School to Work (STW)
Transition
Guidelines & Best Practices

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
Florida Department of Education (DOE)

Revised May 21, 2009
The Role of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) in School to Work (STW) Transition Services

DVR assists secondary education school students with disabilities to transition from school into postsecondary education, training or directly into employment with the ultimate goal of inclusion in the adult community as a productive citizen. The STW Counselor and the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Technician work closely with staff at local schools to:

• Provide assistance with transition planning
• Develop appropriate VR referrals
• Educate school staff, parents, students and others about the VR program

An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) should be in place prior to graduation or exit from school. The IPE is to be coordinated with the student’s Transition Individual Educational Plan (TIEP or IEP), that is developed by the school system’s transition team. The transition team may include, but is not limited to the following members:

• Student
• Parent or guardian
• ESE Teacher
• General education teacher
• Vocational education teacher
• Other necessary school services personnel
• Support Coordinator
• Invited agency representatives
• Others who may be instrumental in the student’s successful transition from school to adult life

Shared STW Counselor and VR Technician Responsibilities

The STW Counselor and VR Technician may carry out the following responsibilities as DVR agency representatives:

• Outreach to educate individuals about the VR process and services
• Processing referrals and applications
• Conducting preliminary assessment interviews
• Securing preliminary eligibility documentation/ student records
• Case note documentation
• Attending Transition IEP meetings as the VR agency representative when invited by the school
• Providing guidance about informed choice, disability issues, and employment
• Follow up
Networking activities that contribute to the successful employment outcome of Floridians with disabilities

**Outreach activities** of the STW Counselor and VR Technician are primarily focused on providing information about VR to school staff, students, parents, community professionals, and others interested in 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
- Scope of services that may be provided to eligible students

The STW Counselor or VR Technician can provide information regarding VR services that can be passed on to students and their families by contacting the following people:

- ESE Director
- ESE Teacher
- Transition Specialist
- School Guidance Counselor
- School Nurse
- Principal
- Support Coordinator

Ways the STW Counselor and VR Technician may conduct outreach include:

- Providing VR brochures and business cards to the school
- Having regularly scheduled school visits
- Participating in transition and job fairs at the school
- Attending school IEP meetings when invited
- Speaking about VR services at school staff meetings, student/parent group meetings, or interagency meetings

STW Counselors and VR Technicians should work with school staff to ensure referrals of students with disabilities to the VR program at the beginning of the school year as follows:

- Referral and application for VR services is recommended at age 16 for students attending schools who are or plan to be involved in community based work experiences (CBWE)
- All other students are encouraged to apply for VR transition services two years prior to school exit
- Students at high risk of dropping out should be referred if they are old enough to begin training or searching for employment
The STW Counselor may act in an advisory capacity for at risk youth that are too young to apply. This should allow sufficient time for determining eligibility, VR service needs, and developing the approved IPE prior to the student’s exit from school.

The VR process may be expedited by having the referring school provide the STW Counselor or VR Technician with copies of the student’s important school documents at time of referral or application. These documents include:

- Current IEP or 504 Plan
- Medical and/or psychological records, to include the most recent 3 year reevaluation
- Transcripts or academic reports
- Attendance and tardiness reports
- Behavioral reports, if applicable
- Vocational training records and/or career assessments, if available
- Involvement with any other agencies, if applicable

**Responsibilities of the VR STW Counselor Only**

The STW Counselor is responsible for completing the following:

- VR eligibility determinations
- IPE development
- Payment of any necessary VR services from application to case closure

The STW Counselor may use school records and information from the student, teachers, parents, and/or employers to help identify impediments to employment, need for VR services, and to assist with developing an employment plan to transition the student from school to work.

**VR STW Transition Activities**

The VR STW Transition activities outlined below are a general guide. Activities may vary based upon individual circumstances.

**PERIOD I (2 to 3 Years Prior to Graduation):**

- Consult with and educate schools, parents, students, and other agencies about VR services
- Conduct outreach to include VR orientation presentations, dissemination of VR brochures, and technical assistance with transition IEP planning
- Participate in transition fairs, job fairs, and other activities targeting parents and students to increase appropriate referrals
PERIOD II (2 to 3 Years Prior to Graduation): Typically, a student is 16 years old before the DVR representative participates in a Transition IEP meeting unless the student is at risk of dropping out of school.

- Participate in IEP meetings at the invitation of the school
- Participate in other ways to assist the IEP team in planning transition services if unable to attend the IEP meeting
- Link the student with other appropriate adult agencies that may provide services during the transition process and/or after the student exits school
- Encourage student application for VR transition services
- Communicate relevant VR policy which may impact a student’s application or eligibility for VR services during the IEP
- Determine eligibility (STW Counselor only)
- Coordinate and provide payment for any assessment necessary for VR services (STW Counselor only)
- Counsel the student, parent and/or guardian on vocational goals, evaluations, recommendations, and discuss options for VR services so that they can make an informed choice
- Encourage career exploration, CBWE, mentoring, job shadowing, and volunteerism
- Provide guidance and counseling about work attitudes, habits, and behaviors generally required by employers

Counseling may encompass regular attendance, punctuality, orderliness, grooming/hygiene, diligence, acceptance of authority, and conformance to established rules and procedures, including the use of community rehabilitation facilities and work experience placements at community work sites.

- Provide guidance and counseling about postsecondary training and education opportunities, as needed
- Develop an approved IPE coordinated with the school’s IEP before the student exits school (STW Counselor only)
- Coordinate comparable services and provide VR services outlined in the IPE that are vocationally relevant and necessary to obtain employment. VR services are only provided when there are no comparable benefits available for CBWE and/or postsecondary employment services (STW Counselor only)
Communication with referral sources and others directly involved with the transition student is essential for establishing positive working relationships, appropriate referrals, and successful employment outcomes.

**Best Practice:** When a student with a disability is referred to DVR from the school system, it is a good practice to receive a signed copy of the school’s release of information form with the school records. The STW Counselor will notify School District liaisons of changes in VR policy or procedure that may affect the transition process.

At age 16, agencies that may be able to provide or pay for the transition student’s needs after exiting school are invited to attend the student’s IEP meeting. At times, the STW Counselor or VR Technician may not be able to attend IEP meetings when invited. When this occurs, alternative methods of networking with the referral source and the student may be employed. This will ensure that students with disabilities are provided with information about VR transition services and are given an opportunity to apply at least two years before the student exits school. Alternatives to physical attendance include:

- Telephone contact
- Conference calls
- E-mail
- Completion of a written input form for school use in documenting agency participation

School follow-up is necessary for effective IEP implementation. Schools usually designate a staff person as a Transition IEP Coordinator. This person is responsible for communicating the student’s transition services needs to agency representatives who were unable to attend.

The school must obtain agency commitments to provide or pay for needed transition services or reconvene the IEP team to determine alternate methods for meeting the student’s needs. It is important for the STW Counselor to respond to school staff on the progress of mutual students, with appropriate parental, legal guardian or student consent at age 18.

**Confidentiality, Waiver of Confidentiality & Mutual Consent to Exchange Information**

STW Counselors, like other general caseload VR Counselors, are bound by Florida Statutes (413.341) covering the release of applicant and consumer records as well as confidential and privileged information. Parental involvement and other natural supports are critical to ensure a successful transition to employment, especially if the student is dependent upon them for assistance.

**Best Practice:** Encourage a student to name representatives for communication and networking purposes. This would allow the exchange of pertinent information between
the STW Counselor and the student’s natural supports (including school staff) in the rehabilitation efforts. The STW Counselor or VR Technician should encourage the student to complete a Waiver of Confidentiality form (RIMS template VCMT066) to share information with designated representatives in the VR process. The STW Counselor or VR Technician will want to assure all parties understand that assistance from representatives should only apply if requested by the student, thus empowering him/her to advance in their independence during the transition into employment.

**Obtaining Signatures on VR Forms**

Parents of minor aged students and legal guardians must be involved in the VR process and sign VR forms. If the student is of majority age (18 years old) and without an assigned legal guardian, only the student will be required to sign VR forms.

**Best Practice:** Even though the minor’s signature is not required, the student should be encouraged to review and sign VR forms along with his/her parent or guardian. This will help to better prepare him/her for their transition from school to work.

The STW Counselor needs to make sure that the student or student’s representative provides copies of the court order or other paperwork necessary to establish the legal rights of the guardian. This is described in the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors (Chapter 4.0503).

**STW Transition Referrals**

Students may be self-referred or referred by a school, a family member, a guardian, or other interested persons. Anyone living in Florida with a mental or physical impairment that is legally able to work may apply for VR services.

The STW Counselor or VR Technician should establish a consistent point of contact with a designee from the local school(s). This is to encourage schools to make referrals early in the school year. The designee may be the:

- Transition Specialist
- Special Education Coordinator
- Special Education Teacher
- Guidance Counselor
- School Nurse
- Principal
- Other representative

**Best Practice:** The STW Counselor or VR Technician should:

- Visit the assigned school(s) at least once a month, starting in the fall of the school year
• Visit more frequently depending on the needs of the school and the local agreement with the VR field office
• Maintain regular communication
• Meet with the school designee at the beginning of the school year to review referral procedures and to identify transitioning students who may benefit from VR services. There should be sufficient time for the STW Counselor to assist the student in identifying his/her vocational goal and needs so that the IPE can be finalized prior to their graduation or exit
• Seek out school referrals of those students with disabilities who do not qualify for special education or are under a Section 504 plan in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act

**Eligibility for VR STW Transition Services**

VR eligibility criteria are the same for students as for other adult consumers applying for VR services.

**Use of existing information:** School documents/applicant and family information should be used whenever possible to ensure that VR eligibility determination is made in 60 days of student application or earlier. Section 102 of the Rehabilitation Act, as amended, stresses the importance of using existing information to the maximum extent appropriate, especially information used by education officials, the Social Security Administration and information that can be provided by the applicant or family.

**Out of state records:** Records originating from outside of Florida may be used to the extent that they meet the state of Florida and the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors requirements for medical and psychological information.

**Mental health diagnosis:** The diagnosis of a mental health disorder is acceptable from a licensed psychiatrist, or a licensed clinical psychologist. A licensed school psychologist may be used for all developmental diagnoses. The required diagnosis should follow the coding established in the most current Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM).

**Borderline Intellectual Functioning:** If a student’s school records indicate a Borderline IQ score of 76-79 without adaptive functioning deficits, they would not be VR eligible.

**Mental Retardation:** The term “Intellectual Disability” is used by the Department of Education to describe mental retardation. However, VR uses the diagnosis term or mental retardation found in the DSM. While a person’s IQ may be a good indicator, adaptive functioning deficits are necessary for a consumer to be diagnosed with mental retardation. This is described in the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors (Chapter 4.16).
Best Practice: The STW Counselor should access the services from a local VR Psychological Consultant for assistance in interpreting school or other psychological records as an alternative to securing a new psychological evaluation whenever the option would meet VR recency requirements.

Specific Learning Disabilities: Reports generated by schools in Florida, which document a Specific Learning Disability diagnosis, are VR acceptable documentation for transition students applying for VR services, though the report must still meet VR recency requirements. A VR acceptable diagnosis of Specific Learning Disability should be based on age appropriate assessments. This is described in the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors (Chapter 4.1701).

It is reasonable to expect that the student may have benefited from special education programs and/or acquired adaptive behavior to compensate for learning disabilities. Based on this, the student may no longer test as having a learning disability diagnosis and would not be VR eligible unless other psychological or medical disabilities are noted.

The transition student’s disability and need for special education as demonstrated on the IEP or 504 plan can be translated into substantial impediments to employment and can be used to demonstrate the need for VR services. A copy of the student’s IEP or 504 plan should be included in the VR case file.

Applicants who meet VR eligibility criteria are presumed to be able to benefit from VR services to obtain an employment outcome, unless trial work or extended evaluation demonstrates that the applicant is incapable of benefiting due to the severity of the consumer’s disability.

Recency of Diagnostic Records

The STW Counselor will determine if the existing records are recent enough to document impairment(s). Recency is determined by the current status of the student’s condition compared to available reports. When VR will be sponsoring treatment, the information can be no older than a year. This is described in the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors (Chapter 6.04).

If in the STW Counselor’s opinion additional diagnostics or assessments are required to ensure that all necessary VR services are provided, evaluations can be done after eligibility or activation from the waiting list, whichever occurs later. If additional impairments and/or impediments to employment are revealed from additional diagnostics, these should be reflected in a case note entry entitled, Addendum to Certification. This is described in the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors (Chapter 6.0702 and 6.0703).
Higher Education: Most Florida public colleges and universities require students with disabilities to have recent adult testing as documentation of learning disabilities prior to requesting and being provided necessary accommodations at the institution.

Best Practice: Contact the higher education institution to verify documentation needs. If no medical insurance or other comparable benefits are available to cover the cost of learning disabilities retesting, the STW Counselor may sponsor a new psychological assessment for the college bound VR eligible transition student. The new psychological assessment should only include those tests required by the university or to address any outstanding vocational issues during plan development. The student must be willing to request accommodations by self disclosing his/her disability and providing documentation to the college or university service center for students with disabilities.

Order of Selection

On August 4, 2008, DVR invoked an Order of Selection plan consistent with the federal Rehabilitation Act. This is necessary for DVR to operate within the available financial resources provided by the federal & state government. Under Order of Selection, all eligible consumers are assigned to specific categories based on the significance of their disability. Federal law requires that consumers with the most significant disabilities be served first. More detailed information on the Order of Selection can be found in the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors (Chapter 7.07).

Best Practice: It is essential for the IPE to be developed prior to the student’s graduation or exit from school to maximize the chance for the student to smoothly transition into education, training or directly into employment.

- Referral and Application for VR services should be made two to three years prior to graduation
- Referral and Application should be made two to three years prior to graduation or exit for those students planning to remain in school until they turn age 22
- STW Counselors cannot know when a consumer will be released from the waiting list and should not try to provide estimates
- STW Counselors should not authorize for vocational evaluations prior to the eligibility determination unless that information is necessary for the eligibility decision to be made
- When additional diagnostics or assessments are required to ensure all necessary VR services are provided on the IPE, then evaluations should be done after the consumer is released from the waiting list
- Additional evaluations should not be done prior to eligibility determination, unless the information is necessary for the eligibility decision to be made and in this way the counselor ensures that the information from the evaluations will be relevant in the development of the IPE
- Counselors should help students placed on a waiting list stay engaged in the transition process
Some ways to capture the student’s interest include providing self-directed resources for vocational exploration and visiting classrooms to provide information on vocational options.

- Provide vocational resource information directly to school staff for use in the classroom in order to develop professional relationships with those that can endorse the VR program
- Engage students with information on the benefits of CBWE, mentoring, job shadowing, and volunteerism
- Use the most recent VR Fact Sheet on the Order of Selection during the IEP meeting and send it electronically at other times
- Provide information on how to access Order of Selection information on the VR website, www.rehabworks.org

**Developing the IPE**

IPE services and the employment outcome can be mutually amended, as needed. To ensure timeliness in the development of the student’s IPE, the employment outcome may be broad (though it must still be appropriate for that student) and amended later to a specific postsecondary school employment goal. The STW Counselor should include all services that the student receives in school either as comparable benefits, VR responsibilities, and/or shared VR responsibilities, especially as the student prepares to exit school.

Additional assessments and work evaluations may be sponsored if necessary to identify the student’s desired employment outcome and IPE services during the 120 day timeframe allotted between eligibility determination or activation from the waiting list, whichever is later, and IPE development.

**Best Practice:** Enter an IPE Development case note to document the vocational guidance, counseling, and informed choice of the student used to identify an appropriate employment outcome and the services needed to reach the student’s goal. Correlation between the IPE and the student’s IEP should also be noted to show similarities and/or justify differences.

**Supported Employment (SE) IPE**

The Supported Employment IPE is developed for students who:

- Meet the requirements of having a most significant disability
- Initially need intensive support (Phase I) to obtain competitive employment in an integrated work setting
- Need ongoing support (Phase II) to maintain competitive employment

Additional services that are necessary for a successful employment outcome are also included in the SE IPE, as in a VR IPE. The STW Counselor should consider
comparable services the student is receiving in school as well as services shared by VR and/or planned services that are the sole responsibility of VR in the SE IPE.

**Phase I** VR sponsored SE services are time limited to 18 months unless a longer time is required based on services provided and is specified in the SE IPE or an extension is justified by special circumstances and agreed to by the VR Counselor and the student. The SE IPE itself usually extends well beyond this time limitation, depending on when it was signed and the number of years the student expects to remain in school. More detailed information on Supported Employment can be found in the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors (Chapter 17).

**Best Practice:** Initiate Phase I VR sponsored SE services no earlier than 5 months prior to the student’s exit from school. This will allow the VR sponsored SE provider to place a student in employment while they are still in school, ensuring a seamless transition to adult life and successful case closure after the student exits school. When the VR consumer is determined stable in the job placement by all parties, the STW Counselor may change the consumer status in RIMS. This is described in the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors (Chapter 17, Section 17.07).

**Financial Participation**

On April 14, 2008, VR implemented a process to determine financial participation of consumers in the cost of their Vocational Rehabilitation services. The consumer’s level of participation in the cost of services is based on the consumer’s plan of services and income, and includes consideration of work-related disability expenses paid by the consumer. The Division believes that this process is necessary to maximize the use of available resources and to continue to serve all eligible consumers. More detailed information on Financial Participation Determination can be found in the Operational Policies and Procedures for DVR Counselors (Chapter 9.02).

**Best Practice:** The STW Counselor’s message should emphasize that every person eligible for VR services will receive some level of assistance.

- Explain that some VR services are exempt from the Financial Participation Assessment and others require financial participation. Inform the student and/or representative that they may choose to participate in only the exempted services, if that is their choice
- The most valuable service VR provides is guidance and counseling
- It is helpful to explain VR policy in terms that can be easily understood by the individuals present at the IEP
- The VR financial participation determination can be compared to the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) as it is important to reference a more familiar example since school personnel will often address requests for information
- Use handouts with the most recent VR information available to explain financial participation.
• Provide information on how to access financial participation information on the VR web site, www.rehabworks.org

RIMS Coding

Transition student: To be identified as a transition student, VR must be involved while the student is in school. On the Pre-interview Questions screen in RIMS, there is a check box (TS) which becomes visible and enabled if the student is between the ages of 14 and 23. For individuals referred by an “elementary/high school” or “school for mentally/physically handicapped”, RIMS will not allow the case to be entered into applicant status until the student is checked off and coded as a transition student.

Student who has exited school: If an individual is referred to VR between the ages of 14 and 23 and has already exited school, they should not be coded as a transition student. Therefore, options of “elementary/high school” or “school for the mentally/physically handicapped” should not be used on the Referred By screen in RIMS as the referral source. Do not use referred by someone from the school system, use “other individual” as the referral source option.

Youth or young adult who returns to school: If a consumer is not a transition student at the time of application to DVR, but later returns to the school system, transition student coding can be added on the Pre-Interview Questionnaire screen in RIMS. The initial referral source information on the Referred By screen in RIMS would not be changed.

Community Based Work Experience (CBWE) is a VR transition service for VR consumers who are or will be working in the community through a Third Party Cooperative Arrangement or other means. If the student is or will be participating in a CBWE while still in school then it should be included on a student’s IPE as a training service.

Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) is found under the Acceptance screen in RIMS as a disability code. It is included under the disability category “Mental and emotional conditions”.

Transition Services Funding

Under IDEA 2004 federal legislation, schools are responsible for providing a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) by funding and meeting the needs of students with disabilities while they remain in school. Students who have not obtained a regular diploma may choose to remain in school until they turn age 22 or return to school if they have exited.

The STW Counselor may sponsor vocationally relevant services that are not provided by the school system to support early work experiences.
The STW Counselor may also need to sponsor IPE services prior to school exit for students who are not involved in these early work experiences but who need services initiated prior to school exit to ensure a seamless transition from receipt of school services to receipt of VR services when they exit.

**Assistive Technology**

Schools are responsible for providing equipment and/or assistive technology devices to meet the educational needs of their students with disabilities. Students may request to keep these device(s) when they change schools and when they exit school. However, assistive technology provided by the school system may not meet a student’s needs in postsecondary training or in employment settings. The technology may also only be effective for a few years and need replacement.

The STW Counselor should address assistive technology in the development of a student’s IPE. Assistive technology services or devices may be a comparable benefit provided by the school and/or a responsibility that is shared by VR. VR may be the sole sponsor of assistive technology services and/or devices, which are newly identified as a need for postsecondary education or for a successful employment outcome on a student’s IPE.

**Employment Specialists**

Third Party Cooperative Arrangements (TPCA) provide for school-based employment specialists. In these cases, funding is shared by VR and the school district to provide VR eligible transition students with valuable community work experiences to assist with the planning and preparation necessary for postsecondary school employment success.

**Job Coaching Services**

**Offered Solely by the School District**

If the school district offers job coach services to their students without VR funding, it is considered by VR to be a comparable benefit until the student exits school.

**Offered Solely by DVR**

If the job coaching services are not offered by a high school, but the need is identified on the student’s IPE as a necessary service for post school employment, then job coaching would be the sole responsibility of VR.

**Federal Legislation of Transition Services**

VR STW transition services are based upon federal legislation and regulations. The following legislation mandates VR to work collaboratively with other state and local
education agencies, as well as other service providers to insure that eligible students with disabilities are given the opportunity to make a seamless transition from school to postsecondary activities within the adult community.

Other Resources

- TPCA VR Staff Technical Assistance
- Transition Student Referral Application Information Needs
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, as amended in 2004

For Additional STW Transition Services Information or Questions Contact:

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