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Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program (EFSLMP)

At the federal, state, and local levels, Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) continues to make great strides toward a streamlined and coordinated one-stop delivery system serving adults and youth with disabilities and employers that employ these individuals. TWC’s executive director and the commissioner of assistive and rehabilitative services (transferred to TWC as of September 2016) participate as ex officio members of the Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities. TWC also serves on state-level interagency councils and workgroups supporting gateways for individuals with disabilities, such as the Employment First Task Force and the Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services’ (DADS) Promoting Independence Advisory Council. Other memberships have included the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services’ (DARS) Medicaid Infrastructure Grant Advisory Council, and HHSC’s House Bill 1230 Workgroup on Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities. TWC will also continue to coordinate with the State Independent Living Council (SILC) and the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to serve mutual consumers who need employment assistance as well as assistance with independent living resources. In this vein, TWC has collaborated with a number of agencies in developing guidance, such as a transition and employment guide for Texas students with disabilities.

On a local level, MOUs established between Boards and one-stop partners set forth the operation of the one-stop delivery system to seamlessly and meaningfully serve individuals with disabilities. The elements included in each MOU describe the referral processes between partners and funding of infrastructure costs for one-stop offices and the process for negotiation of the MOUs, as proposed under regulations §678.500 through §678.510 of WIOA. (Page 74) Title I

Evidence of Collaboration, Contracts, and Agreements To provide seamless service delivery to customers and ensure effective use of resources, TWC Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) maintains the following collaborations with community partners and other state agencies:

- VRD Program Specialists provide information and technical assistance to the appropriate Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) Medical and Social Service Divisions when changes to VR employment services occur.
- VRD works with the appropriate HHSC Medical and Social Service Divisions to ensure that service definitions in the 1915(c) home- and community-based waivers accurately reflect Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and Rehabilitation Services Administration regulations. This partnership allows services that result in competitive integrated employment to be delivered efficiently and timely through the payer of first resort.
- VRD offers free intensive training and technical assistance to HHSC’s Medical and Social Services Divisions’ Behavioral Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) Services Departments Special Projects Unit and community providers to become Benefits
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Subject Matter Resource staff. • VRD partners with HHSC’s Medical and Social Services Divisions’ Behavioral Health and IDD Services Departments Special Projects Unit to provide cross training on the VR Long-Term Supports and Services System; • VRD uses its current partnership with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to encourage CRP providers to become employment networks (ENs) under the SSA Ticket to Work Program. VRD offers incentive payments to CRP-ENs that provide: • supported employment or job placement services during the provision of VR services; and • extended support to Ticket to Work customers after VR case closure in order to advance employment or increase customer earnings. • VRD partners with school districts that provide transition services to youth, and considers all aspects of the cooperative agreements in place to ensure continuity and timeliness of services for those school districts that initiate supported employment services before or after a student graduates. • VRD maintains membership and participation in the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE). • VRD has representation in the following: • The Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities • The Council for Advising and Planning for the Prevention and Treatment of Mental and Substance Use Disorders • Texas Coordinating Council for Veteran Services • State Independent Living Council • Texas Technology Access Program Advisory Council • Texas Council on Consumer Direction • The Promoting Independence Advisory Council • HHSC Statewide Behavioral Health Coordinating Council • HHSC Office of Mental Health Coordination Cross Agency Liaison Committee • Governor’s Committee on People with Disabilities Contracts VRD has bilateral service contracts with CRPs to provide specific employment services, which include supported employment services. VRD counselors may refer customers with all disabilities, including blindness and visual impairments, to CRPs with contracts for supported employment services. The terms and conditions of CRP service contracts are provided in the VRD Standards for Providers manual. (Page 247-248)

To improve employment rates, suggestions include flexibility in opportunities, increases in on-site work experiences, automated systems to assist providers in managing the reporting requirements of the services, and protections for the customer. All are under review for implementation. Continued data tracking will help identify effectiveness in technology or work experience training and may define service options that can be added for enhanced successes. Furthermore, the provision of SE services for customers will undergo an Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) process to identify opportunities for new or enhanced strategies for greater successes. The VR division has executed a memorandum of understanding with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) that includes prohibiting contracts between TEA or local education agencies (LEAs) and employers who pay subminimum wage. Customers already served in subminimum employment receive counseling consistent with Employment First principles and WIOA requirements to encourage meaningful employment in an integrated environment with or without supports. (Page 268)
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opportunities for new or enhanced strategies for greater successes. The VR division has executed a memorandum of understanding with the Texas Education Agency (TEA) that includes prohibiting contracts between TEA or local education agencies (LEAs) and employers who pay subminimum wage. Customers already served in subminimum employment receive counseling consistent with Employment First principles and WIOA requirements to encourage meaningful employment in an integrated environment with or without supports. Finally, the VR division is also launching a capacity-building project for VR and LEA staff to develop skills for practical application through joint training. (Page 278) Title IV

VRCs work with Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) SE specialists, HHSC providers, or service coordinators/case managers, and customers’ natural support networks to develop short- and long-term support strategies based on individual needs. This ensures the appropriate amount of support is available and provided so that employment can be maintained. Extended services, known in Texas as long-term support and services, can be publicly funded, “natural” or “in-kind,” or paid by the customer through SSI, Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), or another Social Security Administration Title II work incentive program. Examples of extended services include, but are not limited to, consulting with a customer’s job supervisor regarding areas of concern or training needs; creating supports and strategies to improve work performance through job coaching; providing services such as medication management or hygiene; and identifying and training on transportation options. (Page 305) Title IV

Customized Employment

Plans for Improving Supported Employment Services TWC VRD will continue to strengthen the numerous supported employment service improvements implemented by legacy DARS in 2017, including the following: • Assisting CRPs in using the Supported Employment Assessment that focuses on discovery and person-centered techniques, vocational theme development, and providing worksite observations; • Working with VRCs on applying the supported employment planning and service provision to improve customer participation and informed choice by requiring review and signatures at each benchmark; • Providing ongoing training to TWC’s VRD subject matter experts, who provide technical assistance to VRCs on identifying and coordinating extended service/long-term support before beginning the benchmark process; • Ensuring that all criteria for determining job stability to ensure extended service/long-term support after VR case closure are being applied; and • Continuing to provide specific employment services to people with autism to improve their success in obtaining and maintaining employment. (Page 254)

All staff has access to training opportunities through the professional development plan created through the management chain’s professional development process. Training content for field staff is typically developed within the system of statewide training product modules disseminated through field management staff. Content learning includes topics that directly relate to the knowledge, skills, abilities, and attitudes necessary to perform jobs as expected by management and as detailed in job descriptions. Content training strategies include the following: • Continued focus on the foundations of the VR process for counselors and RAs, including accurate eligibility determination, inclusion of customers in planning for service delivery, thorough assessment and planning practices, models for VR counseling, informed customer choice, service to culturally
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diverse populations, purchasing practices, supported employment, customized employment, and other strategies for quality employment assistance, service delivery, and effective case note documentation; • Training in working with employers and customers to increase knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1998, the Olmstead decision, available independence initiatives, and WIOA to enhance employment options and employment knowledge; • Training in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, appropriate options and alternatives for effective transition services and Social Security work incentive programs, including programs under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvement Act of 1999; • Training in assessing appropriate rehabilitation technology interventions; • Extending opportunities to take advantage of training available from external sources for ongoing dissemination of timely trends related to disability and treatment modalities within the field of rehabilitation; • Coordinating with the Texas Administrators of Continuing Education and other entities as appropriate to develop localized training in targeted disability areas; and • Implementation of training for new counselors that focuses on critical thinking and sound decision making. (Page 263) Title IV

The division continues to work with the National Employment Team to facilitate employer relationships at the national level. Feedback and data gathered in the needs assessment for the 2017 CSNA encourage opportunities for additional and enhanced collaboration that have come about through some of the programmatic changes which moved other support programs HHSC. For example, HHSC outsourced the Independent Living program in Texas to the Centers for Independent Living. Meanwhile, the Independent Living Services for Older Individuals Who Are Blind (ILS-OIB) program has been retained in TWC with VR. As a result, formal referral processes and policies have been developed to expand the network of providers available for referral of those individuals needing independent living services and to increase the referral to VR of individuals who may benefit from ILS-OIB services. In one year, FFY’17, the VR division served 1,780 new customers in the ILS-OIB program following the program’s redesign. Similarly, the Comprehensive Rehabilitation Services program, which serves individuals with traumatic spinal cord or brain injury, and the Blind Children’s Vocational Discovery and Development program also remained in HHSC, which presents further opportunities to collaborate to provide referrals and receive referrals when those customers are ready for VR. Other collaboration with LEAs, higher education, and Boards has resulted in customer access to post—high school scenarios that provide training and employment in meaningful and higher-paying jobs. (Page 279) Title IV

Braiding/Blending Resources

Over the past year, many of TWC’s analytic resources have been heavily focused on WOIA implementation activities, such as conducting an updated Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and developing Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) and RSA-911 logic and testing. However, as that work begins to wind down over the next year, the Division of Operational Insight (DOI) has begun looking at several evaluation projects.

Regarding the Career and Training program, DOI is developing a new model to identify UI claimants who need additional assistance to have a timely return to work. This will be the seventh such model that TWC has developed and the sixth in the last 12 years. Additionally,
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TWC is interested in leveraging similar techniques to identify individuals who are not claimants but who might also benefit from additional assistance. (Page107) Title III

Texas has a proven history of supporting and encouraging regional planning and service delivery efforts. The benefits from regionalism include collaborative planning, pooling and leveraging of resources, capacity building, and ensuring that services can be delivered in the best possible way—regionalism is essential to the Boards’ mission. However, it is important that regionalism not be hampered by the designation of artificial boundaries. (Page 142) Title I

Barriers to serving unserved and underserved populations identified in the CSNA included: • lack of awareness of the impact of receiving services on Social Security benefits, highlighting the disincentive to work from the fear of losing benefits; • lack of awareness of VRD services among customers and/or parents; • lack of awareness of VRD services among doctors and other medical professionals; • growing need for services that will require partners to leverage available funding and may require increased funding; and • scarcity of available transportation that creates challenges for potential customers, especially in rural areas, to access VRD offices, providers, and jobs. Strategies The following VRD strategies address the barrier created by not understanding the impact of service receipt on Social Security benefits: • Work closely with community partners such as the local Social Security Administration (SSA) offices and Work Incentives Planning and Assistance programs to dispel inaccurate perceptions regarding loss of benefits and attempt to work efforts. • Provide statewide training for all VRCs on basic benefits and work incentives support and services. • Expand training for additional VRD staff to be Benefits Subject Matter Resources (SMRs), including a train-the-trainer component for all SMRs, and provide ongoing statewide training in federal and state work incentive programs for all VRD staff. • Enhance current partnership with the SSA to encourage CRP providers to become ENs under the SSA Ticket to Work Program. VRD offers incentive payments to CRP-ENs that provide: o supported employment or job placement services during the provision of VR services; and o extended support to Ticket to Work customers after VR case closure to advance employment or increase customer earnings. The following VRD strategies address the barrier created by the lack of awareness of VRD services among customers, parents, and doctors and other medical professionals: • Increase collaboration with other organizations to improve customer access to services. • Increase outreach efforts in the business community. • Educate community leaders on the availability of VRD services to enhance outreach efforts to all ethnic groups. • Offer the 2-1-1 Texas statewide referral helpline, a service that assists customers with referrals to appropriate agencies for help. • Enhance community outreach activities. The following VRD strategies address the growing need for services by leveraging other partner and community resources, and seeking opportunities to increase efficiency in VRD structure and processes: • VRD will continue to work to educate state officials and oversight authorities about the value of VR services to Texans with disabilities and to the overall state economy. • VRD will leverage existing resources and make every effort to draw down the maximum federal funding match to provide needed services for Texans with disabilities. • VRD will fully use SSA programs and work to maximize SSA/VR reimbursements. • VRD will provide budget management training for staff. VRD strategy addressing the barrier created by scarcity of available transportation will be to continue to advocate for local improvement in public
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Transportation at HHSC’s regional coordination forums. (Page 296-297) Title IV

**DEI/Disability Resource Coordinators**

No disability specific information found regarding this element.

**Financial Literacy/Economic Advancement**

2. Individualized career services. As consistent with program requirements and federal cost principles, individualized career services include the following:

- Comprehensive and specialized assessments of skill levels and service needs of adults and dislocated workers;
- Development of an individual employment plan;
- Group counseling;
- Individual counseling;
- Career planning;
- Short-term pre-vocational services;
- Internships and work experiences linked to careers;
- Workforce preparation activities;
- Financial literacy services;
- Out-of-area job search assistance and relocation assistance; and
- English language acquisition and integrated education and training programs. (Page 69) Title I

**School to Work Transition**

RCT recommends that VR ensure that the individual plan for employment (IPE) is completed as early as possible during the transition planning process and no later than the time the student with a disability who is determined to be eligible for VR services leaves the school setting. Response: Policy in VRSM C-1300 states that the VR counselor must complete the IPE before the eligible student leaves the school setting and no more than 90 days from the time of eligibility determination. VR is committed to ensuring that VR counselors comply with this policy, with an emphasis on monitoring through case reviews and readings. (Page 235) Title IV

The provision of quality VR services for Texas students with disabilities is a strategic priority for the Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD). VRD policies and procedures have been updated to align with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) §413(B)(F), which sets forth that the individualized plan for employment (IPE) must be developed as soon as possible,
but not later than a deadline of 90 days after the date of the determination of eligibility, unless the counselor and the eligible individual agree to an extension to a specific date. Transition planning by VR counselors and school personnel facilitates the development and implementation of a student’s individualized education program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act §614(d). The goals developed in the IEP are considered in the development of the IPE. The development and approval of an IPE is initiated by a VR counselor. Planning includes conversations about informed choice and program information so that students understand the available options for additional education, training, service providers, and employment. (Page 241) Title IV

The MOU will include the addition of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) as defined in C.F.R. §361.48, and other Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements, operationalizing a referral process for students with disabilities, and a process for inviting counselors to Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) meetings. The MOU provides for consultation and technical assistance in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services; transition planning for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and completion of the IEP; clarification of the agencies’ respective roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities for providing transition planning services to students with disabilities; and a description of procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who are in need of transition services. (Page 242) Title IV

Pre-ETS are provided to students with disabilities. Required Pre-ETS activities are job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on opportunities for enrollment in postsecondary educational programs, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. In an effort to provide transitioning students with more effective and comprehensive preparation for work after high school, VRD is also increasing the number of summer work opportunities with community partners around the state. TWC is launching the Pathways to Careers Initiative (PCI), an initiative to expand Pre-ETS to Texas students with disabilities. The first strategy launched under PCI in summer 2017 was Summer Earn and Learn. (Page 243) Title IV

Consultation and technical assistance is provided at Admission, Review, and Dismissal meetings (ARDs), and attendance may be in person or through alternative means, including videoconferencing or conference calls (based on 34 C.F.R. §361.22(b)(1)). When necessary, VRD counselors and school personnel coordinate to satisfy documentation requirements for students and youth with disabilities who are seeking subminimum wage employment, as set forth in 34 CFR §397.4(c). VRD does not pursue subminimum wage employment for customers. When a customer chooses to pursue subminimum wage employment, counseling on other employment options is provided. When, after counseling, subminimum wage employment is still the customer’s choice, the VR case is closed. Those customers who choose subminimum wage employment receive counseling, guidance, and referral services within the first six months of employment and annually thereafter. TWC has regional and state office transition specialists who provide support to VR counselors and VRD field office managers in developing collaborative partnerships with and increasing cooperation between VRD, local school districts,
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and other community organizations as resources for students with disabilities. These transition specialists assist with the development of policy, training, and strategies that lead to effective provision of transition services. (Page 243) Title IV

TWC’s Pathways to Careers Initiative (PCI) is an initiative to expand Pre-ETS to students with disabilities during the summer months. It began in the summer of 2017. The first of five strategies, Summer Earn and Learn is a work-based learning program conducted in partnership with Boards and their employer partners. This statewide strategy includes employability skills training and paid work experience for students with disabilities. More than 1,500 students and more than 600 employers participated in Summer Earn and Learn in 2017. (Page 252) Title IV

As a result, these efforts improve the effectiveness of VR services for transition customers. Such collaborations take on many different forms in training VRD and educational staff, as well as in impacting families. VRD staff will continue to collaborate with ISDs in the provision of Pre-ETS as specified in WIOA. Additionally, counselors are often invited to education service centers to participate in educator training and to present training, particularly for more effective transition planning for students. VR staff works with schools in creating job fairs that allow students to meet with employers and gather information about the labor market. Family nights are hosted in some areas to invite interested members of the public to VRD offices to share resource information, discuss service delivery issues, and give input regarding best practices that would better support students and their families. In some areas, community partners such as churches, Workforce Solutions Offices, and community centers assist in providing training to school personnel on understanding cultural diversity in Texas. (Page 266-267) Title IV

As of October 1, 2017, the Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) had 1,314 full-time employment (FTE) staff positions to provide direct services to VR customers, broken down as follows:

• Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs)
• Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (TVRCs)
• Unit Support Coordinators (USCs)
• Vocational Rehabilitation Teachers (VRTs)
• Rehabilitation Assistants (RAs) (Page 256) Title IV

Typically, these are students who are on an IEP and in their last year of high school eligibility. The goal for these customers is competitive integrated employment within the business community or the business where the worksite rotations occur. Project SEARCH has expanded from one original program site established in 1996 at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital in Ohio, to over 400 sites internationally. Project SEARCH in Texas began in 2007 with Seton Healthcare Family in Austin. (Page 250) Title I Typically, these are students who are on an IEP and in their last year of high school eligibility. The goal for these customers is competitive integrated employment within the business community or the business where the worksite rotations occur.
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The specialists assess staff skill levels, recommend and implement training approaches, and coordinate service delivery statewide. The Deafblind Unit serves customers who are deafblind. Specialists fluent in sign language consult with caseload-carrying staff, customers, and community resources to develop and implement plans and services. VRD also purchases state-certified interpreter services as needed. VRD works closely with the education system in transitioning students with disabilities from high school to postsecondary training or employment. TVRCs participate in training covering the Admission, Review, and Dismissal (ARD) process as well as the Individualized Education Program (IEP). When conducting seminars or workshops for the ARD and IEP process, trainers may also include parents and professionals from: • Texas Education Agency’s (TEA) Special Education Division • Regional education service centers and local education agencies (LEAs) • Disability Rights Texas • Partners Resource Network, Inc. • Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Additionally, VR staff participates in cross-trainings with other entities involved in education for students with visual loss, such as the Texas Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, and sponsors and participates in workshops and seminars to help education staff members develop expertise in working with these students. (Page 262) Title IV

Table 1. VR Needs Mentioned during 2017 Town Hall Meetings SOURCE: DOI Town Hall Textual Analysis VR Program or Service Need Number of Mentions Communication/Collaboration 89 Employer/Staff Training 39 Readiness/Work-Based Learning 34 Transportation/Housing 23 PAS & Supported Employment 18 Outreach & Marketing 15 Benefits & Work Incentives 10 Disability-Related Skills 10 Customer Choice 6 Academic/Vocational Training 2 Treatment of Impairments 2 Budgeting 1 Medical/Vocational Assessment 1.

A few comments concerned the need for additional VR service providers, especially service providers that offer specialty skills training like orientation and mobility. Other comments expressed dissatisfaction with providers that did not meet expectations of quality and timeliness. These concerns will be addressed as the Texas VR program moves forward to implement the 2017 State Plan goal. Cultivating good working relationships between TWC’s VR division and external service providers is a top priority. (Page 274) Title IV

: Partnerships Priority 1 Enhance collaboration and coordination with Boards, employers, and other stakeholders to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes and work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after-school opportunities such as internships, volunteer positions, and summer and year-round work experience programs. Discussion: Strengthening Relationships with Collaborators with VR’s merger into TWC, the agency has entered into data agreements with other federal and state agencies, including Veterans Affairs (VA). These agreements will help forge the way for programmatic collaboration and customer coordination for available services and resources. Working with the VA has resulted in an increased number of veterans who are served by the public VR program in
collaboration with their VA counselors. To help anticipate and target Pre-ETS, TWC has also obtained per county counts of students with disabilities who are under a 504 Plan or receive IDEA services, current as of 2013—2014, from the US Department of Education’s Office of Civil Rights. (Page 279) Title IV

Expand and improve vocational rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment, and improve coordination with state and local secondary and postsecondary educational entities. Discussion: Meeting Pre-ETS Needs Over the past several years, the number of both eligible students and funds expended has increased. The number of students served increased by close to 10 percent, while funds, per transaction, increased by about 20 percent on average. The data from the 2017 CSNA shows several actions taken to address the needs of students and youth with disabilities. (Page 277) Title IV

Services to Students and Youth with Disabilities Priorities • Expand and improve vocational rehabilitation services, including Pre-ETS for students with disabilities who are transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or employment, and improve coordination with state and local secondary and postsecondary educational entities. • Provide supported employment services to youth and other individuals with the most significant disabilities who require extended support in order to achieve and maintain an employment outcome. Goal Area 3: Partnerships Priorities: • Enhance collaboration and coordination with Boards, employers, and other stakeholders to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes and work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after-school opportunities such as internships, volunteer positions, and summer and year-round work experience programs. (Page 282) Title IV

A customer’s extended services are identified and documented in the customer’s Individualized Plan for Employment. VRD providers do not provide services to customers during the 90-day period between “Job Stability” and “Service Closure.” If VRD providers do provide direct services to a customer during this period, job stability ends and is not reestablished until at least 30 days after the direct services or job change has occurred. A VRD-supported employment case is closed after a customer successfully maintains job stability for 90 days, with extended services being provided only by non—vocational rehabilitation resources. VRD identifies and makes arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other state agencies and other appropriate entities to assist in the provision of supported employment services. VRD coordinates with other public or non-profit agencies or organizations within the state, employers, natural supports, and other entities with respect to the provision of extended services. (Page 285) Title IV

The goal for Goal Area 3 is to enhance collaboration and coordination with local workforce development boards, employers, and other stakeholders to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes and work-based learning experiences, which may include in-school or after-school opportunities such as internships, volunteer positions, and summer and year-round work experience programs. In addition to the above goals, priorities for funds received under the Rehabilitation Act §603 are to increase the number of customers receiving supported employment services who achieve employment outcomes and the number of supported
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employment services providers statewide, and maintain the number of customers receiving supported employment services within their home communities. (Page 285) Title IV

Career Pathways

Texas aligned AEL and workforce development systems in 2013. The alignment required statewide deployment of models to develop the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education programs and obtain and advance in employment. Successful models have included Integrated Education and Training (IET), career pathways, distance learning, and college and workforce preparation activities. Texas also aligned service-delivery options for individuals with disabilities and other special needs. AEL statewide service-delivery contracts are compliant with WIOA requirements under performance, workforce system, and rehabilitative services alignment and programmatic integration. (Page 115) Title IV

VRD has forged productive, proactive working relationships with Texas universities that train rehabilitation professionals. Involvement with Texas universities results in student requests for practicum and internship placements within VRD. Internships have been offered since 1999 for students completing master’s degrees in Rehabilitation Counseling or Rehabilitation. In FY’17, VRD hosted 20 internships. Evaluations of student interns come directly from certified, licensed, or Qualified Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (QVRC) internship supervisors and department advisors from the intern’s university. Job vacancy notices are routinely posted on WorkInTexas.com, TWC’s statewide online jobsite. Hiring supervisors can also request a broader distribution of vacancy notices by having TWC Human Resources post them to additional sites such as Indeed.com, Monster.com, and others. Recruitment continues for bilingual Spanish- and English-speaking candidates to fill positions located in areas with high Spanish-speaking populations. Opportunities to promote employment to all community sectors are achieved by sharing job postings with universities. VRD encourages the hiring of qualified individuals with disabilities, and strives to ensure that staff represents ethnic diversity and thereby reflects the population of Texas and the customers we serve. Ethnic distribution of VRD employees and Texas residents is shown below. (Page 259) Title IV

VRD recognizes master’s or doctoral degrees in fields of specific study, such as VR counseling, clinical rehabilitation counseling, behavioral health, behavioral science, disability studies, human relations, human services, marriage and family therapy, occupational therapy, psychology, psychometrics, rehabilitation administration/services, social work, special education, vocational assessment/evaluation, or another field that reasonably provides competence in the employment sector in a disability field or rehabilitation-related fields. A counselor meets the CSPD standard by holding a master’s degree in VR counseling; master’s degree in “counseling or counseling-related field” with specific coursework; master’s, specialist, or doctoral degree in specific majors with specific coursework; current CRC certificate from CRCC; or current LPC licensure. Therefore, a counselor with a master’s degree in counseling or a counseling-related field must, at a minimum, complete a graduate course in the Theories and Techniques of Counseling and successfully complete six graduate courses with a primary focus in the following areas: • one course on assessment; • one course on occupational information or job placement; • one course on case management and rehabilitation services; • one course on medical aspects of disabilities; • one course on psychosocial aspects of disabilities; and • one course on multicultural issues. A
counselor with a master’s or doctoral degree in one of the listed specific fields of study must complete a graduate course on the Theories and Techniques of Counseling, and successfully complete six graduate courses each with a primary focus in the areas listed, plus one course on Foundations of Rehabilitation Counseling. Although VR has taken steps to hire rehabilitation counselors with master’s degrees in VR counseling, a number of factors pose challenges to this undertaking. A significant barrier to hiring counselors with master’s degrees in rehabilitation counseling is the expanse of Texas that must be served. (Page 260) Title VI

Apprenticeship

Apprenticeship programs that are registered with the State or the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Office of Apprenticeship are automatically eligible to be included on the State Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL). Registered apprenticeship programs are given an opportunity to consent to inclusion on the ETPL before being placed on the list, and will remain on the ETPL for as long as the program is registered with DOL or until they request to be removed.

Registered apprenticeship programs are not subject to the same application and performance information requirements or to the same initial or continued eligibility procedures as other eligible training providers. (Page 158) Title II

The Registered Apprenticeship Training Program for Veterans and/or Service members is a program that:

• accelerates participants into or through a DOL Registered Apprenticeship Training Program in Texas (Apprenticeship Training Program); or

• accelerates participants into or through a DOL Registered Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program that leads to enrollment of participants into an Apprenticeship Training Program during the grant period. (Page 151) Title I

As a division of TWC, VRD participates in the planning for and evaluation of the Texas workforce system conducted by the Texas Workforce Investment Council (TWIC), which serves as the state workforce investment board. These activities include: • participating in the development and implementation of the state-mandated strategic plan for the Texas workforce system; • participating in TWIC meetings and serving on the TWIC Apprenticeship and Training Advisory Committee; and • reporting quarterly and annually as requested by TWIC on the division’s activities to implement goals and objectives in the Texas workforce system strategic plan. VRD works closely with other TWC staff to provide information, partner on community initiatives, and enhance customer referral processes. Across the state, VRD counselors have strong relationships with the 15 Disability Navigators located at Workforce Solutions Offices to provide consultation on disability issues to workforce system staff, and provide direct assistance to customers with disabilities as needed. Ongoing collaborative efforts between VRD and each of the 28 Boards have resulted in projects, initiatives, and processes such as joint community outreach and awareness events, summer youth initiatives, employer symposia and job fairs, customer referrals, coordination of services, and cross-training for staff. (Page 292) Title IV
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#### Work Incentives and Benefits

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends that VR provide detailed training to VR counselors regarding the use of additional resources to assist customers, such as Medicaid waiver programs.

**Response:** As part of a five-day intensive training, VR state office program specialists for benefits and work incentives provide training on Medicaid waivers to staff members who function as subject matter resources on Social Security Administration (SSA) benefits. Additionally, a two-part webinar series on waivers is held each year for relevant staff. To date, 121 VR counselors have been trained as subject matter resources for benefits and work incentives, and an additional 58 staff members in management, as well as state office program specialists, have completed the training.

RCT acknowledges and commends VR for expanding the capacity of staff in assistive technology by training regional teams to become subject matter experts. Although it is possible that the Centers for Independent Living (CILs) around the state serve as resources to local VR staff, it is vital that VR staff have access to accurate and up-to-date information about assistive technology to overcome workplace barriers specific to disabilities. RCT recommends that VR clarify content in the Strategies and Use of Title I Funds for Innovation and Expansion Activities section to clarify which customers will be served by these teams.

**Response:** The regional teams are composed of VR staff members who have been trained in all levels of assistive technology and who provide recommendations on assistive technology to customers with various disabilities. The loaning or purchasing of assistive technology is not limited to customers with specific disabilities; it is available to all customers as needed. (Page 235) Title IV

**Recommendation:** RCT recommends that VR indicate where and how the use of Social Security benefits can be used to pay for extended services after VR involvement.

**Response:** Both VR and employment networks (ENs) participate in the Ticket to Work Partnership Plus Program for individuals between the ages of 18 and 64. When a VR case is closed successfully, the customer is informed that his or her Ticket to Work still has value and can be assigned to an EN to provide long-term job supports and services. Customers are informed of the ENs serving Texas. Additionally, subject matter resources on SSA disability benefits provide guidance to customers on using SSA work incentives, which can potentially assist with maintaining health insurance benefits and cash benefits after achieving employment. SSA benefits and the partnership between VR and ENs are fully explained on page 24, in the Social Security Administration section, and on page 58, in the Funding and Timing of Transition to Extended Services sections. (Page 236) Title IV

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between VR and ENs are fully explained on page 24, in the Social Security Administration section, and on page 58, in the Funding and Timing of Transition to Extended Services sections. (Page 238) Title IV

MOUs with education service centers, Texas Education Agency (TEA), and independent school districts (ISDs) to enhance coordination of services provided through programs like Project SEARCH and Project HIRE (Helping Individuals Reach Employment), and other community programs and support available to improve and expand services for transition-age students with disabilities • Coordination with the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired to provide specialized programs that prepare students for the transition to postsecondary life and the workplace • A new MOU in 2016 with the Texas Department of Insurance’s Division of Workers’ Compensation to enhance referrals for return-to-work efforts • Coordination with the Social Security Administration (SSA) on employment incentives and support to maximize Social Security Administration/Vocational Rehabilitation (SSA/VR) reimbursement activity through the Ticket to Work Program • An MOU with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs to maximize case service funds through better access to comparable benefits, and to enhance the case management process while avoiding duplication of services. • Coordination with the Texas Veterans Commission to help identify veterans who need additional support in securing benefits, gaining employment, and accessing advocacy services. (Page 239) Title IV

Social Security Administration TWC VRD coordinates with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to encourage CRP providers to become employment networks (ENs) under SSA’s Ticket to Work Program. TWC VRD offers incentive payments to CRP-ENs that provide: • supported employment or job placement services during the provision of VR services; and • extended supports to Ticket to Work customers after VR case closure in order to advance employment or increase customer earnings. TWC VRD and select CRPs participate in the Partnership Plus program. Additionally, VRD is participating in the Promoting Opportunity Demonstration (POD) pilot that will test a benefit offset in the Social Security Disability Insurance program to determine its effects on outcomes such as earnings, employment, and benefit payments. SSA and HHSC have a data exchange agreement that allows HHSC to access SSA data. Through a third-party agreement (State Verification and Exchange System), VRD is able to obtain SSA data regarding cost reimbursement from HHSC. (Page 254) Title IV

Changes to the VR program also promise to maximize counselors’ time with customers and allow for the creation of collaborative on-the-job training opportunities for counselors and other field staff. The future of the Texas VR program is customer-centered and needs-conscious, emphasizing access to resources and other employment-related programs at TWC. The implementation of Rapid Process Improvement (RPI) strategies will benefit the Texas VR program as well. RPI is a management tool based on the Theory of Constraints/Lean Management and provides a methodical approach to engaging staff to quickly identify, map, and improve the processes of an organization. RPI projects are designed to ensure that the division is making the most effective use of service delivery options available for both customers and employers.

Increase counselors’ knowledge of work incentives and the effect of earnings on SSI/SSDI. This will improve the quality of VR’s provision of counseling on decisions that impact employment.
Discussions: Improving Knowledge Bases

Interestingly, the data in the VR needs survey and Town Hall meetings for the 2017 CSNA indicate that staff, stakeholders, and customers have differing beliefs about work incentives and other benefits, their value, and application in the vocational counseling process. While respondents agree that a loss of benefits, along with lack of affordable child care, housing, and transportation are barriers to success, staff and stakeholders are more likely than customers to express concern for loss of benefits as a barrier. This could indicate several different beliefs. Applying a short-term problem-solving counseling methodology regarding child care, housing, and transportation may provide better information on a customer’s benefits and concerns while also addressing barriers to success. Continued tracking of financial beneficiary data, by type of beneficiary, as introduced in Table 3 below, will assist the VR division and the RCT in developing the specific extent of customer service needs among recipients of financial benefits. Financial benefits are defined as follows: • General assistance: cash assistance to dependent needy children and disabled adults who are not eligible for assistance under other cash assistance programs. (Page 275-276)

TWC’s Vocational Rehabilitation Division (VRD) provides supported employment services for customers with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities. Funds received under Title VI, Part B §622 (also known as the supported employment program) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended are used to serve these individuals. VR customers with the most significant disabilities may have multiple disabilities or functional limitations that result in the requirement for extended support services essential to retaining competitive integrated employment. Texas’ provision of supported employment services is integral to the state’s overall plan to provide services that result in competitive integrated employment outcomes for VRD customers. Goal Area 1: Target Populations The goals for Goal Area 1 are as follows: • Improve customer employment outcomes for individuals with significant disabilities, including but not limited to individuals who are blind or significantly visually impaired; individuals who are from minority backgrounds; individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders (including autism, intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities); individuals with mental health disorders; and veterans with disabilities. • Increase counselors’ knowledge of work incentives and the effect of earnings on Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income to improve counselors’ ability to provide vocational counseling on decisions impacting employment. (Page 284) Title IV

Potential funding sources include the Social Security Administration’s Ticket to Work Program, DSHS (the state mental health agency), CILs, Medicaid/CHIP—the administrative authority for all Medicaid waivers and state plan services. Additionally, HHSC, the intellectual and developmental disabilities state agency, is a potential funding source and is the operating authority for the following: • The majority of 1915(c) state Home and Community-based Services (HCS) Medicaid waivers; • 1915(k) Community First Choice; • Title XX community services; and • Employment services provided through state general revenue funds. (Page 286) Title IV

Expand training for additional VRD staff to be Benefits Subject Matter Resources (SMRs), including a train-the-trainer component for all SMRs, and provide ongoing statewide training in federal and state work incentive programs for all VRD staff. • Enhance current partnership with
## Texas (TX) WIOA Matrix

The SSA to encourage CRP providers to become ENs under the SSA Ticket to Work Program. VRD offers incentive payments to CRP-ENs that provide: • supported employment or job placement services during the provision of VR services; and • extended support to Ticket to Work customers after VR case closure to advance employment or increase customer earnings. The following VRD strategies address the barrier created by the lack of awareness of VRD services among customers, parents, and doctors and other medical professionals:  (Page 296) Title IV

### Employer/Business

Starting January 1, 2016, all training providers must submit information and criteria as established under WIOA §122(d) through (g). Training providers use TWC’s Eligible Training Provider System (ETPS) to provide all required information for initial eligibility, which include Provider Assurances Statement, as well as applications for each program of study. ETPS doubles as TWC’s program certification system and the Statewide List of Eligible Training Providers, as required by WIOA §122 (a)(3). Boards then review and certify the provider and program if all minimum requirements are met, as established by the governor or higher standards as determined by Board policy. The ETPS automated system then informs TWC of the Board’s review and approval of programs of study, and validates all WIOA training provider requirements. Subsequent eligibility determinations take place on a biennial basis, where performance data is again evaluated against the standards. (Page157-158) Title II

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) §231(a), pursuant to §222(a)(1), requires each eligible agency to award multiyear grants or contracts, on a competitive basis, to eligible training providers within the state for adult education and literacy (AEL) services. The Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) is seeking a waiver to grant the state flexibility to either award AEL grants directly to AEL providers or to allocate funds to Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) to conduct a local competitive procurement for the delivery of AEL services. (Page 171) Title II

### Data Collection

Congressional action to reauthorize and reform WIA—now WIOA—allows the Boards to continue to apply and improve upon an integrated strategy for serving the Texas labor market. Texas has implemented a majority of programmatic changes mandated by WIOA, such as providing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participants with training and placement services by ES staff and using common performance measures across core programs for both adults and youth. WIOA clearly recognizes Texas’ integrated workforce system by the inclusion of the permissible alternate entity language. (Page 44) Title I

TWC envisions leveraging its experience in building an integrated reporting system to support Common Measures and the WISPR to build a similar system to perform integrated reporting for WIOA and for reports required by WIOA §116. Customer data from TWC’s case management systems, as well as other data such as UI wage records, will be extracted and combined to produce customer-centric, rather than program-centric, records to be used in reporting. The envisioned platform will allow integration of customer records across all six core programs as
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well as a variety of other partner programs to provide a holistic view of each customer, their services, and their outcomes. (Page 118) Title IV

Additional items required of the 2017 CSNA included: i. an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services provided under RA73 are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); ii. an assessment of the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) within the state; iii. a report submitted to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) containing information about updates to the aforementioned assessments, for any year in which updates are made; and iv. the process that the state will use to demonstrate that required Pre-ETS are made available to potentially eligible students with disabilities before using any Pre-ETS funding on authorized activities. Methodology the 2017 CSNA includes information from five main sources: 1. An Internet-based needs assessment survey that was contracted with the Public Policy Research Institute at Texas A&M University to gather perspectives from customers, staff, and others 2. Customer satisfaction surveys 3. Data from ReHabWorks (the automated case management system used by the Texas VR program) 4. Five town hall meetings held across Texas in Dallas, El Paso, Houston, McAllen, and San Antonio 5. Ten key informant interviews of VR managers and counselors, including one VR manager from each integrated service area and one from each of the previously separate designated state units (DSUs) for blind and general VR services, one experienced counselor, and one novice counselor. Data Collection and Organizational Challenges Data was gathered from January to October 2017. (Page 273) Title IV

Equal Opportunity and Nondiscrimination: Section 188

TWC additionally promotes partnerships with employers to overcome barriers to meeting workforce needs with the creative use of technology and innovation. TWC takes steps to ensure that the staff of public schools, vocational service programs, and community-based organizations are trained and supported to assist all individuals with disabilities in achieving competitive employment. TWC also promotes the availability and accessibility of individualized training designed to prepare an individual with a disability for the individual’s preferred employment. To this end, individuals with disabilities are given the opportunity to understand and explore options for education and training, including postsecondary, graduate and postgraduate education,
Additionally, TWC employs an electronic and information resources (EIR) accessibility coordinator to serve as a contact for EIR accessibility concerns. The coordinator both monitors agency-wide compliance with accessibility policy and facilitates correction of noncompliant EIR. To these ends, the coordinator partners with accessibility-designated liaisons in each business area. An accessibility liaison functions as the primary contact for the business area’s compliance with EIR accessibility requirements. The liaison also assists in staff development, addressing the needs of individuals with disabilities, as well as in sharing TWC’s accessibility goals and requirements. (Page 130) Title I

Describe the State’s one-stop center certification policy, particularly the accessibility criteria. Achieving excellence in accessibility is based on three core principles:

• ensuring that all customers can effectively use workforce products and services;
• creating a workspace accessible for individuals with disabilities; and
• complying with all federal and state legal requirements. (Page 130) Title I

The TWC Equal Opportunity (EO) Unit functions within the Sub recipient and Equal Opportunity Monitoring Department. The EO Unit monitors recipients of WIOA Title I financial assistance to determine compliance with the nondiscrimination and equal opportunity provisions of WIOA §188. Both programmatic and physical accessibility are addressed during an EO compliance review.

As recipients of WIOA funding, Boards are monitored on-site based on a three-year rotation schedule, as referenced in the State Methods of Administration (MOA) maintained on file with DOL’s Civil Rights Center (DOL-CRC). All 28 Boards are scheduled for an EO review within a designated three-year period. Dates for EO monitoring reviews generally align with those of the TWC’s annual Board monitoring review.

In determining which sites are selected for physical accessibility reviews, current Workforce Solutions Offices lists will be cross-referenced with the database of Workforce Solutions Offices previously reviewed by state-level staff. The EO manager will conduct a risk assessment in selecting locations for physical accessibility reviews based on the following criteria:

• the location was not previously reviewed by TWC staff based on historical review data;
• the location was not reviewed by TWC staff during the tenure of the current Board EO Officer; and/or
• the location reflected numerous deficiencies in the previous EO review, thus warranting a follow-up review by TWC. (Page 131) Title I

TWC purchases services only from providers that are in compliance with the VR Standards.
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TWC-contracted service providers are subject to both ongoing and periodic programmatic and financial monitoring. Risk assessment tools are used at the state and the regional level to identify service providers to be monitored. On-site monitoring visits may be scheduled. Additionally, service providers not identified through the risk assessment tools may also be monitored. A monitoring team includes representatives from TWC VRD and VR Contract Oversight Monitoring. Contractors found in noncompliance with VR Standards may be placed on a corrective action plan. Sanctions vary and may include financial restitution where appropriate. All contractors are provided ongoing technical assistance. In addition to monitoring, VR Standards also require ongoing self-evaluation by each contracted service provider. (Page 246) Title IV

Approved providers also receive training in the field from VRCs, state office program specialists, employment assistance specialists, University of North Texas online courses, and Criss Cole Rehabilitation Center staff. Training may include:

- disability awareness, including blindness, to give providers a better understanding of the challenges and limitations faced by customers;

- education on Americans with Disabilities Act requirements to ensure that providers understand the guidelines and law governing provision of accommodations to customers;

- education on other employment-related laws and recruitment, job matching, job customization, work accommodations, and retention;

- Texas Confidence Builders training, which provides the philosophy TWC VRD has adopted to help customers gain personal independence, acceptance, and adjustment to blindness, and find meaningful work; and

- accessible writing courses, which promote awareness and education related to the importance of accessibility in documents. (Page 247) Title II

### Vets

Required one-stop partners: In addition to the core programs, the following partner programs are required to provide access through the one-stops: Career and Technical Education (Perkins), Community Services Block Grant, Indian and Native American programs, HUD Employment and Training programs, Job Corps, Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives and Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program, National Farmworker Jobs program, Senior Community Service Employment program, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) (unless the Governor determines TANF will not be a required partner), Trade Adjustment Assistance programs, Unemployment Compensation programs, and YouthBuild. (Page 29)

CCH seeks to maximize college credits awarded to veterans and active duty service members for their military experience through streamlined degree paths and workforce certifications to expedite transition into the Texas workforce.

Since its initiation in 2011, CCH has undergone a phased-in expansion across the state. Fourteen
Texas (TX) WIOA Matrix

Texas colleges and universities have established accelerated curricula for veterans and active duty service members in fields such as emergency medical services, surgical technology, respiratory therapy, nursing, information technology (IT), firefighting, advanced manufacturing, logistics, wind engineering, and oil field technology.

College Credit for Heroes (CCH) also created an online application and database where veterans and active duty service members can receive an official evaluation of credit to be used at colleges and universities. As of October 1, 2015, the website has received over 90,000 visits and more than 10,000 requests for evaluations. Texas veterans and active duty service members have earned an average of 25 credit hours each through the CCH website.

Additionally, the program aims to expand the network of partnering colleges and universities through memoranda of understanding partnerships. The award of academic credit is contingent on approval from a receiving Texas college or university; therefore, increasing awareness among these institutions is essential. Institutions that become partners commit to review CCH evaluations and to maximize the award of college credit to veterans and active duty service members for their military experience and training.

To date, the network of CCH partner schools has grown to more than 42 institutions of higher education, with more looking to join. (Page 76) Title I

Texas is home to 1.68 million veterans, the second largest veteran population in the nation. TWC is using the newest workforce development strategies and initiatives to expand services for veterans and spouses of veterans. (Page 127) Title I

Mental Health

Mental Health VRD promotes mental health evidence-based practices and other evidence-informed models of service that will improve competitive integrated employment outcome strategies for customers. Other examples of collaboration include: increasing coordination and developing new partnerships with other state and community organizations—mental health organizations, local authorities, DSHS (the state agency for mental health), and universities—that serve individuals with developmental or intellectual impairments and mental health disorders to develop resources, expand knowledge, and implement best practices; working with the HHSC Office of Mental Health to identify and implement best practices, engage potential community partners, and facilitate service coordination; and participating in the Mental Health First Aid training conducted by local mental health authorities, which teaches VRCs and other professionals how to assist someone experiencing a mental health crisis. Training is another area that emphasizes interagency cooperation. (Page 254-255) Title IV

Table 2: Vocational Rehabilitation Division Attrition Rate as of October 1, 2016

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<th>Job title</th>
<th>Average Strength (average filled positions)</th>
<th>Total Separations</th>
<th>Vol</th>
<th>YTD Rate</th>
<th>VRC 583.5</th>
<th>92 66 6 13 7 15.77%</th>
<th>11.31% TVRC 97.75 15 10 2 2 15.35% 11.28%</th>
<th>Table notes: • YTD Rate calculated by dividing Total Separations by Average Strength • Vol YTD Rate calculated by dividing Volun by Average Strength • Attrition Rate information provided by TWC Human Resources Outreach</th>
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Texas (TX) WIOA Matrix

Activities will continue to be conducted to broaden the population of individuals with disabilities being served by VRD. Outreach, education, and awareness efforts will be targeted to underserved and unserved populations such as transition students, veterans, and individuals with neurodevelopmental disorders (including autism), and psychological disorders such as bipolar disorder or schizophrenia. (Page 257) Title IV

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*All enclosed information is cited directly from final state plan as of June 30, 2019

Find your local state plans here:

https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/wioa/state-plans/index.html