementing the Employment Services Organization Outcomes Report will provide information to VR counselors and their consumers on the performance of each Employment Services Organization to inform decisions regarding service provision.

DARS will obtain stakeholder insights and assistance through the Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) Network. The network represents a cross-section of stakeholders and DARS' staff meets regularly with the Network members 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.

Individual school/district interest/capacity in partnering with VR for services to students with disabilities: Following the pandemic, access to some schools/districts had been restricted as relationships between Virginia VR and educational districts needed to be strengthened and rebuilt. 2024-2025 outreach activities continued and included the first annual Capacity Building Institute in Virginia. DARS and seventeen school districts across Virginia came together to enhance relationships and develop plans to improve student transition activities. VR districts hold events focused on services to students with disabilities that are well attended by educators and partners. These efforts brought increased VR visibility and educator engagement in the collaborative process. These efforts will continue and expand with the Virginia Department of Education Transition staff who have jointly held meetings with Special Education Directors (SPED), special education teachers and Virginia VR statewide.

In 2025, DARS partnered with the Virginia Association of Centers for Independent Living to improve access to Pre-ETS services for underserved students, including justice involved youth.

4. WHAT IS YOUR TIMELINE, INCLUDING TARGETED MILESTONES, FOR ADDRESSING THESE IDENTIFIED BARRIERS?

Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA) (20 U.S.C. 1228a) applies to a State applicant submitting a state plan for a formula grant from the US Department of Education. The State applicant is responsible for completing the GEPA Section 427 form that provides a description of the steps the State proposes to take to ensure all program beneficiaries have equitable access to, and participation in, its Federally funded, State-level project or activity.

GEPA 427 - Form Instructions for Application Package

State applicants must respond to four questions.

The final of four questions is:

What is your timeline, including targeted milestones, for addressing these identified barriers?

Virginia VR began efforts to mitigate identified barriers in 2022 following the pandemic and as operations expanded. Community outreach and efforts targeted on increasing agency visibility are a key priority of all statewide field offices. These efforts will continue and will be sustained ongoing as an effort to increase public perception and general knowledge of the contribution the VR process makes to strengthening the lives and employment outcomes for people with disabilities of all ages.

Targeted community outreach to increase visibility and equity of service access began in 2023 which led to an increase in VR applications statewide. These efforts will continue and will be expanded based on demographic and service data as it informs our current efforts.

The expansion of Pre-ETS services for students with disabilities continues to be a focus of our efforts in 2025-26. Increasing visibility, access to quality programming, expanding relationships with special education transition and school personnel as well as increasing vendor capacity.

PERFORMANCE INDICATOR APPENDIX

ALL WIOA CORE PROGRAMS

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM (COMBINED OR GENERAL) - VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAM PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Each State VR program must submit expected levels of performance in its Unified or Combined State Plan and in the two-year modification of that plan. Expected levels of performance for the first two years of a state plan must be submitted in the initial submission of the Unified or Combined State Plan and in the initial submission of the two-year modification of that Plan, for years three and four, as described in 34 CFR § 361.170(a). Expected levels of performance must be stated to the nearest tenth of a percent (XX.X %) or to the nearest whole dollar for median earnings. State VR programs are reminded that the expected levels of performance must be published for public comment prior to plan submission in accordance with state law, regulation, and policy.

After the Unified or Combined State Plan submission, each State VR program must reach agreement with RSA on the negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the Unified or Combined State Plan (or for the third and fourth years of the

Unified or Combined State Plan during the required two-year modification process) in accordance with WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv).

RSA will use its statistical adjustment model to derive pre-program year estimated levels of performance for each indicator. Each State VR program and RSA will consider the negotiation factors outlined in WIOA section 116(b)(3)(A)(v) during the negotiation process. Once negotiated levels of performance are agreed upon, each State VR program must incorporate the negotiated levels of performance into the Unified or Combined State Plan and the two-year modification of that plan prior to the plan's approval (section 116(b)(3)(A)(iv) of WIOA).

Effectiveness in Serving Employers

In the final rule implementing WIOA, the Departments indicated that they would initially implement this indicator in the form of a pilot to test the feasibility and rigor of three proposed approaches. During Program Year (PY) 2022, the Departments initiated the rulemaking process to establish a standard definition of Effectiveness in Serving Employers. States will continue to report two of three proposed approaches until the Departments issue the final rule and implement the indicator.

Performance Indicators	PY 2026 Expected Level	PY 2026 Negotiated Level	PY 2027 Expected Level	PY 2027 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	59%		59.5%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	57%		57.5%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	\$4,173		\$4,200	
Credential Attainment Rate	63.0%		66.0%	
Measurable Skill Gains	89.0%		91.5%	
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹	Not Applicable ¹

¹

The Departments have not issued the final rule defining Effectiveness in Serving Employers. As a result, states will not submit expected levels of performance for this indicator and the Departments will not establish negotiated levels of performance for PYs 2024 and 2025.

ADDITIONAL INDICATORS OF PERFORMANCE

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.