

Final
STAFF SUMMARY OF MEETING

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES FOR THE BLIND

Date: 08/19/2015

ATTENDANCE

Time: **01:02 PM to 03:57 PM**

Aguilar *

Lundberg E

Place: HCR 0112

Primavera X

Windholz *

This Meeting was called to order by
Representative Danielson

Balmer X

Danielson X

This Report was prepared by
Luisa Altmann

X = Present, E = Excused, A = Absent, * = Present after roll call

Bills Addressed:	Action Taken:
Opening Remarks	Witness Testimony and/or Committee Discussion Only
Agency Structure and Best Practices Panel	Witness Testimony and/or Committee Discussion Only
Senior Services for the Blind	Witness Testimony and/or Committee Discussion Only
Youth Transitions from Education to Employment	Witness Testimony and/or Committee Discussion Only
Public Comment	Witness Testimony and/or Committee Discussion Only

01:03 PM -- Opening Remarks

Representative Danielson, chair, called the meeting to order and gave a few brief comments regarding the meeting agenda.

01:04 PM -- Agency Structure and Best Practices Panel

Each member of the panel on the discussion of agency structure and best practices for vocational rehabilitation services for the blind introduced themselves. The panel members included:

- Dr. Fred Schroeder, Executive Director of the National Rehabilitation Association;
- Julie Deden, Executive Director for the Colorado Center for the Blind, chair for the State Rehabilitation Council, and first vice president of the National Federation for the Blind of Colorado; and
- Diane McGeorge, Chair of the Colorado Center for the Blind board of directors and representing the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado.

01:07 PM

Dr. Schroeder discussed the National Rehabilitation Association, what it does, and its history. Dr. Schroeder also discussed his personal experiences, which have included serving as Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration within the U.S. Department of Education, which is the agency that has oversight of state vocational rehabilitation programs, and directing the New Mexico Commission for the Blind, which was the designated agency to provide vocational rehabilitation and other services to blind and visually impaired individuals in New Mexico.

Dr. Schroeder continued with a discussion of the different structural options that states have for providing vocational rehabilitation services. The federal Rehabilitation Act (Title 4 of the Workforce Opportunity and Innovation Act) requires each state to administer a vocational rehabilitation program. There are two structural options states have in order to administer vocational rehabilitation programs to the blind: a separate, designated agency or a combined state agency. The Rehabilitation Act gives states the option to have a separate, designated agency to provide vocational rehabilitation services to the blind, known as a designated state unit, and roughly half of the states do this. Under the separate structure, the agency operates as its own administrative unit and receives grant funds directly from the federal government. A general agency then provides vocational rehabilitation services to all other eligible individuals. The other option states have is to provide vocational rehabilitation services for the blind under a combined state agency which is responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services to all eligible individuals, including the blind. This is the model that currently exists in Colorado. In some states, these combined state agencies create a separate administrative unit, which is given administrative responsibilities for specific programs and services.

Dr. Schroeder then discussed the efficacy of these two vocational rehabilitation program structures. According to Dr. Schroeder, every nationwide study that has looked into the effectiveness of services to blind individuals has concluded that separate agencies for the blind produce significantly better outcomes for the blind. According to these studies, blind individuals who are served in separate agencies for the blind are nearly twice as likely to be self-supporting at case closure. Dr. Schroeder spoke about two potential reasons why separate agencies for the blind outperform the combined state agency structure. The first reason is that blind individuals require a variety of blindness skills training to be able to sufficiently manage their blindness, live independently, and have a successful career. This training can include how to cook, manage laundry, travel independently, read braille, and gain skills related to a specific job or occupation, including having access to and learning how to use assistive technologies. This training is typically more involved for blind individuals, is not typically covered by health insurance, and is typically more available in a separate agency from staff with these particular skills. Dr. Schroeder stated that a second, more intangible reason, for the higher performance of separate state agencies for the blind typically have higher expectations for their blind clients. Staff at these agencies are trained to understand what is realistic for blind individuals and they know a wider range of potential occupations that might be a good fit. Blind people tend to have a greater chance to pursue their own individual interests and explore their real abilities in separate agencies. Dr. Schroeder continued with an example from the state of Iowa, which has a separate state agency for the blind and has a mission of helping to move blind individuals into jobs that are the best fit for the individual, even if they are non-traditional types of employment.

Dr. Schroeder also discussed his experience from his time directing the New Mexico Commission for the Blind. In 1986, the New Mexico legislature created a separate vocational rehabilitation agency for the blind after years of poor outcomes for the blind, including low job placement, low earnings, and high placement in non-wage earning/"homemaker" positions. Because a high proportion of blind individuals receive federal disability benefits, either supplemental security income or social security disability insurance, New Mexico was able to control costs of the new agency from federal reimbursements received when persons get off of Social Security disability benefits. Under Social security rules, if a state helps an individual go off of Social Security benefits because of work, the Social Security Administration (SSA) will reimburse the state for the full cost of that individual's vocational rehabilitation. With the better outcomes for the blind being produced by the new state agency, New Mexico was able to increase its Social Security reimbursements, thereby offsetting the increased costs of the new agency. Dr. Schroeder continued discussing the successes of the New Mexico system.

01:23 PM

Dr. Schroeder responded to questions from the committee outlining that in order to change the combined structure of vocational rehabilitation services currently in place in Colorado, the General Assembly would have to pass legislation designating a separate state agency to provide vocational rehabilitation services for the blind to be consistent with requirements from the federal Rehabilitation Act.

Dr. Schroeder also responded to committee questions regarding initiatives the SSA has regarding promoting returning to work, but the SSA does not currently offer direct subsidies or other incentives to employers for hiring blind employees. Dr. Schroeder spoke about what the New Mexico agency did to fund on-the-job training, at no cost to the employer, to help the potential employee learn the necessary skills and gain real job experience, and also convince the employer to give blind individuals an opportunity, believe the blind individual is competitive, and that they can do the job effectively. The New Mexico agency also funded on-the-job training for high school students in the transition program during the summer, 75 percent of whom ended up being offered permanent jobs from this experience. Dr. Schroeder continued to respond to questions from the committee regarding his experience in other states and also spoke further about the costs and benefits of a separate state agency for the blind and his experience in New Mexico.

01:31 PM

Ms. Julie Deden discussed her experience having been blind since birth, attending public school, and being a teenager when she was first contacted by a vocational rehabilitation counselor at the age of 16. Ms. Deden spoke about how the vocational rehabilitation counselor helped her understand what she needed in order to be successful in college, including how the vocational rehabilitation program would pay for readers to access books and handouts, provide orientation and mobility services, and offer any other services needed to be successful.

Ms. Deden continued with a discussion of her experience previously working as a vocational rehabilitation counselor for the blind in Colorado. In 1984 in Colorado there was a separate division dedicated to providing vocational rehabilitation services for the deaf and blind. Ms. Deden explained how at that time, all supervisors and counselors received extensive training and knowledge related to the deaf and blind, which was especially important during the initial intake assessment phase of service delivery. Ms. Deden continued with a discussion of several case studies that showed the kinds of expertise rehabilitation counselors for the blind must possess in order to be effective.

Ms. Deden spoke about this history of vocational rehabilitation services for the blind in Colorado. In 1984, there were four counselors dedicated to blindness (and four counselors dedicated to deafness) in the Denver metro office who served over 500 blind clients each year. There were six additional counselors across the state with dedicated blind caseloads. Counselors would meet three to four times per year for training and to share resources. Ms. Deden explained how this is very different from how the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation works in Colorado today. Ms. Deden discussed how different the rehabilitation process is for someone who is blind compared to individuals with other disabilities, and therefore how important it is that rehabilitation counselors receive training specific to blindness.

01:46 PM

Ms. Deden responded to questions from the committee regarding other staff members who work with the blind, in addition to the dedicated rehabilitation counselors. Ms. Deden also responded to committee questions regarding the educational programs that are available from universities for students who are interested in becoming rehabilitation counselors. Ms. Deden explained the importance of providing counselors with specific training related to providing blind services since this specific education is not often provided through university programs. With the current system in place in Colorado where counselors have a mixed caseload and very few clients in a given counselor's caseload are blind, the counselor does not have the time to engage in the necessary blind-specific training. Ms. Deden spoke about how the Nebraska Commission for the Blind provides all new counselors with in-depth training through a training center upon hiring that is focused on services for the blind.

01:53 PM

Ms. Diane McGeorge spoke about her history and experience with working with vocational rehabilitation counselors who were trained to work specifically with the blind during the time when there were separate, identifiable services for the blind in Colorado. Ms. McGeorge also spoke about the experiences of her husband when he lost his eyesight as a teenager and his experience working with rehabilitation counselors. Ms. McGeorge continued discussing the importance of having rehabilitation counselors with a caseload dedicated to the blind. Ms. McGeorge spoke about the changes she saw in the Colorado vocational rehabilitation services provided to the blind, including an increase in low expectations for the blind and an increase in placement of the blind into non- or low-wage earning positions.

Ms. McGeorge discussed her experience helping to organize the Colorado Center for the Blind, started in 1988, and about the graduates from the center. Ms. McGeorge also spoke about the importance of technology in being successful today. Ms. McGeorge reiterated that her experience has been that a separate identifiable agency that is dedicated to providing vocational rehabilitation services to the blind, with a separate, identifiable budget, has been the most successful, as opposed to the current situation with services for the blind being combined within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

02:10 PM

The panel members responded to questions from the committee about the ideal caseload for rehabilitation counselors for the blind. Ms. McGeorge also explained that the Colorado Center for the Blind is part of the National Federation for the Blind, but does not receive funding from them, and that individuals do not have to be a member of the National Federation for the Blind to be a client at the center. Ms. McGeorge and Ms. Deden also expressed the Colorado Center for the Blind's support for the National Federation for the Blind resolution expressing concerns with the current system in Colorado of providing vocation rehabilitation services to the blind.

02:15 PM -- Senior Services for the Blind

Ms. Duncan Larsen, Director of Senior Services at the Colorado Center for the Blind, spoke about her history working with blind individuals in Nebraska and Colorado. Ms. Larsen discussed her experience working in the Nebraska unit dedicated to providing vocational rehabilitation services for the blind. Ms. Larsen received training from the agency dedicated to blindness skills prior to her teaching home management for the blind. Ms. Larsen also discussed the evolution of the Nebraska model from the separate unit to a completely separate agency dedicated to providing vocational rehabilitation services to the blind, known as the Nebraska Commission for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Ms. Larsen spoke about how this is very different and provides several advantages over the Colorado model of having a combined vocational rehabilitation agency where counselors are not required to receive training specific to blind individuals.

Ms. Larsen continued with an overview of the services that are available to older blind individuals. Ms. Larsen spoke about how seniors who lose their sight later in life can often feel a sense of isolation, helplessness, and depression, and have a lack of positive blind role models, and how the Colorado Center for the Blind works to change this. The center provides training to seniors so they can continue to live independently, including traveling independently, reading braille, cooking, using technology, and using other blindness skills. The Colorado Center for the Blind also provides blind seniors and their family members with support groups and educational events. Ms. Larsen also spoke about the desire of many blind seniors to continue working, including part-time or volunteer work, and the importance of providing vocational rehabilitation services to these individuals. Technology training is especially important for these individuals.

Ms. Larsen spoke about the feedback she has received from the blind seniors she works with, including the importance of blindness skills training, counselors needing internal training on attitudes towards blindness, and the need for good transportation services, especially in rural areas of the state.

Ms. Larsen continued to speak about the need for more services for older blind individuals and provided some statistics on the projected growth of this segment of the population. Due to age related vision loss, as the general population ages, so does the incidence of blindness. According to the Area Agency on Aging, 25 percent of seniors age 60 or older experience vision loss.

Ms. Larsen spoke about how the Colorado Center for the Blind provides services to blind seniors through grant from the Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB) program, which is funded through the US Department of Education Rehabilitation Services Administration, and other grants and contributions. Ms. Larsen continued to discuss the funding provided through Title 7 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and how grants are made to states to support services for individuals who are age 55 and older who have independent living goals. The OIB program is administered through the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Ms. Larsen discussed the need for more funding to provide training and other services for older blind individuals across the state and the need to do more outreach to blind seniors to inform them about what services are available. Ms. Larsen discussed the advantages of providing services to the blind through a separate state agency.

02:36 PM -- Youth Transitions from Education to Employment

Dr. Tanni Anthony, Director of the Access, Learning, and Literacy (ALL) Team within the Exceptional Student Services Unit and the State Consultant on Blindness and Visual Impairment at the Colorado Department of Education, spoke to the committee about her work and experience. Dr. Anthony discussed the resources that are available in Colorado that help to identify blind children very early on, with most blind or visually impaired children being identified by the age of three when they enter the public school system. According to the "December 1 count" that is submitted to the federal government and quantifies the number of students in each of the 13 primary disability labels, there are approximately 350 students age 3 to 21 in Colorado with a primary disability of visual impairment. Many others have an additional disability and so are classified in the multiple disabilities category. According to data provided by the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (CSDB), there are approximately 1,065 kids age 3 to 21 with visual impairment. The three main conditions that cause youth blindness have a high correlation with additional disabilities, explaining the discrepancy between these numbers. According to the Colorado Instructional Materials Center (CIMC), there are approximately 258 children in Colorado at the secondary transition age (age 15 or older) with visual impairment.

Across Colorado's 178 school districts there are 62 administrative units to serve students with visual impairments. Across these 62 administrative units, there are approximately 90 teachers who are trained in blindness. Many of these 90 teachers have graduated from the University of Northern Colorado (UNC), which has the only training program in the state for teachers who are working with children who are visually impaired. Dr. Anthony explained her role in helping school districts with the recruitment, training, and retention of these teachers. Dr. Anthony explained that these teachers who are trained in visual impairment (TVI) are typically not the primary educator for visually impaired children, they are typically consultants for general education teachers and provide support to the personnel in the district who provide secondary transition services.

The Colorado Department of Education is responsible for the oversight of all things required by federal and state law. The department is also responsible for measuring post-school outcomes, which measures how many graduates are competitively employed or enrolled in university or trade school programs. Dr. Anthony also discussed the state Bridges to Life program, which is specifically designed to provide post-school transition support for students with sensory disabilities at CSDB.

Dr. Anthony provided two handouts to the committee (Attachment A and Cwcej o gpv'B).

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02:49 PM

Dr. Anthony responded to questions from the committee regarding TVI teachers, including what percentage of a visually impaired student's education is provided by a non-TV I teacher. Dr. Anthony explained that TVI teachers work to ensure visually impaired students have good access to the content (technology, specially designed instruction), and they work closely with student's general education teachers. An exception to this is students who attend CSDB, whose primary teachers are TVI teachers. Dr. Anthony was also asked by the committee to provide data on the percentage of instruction students receive that is provided in a general education classroom. Dr. Anthony explained that approximately 55 to 60 visually impaired students attend CSDB, and that a majority of the rest of visually impaired students in Colorado are attending school at the local neighborhood schools in general education classrooms.

02:56 PM

Brent Batron, Assistant Director at the Colorado Center for the Blind, Director of Youth Programs at the Colorado Center for the Blind, president-elect of the Colorado Association for Education Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired, and appointed to the board of trustees of CSDB, spoke to the committee about importance of transition services for visually impaired students. He stated that the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation can provide services that augment transition services provided by school teachers and school districts. The division is able to provide additional blindness skills training and help understanding how to move from an educational setting to an employment setting, including helping students set expectations.

Mr. Batron spoke about his experience with the School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP), which is a program designed to help students with disabilities, and how he has often had blind students turned away from that program because of their extensive needs. Mr. Batron also discussed his personal experience and his students' experiences with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and being told that students under the age of 18 are too young to access their services, and that they must wait until they have graduated high school to contact the division.

Mr. Batron discussed the variety of pre-vocational skills that are needed, including developing a resume, learning how to look appropriate and have good hygiene, when to talk about blindness in the interview process, how to believe you can do the job, how to use braille and assistive technology, how to budget time and money, and how to travel independently. Mr. Batron discussed how the Colorado Center for the Blind's Earn to Learn Program helps blind students gain job experience. He also explained that a majority of the students in this program have come from states other than Colorado in recent years, and are often fully-funded to attend by their state's vocational rehabilitation program. The Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation does not typically provide funding for blind Colorado high school students to attend this training. Mr. Batron suggested that the committee look into the Rehabilitation Services of Arizona, which fully funds transition services for students beginning at the age of 14 at a variety of centers across the country.

03:09 PM

Mr. Batron responded to questions from the committee and was asked to provide data from Arizona on the state's employment rates compared to Colorado. Mr. Batron also responded to questions regarding the funding of transition services for students through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the history of this funding.

Dr. Anthony also responded to committee questions regarding SWAP, and discussed how the program is for students who qualify, which includes students who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, within specific school districts that provide SWAP. A decision is then made based on the extensiveness of the services the student needs, and the program is designed for students who have mild or moderate employment needs. Blindness is typically considered a more significant disability because they require more extensive services which would be provided through the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The committee asked about the history of the SWAP policy regarding disability level and help to understand the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's responsibilities versus the responsibility of the school districts in developing a transition plan for a student and ways to include all concerned agencies.

03:20 PM -- Public Comment

03:21 PM -- Jamie Principato, representing herself, spoke about her experiences. Ms. Principato is currently a student at Arapahoe Community College, where she is studying physics, and a tutor at the Colorado Center for the Blind. Ms. Principato spoke about her experience trying to work with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, their lack of services, and her discouraging experience working with her vocational rehabilitation counselor. Ms. Principato also discussed vocational rehabilitation counselors' incentives to close cases with employment, not further education, and their lack of experience working with blind individuals. Ms. Principato responded to questions from the committee regarding the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's complaint system and how she has been able to adapt without services from the division after having her case closed after not complying with her counselor's suggestions.

03:35 PM -- Penny Hlavaty, student at the Colorado Center for the Blind, spoke about her history with vision loss and her experience working with a counselor from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Ms. Hlavaty indicated that her counselor did not initially know how to work with a blind person, but they were able to work together to develop a plan for her to meet her goals to go back to work in an office environment and learn the skills she needs to live and work independently. Ms. Hlavaty also discussed her experience as a student at the Colorado Center for the Blind.

03:39 PM -- Zaina Braddy, student at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs, spoke about her experience with vision loss and working with her counselor from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Ms. Braddy spoke about her experience having to explain her desire to go back to school and having to provide justification to the division in order to go back to school.

03:42 PM -- Kathleen Senn, representing herself, spoke about her experience with vocational rehabilitation services while living in Texas compared to her experiences working with the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Ms. Senn responded to questions from the committee regarding the services she has received from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

03:50 PM -- Scott LaBarre, representing the National Federation of the Blind of Colorado, responded to a couple topics addressed during today's committee meeting, including the need to look into the transfer of older individuals who are blind. Mr. LaBarre also discussed that in 1992 the federal Rehabilitation Act was changed to revise the rehabilitation philosophy to place the focus on "informed choice" for each individual client and that vocational rehabilitation services should support the maximum that the individual can and wants to achieve.

The committee also received written testimony from Emily Romero (Attachment C).

03:57 PM

The committee adjourned.

01:03 PM -- Opening Remarks

Representative Danielson, chair, called the meeting to order and gave a few brief comments regarding the meeting agenda.

TRANSITION PLANNING

REQUIREMENTS

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004

§ 300.43 Transition services. (a) *Transition services* means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—

(1) Is designed to be within a results oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(2) Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and includes— (i) Instruction; (ii) Related services; (iii) Community experiences; (iv) The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and (v) If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation. (b) *Transition services* for children with disabilities may be special education, if provided as specially designed instruction, or a related service, if required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education. (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1401(3)).

§ 300.321 IEP Team

(b) *Transition services participants.*

(1) In accordance with paragraph (a)(7) of this section, the public agency must invite a child with a disability to attend the child's IEP Team meeting if a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals for the child and the transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals under § 300.320(b).

(2) If the child does not attend the IEP Team meeting, the public agency must take other steps to ensure that the child's preferences and interests are considered.

(3) To the extent appropriate, with the consent of the parents or a child who has reached the age of majority, in implementing the requirements of paragraph (b)(1) of this section, the public agency must invite a representative of any participating agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services.

Colorado Exceptional Children's Educational Act (ECEA) 2013

4.03 (6) (d) Exception: In lieu of 34 CFR § 300.320(b), the IEP content requirements for transition services shall be as follows: (i) Beginning with the first IEP developed when the child is age 15, but no later than the end of 9th grade, or earlier if deemed appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually, thereafter, the IEP must include: (ii) Appropriate measureable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and when appropriate, independent living skills; and; (iii) The transition services (as defined in Section 2.51 of these Rules and including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals.



PROCESS

Transition planning, services and activities should be approached as a multi-year process. Young adults and their parents play an important role in the planning process. Based on assessment data, identify students' measurable postsecondary goals (PSGs) in the areas of career/employment, education and training, and independent living. The PSGs are the foundational components of the planning process. Once PSGs are identified, the course of study, transition services, and annual goals must directly and genuinely link to the PSGs. In addition, any functional and academic needs must be identified to address gaps that may hinder students' ability to progress toward identified PSGs. Transition services can and should be delivered through the identified course of study to include curricular and extracurricular activities in a variety of settings, such as academic, vocational, home, and community environments as students work toward mastery of annual goals.

CONSIDERATIONS

The following evidence-based practices and predictors of post school success should be considered when developing transition plans. The student's preferences, interests, skills, and needs will guide the transition planning process.

- Identify student learning styles and needs, as well as necessary accommodations to be a successful learner and worker.
- Identify career interests and skills, complete career interest and aptitude assessments to identify additional education or training requirements.
- Match career interests and skills with academic course work and authentic work-based learning experiences.
- Identify needed community adult agency linkages.
- Determine postsecondary education and training needs and linkages.
- Identify independent living needs and supports. Provide opportunities for authentic experiences.
- Provide opportunities for the development of self-advocacy/self-determination skills.
- Ensure students' understanding and ability to explain their disabilities and needed accommodations.
- Determine assistive technology tools needed to increase community involvement and employment opportunities.
- Obtain an appropriate state identification document prior to age 18.
- Determine the need for financial support (Supplemental Security Income, state financial supplemental programs, Medicaid).
- Determine needed skill development in social conventions for a variety of settings.
- Determine need for guardianship.
- Provide opportunities for families to participate meaningfully in the transition planning process.
- Identify transportation needs and options, as well as resources and training needs.
- Provide opportunities to learn and practice skills in the general education environment and other inclusive settings.
- Provide opportunities to learn and practice informed decision-making skills to include safety, financial matters, personal care, health care and wellness.

The contents of this handout were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.



ESSU Technical Assistance

School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP)

The School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP) is designed to provide employment-related assistance to youth and young adults with disabilities, who are experiencing mild to moderate barriers to employment. Disabilities can take the form of physical, emotional, or learning disabilities. SWAP provides assistance that not only produces a desirable employment outcome (such as a career-path job), but also teaches appropriate job seeking and job retention skills that can be utilized throughout a lifetime.

SWAP is a collaborative initiative between the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and local school districts, and is supported by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The SWAP program provides case management and direct services to youth who:

- Have mild to moderate needs in employment;
- Are applicants of or are eligible to receive DVR services (meeting disability documentation requirements and able to benefit from the program); and
- Need short-term support to become competitively employed and to achieve successful community outcomes.

Purpose of SWAP

The purpose of SWAP is to provide successful employment outcomes, increased community linkages, and new patterns of service for youth within all categories of disabilities. The program's goals include:

- Building on current transition planning efforts;
- Filling the case management gap for the targeted population; and
- Supporting collaboration between DVR, the Colorado Department of Education, and local school districts.

Typical SWAP Services

Clients being served through SWAP are eligible for services typically provided through DVR, such as evaluation and diagnostic services, vocational counseling and guidance, physical and mental restoration services, and training. Additionally, SWAP may provide services such as:

- Career exploration
- Career development
- Employment-related instruction
- Job development / placement
- Case management
- One year of follow-up

SWAP is designed to provide a new pattern of service that will enhance existing transition services and to provide employment services to an under-served population of youth. Unique components include:

- Year round community-based services;

2015-2016 SWAP Sites School District/BOCES	
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Academy 20.....	719-234-1333
Adams 12	720-872-2660
Adams 14	303-853-3294
Adams 50	720-542-4582
Aurora	303-344-4910
Boulder.....	720-561-5312
Brighton.....	303-655-4197
Buena Vista	719-395-4064
Cañon City	719-276-6173
Centennial BOCES	970-352-7404
Cherry Creek	720-886-5871
Co. Springs 11.....	719-520-2592
Delta	970-874-7607
Denver.....	303-866-3869
Douglas County	303-387-1104
Englewood/Sheridan.	303-866-4458
Estes Park	970-586-2361
Ft. Lupton.....	303-857-7295
Greeley 6	970-348-1080
Jefferson County	303-982-7014
Littleton.....	303-347-4418
Mesa County	970-254-6402
Moffat County.....	970-756-7927
Montrose.....	970-249-7783
Northeast BOCES.....	970-774-6152
Pikes Peak BOCES	719-380-6256
Poudre.....	970-490-3286
Rio Blanco BOCES.....	970-629-5333
Salida	719-207-1509
San Juan BOCES.....	970-247-1178
San Luis Valley.....	719-589-5851
St. Vrain	303-772-7700
Thompson	970-669-8349
Uncompahgre BOCES	970-626-2977
Windsor.....	970-686-8078
Ute Pass BOCES.....	719-686-2457



- Case management services; and
- One year of follow-up services after successful employment.

The Colorado Department of Education, through a contract with DVR, provides joint training and technical assistance, product development and dissemination, conflict resolution assistance, and program monitoring to 36 local SWAP sites.

Funding

Funding of a SWAP site occurs when schools provide state or local funds to DVR, which are then matched with federal funds. These funds are used to pay for staff and other expenses related to SWAP. Additionally, DVR pays the cost of case services for youth assisted by the project. Participation in SWAP is optional by local districts.

SWAP Target Population

SWAP services would be appropriate for:

- Youth between the ages of 16-25, and
- Applicants of or eligible for DVR services, and
- Have mild to moderate needs in employment, and
- Will be ready to work after short-term service provision, and
- Typically living within the boundaries of a school district or BOCES participating in the SWAP program. (Youth who do not live in a participating district or BOCES may access vocational rehabilitation services directly through the DVR program).

Youth could be:

- In-School served by:
 - Section 504 programs
 - IDEA [Special Education] programs
 - Suspected or known disability not under any other category
- Out-of-School
 - Graduated or aged out
 - Drop-out or at risk of dropping out
 - Under or unemployed

SWAP would not be appropriate for:

- Youth aged 14 or 15
- Youth with significant needs who will require extensive services for placement
- Youth identified as “most severe” or currently eligible for supported employment services
- Youth with on-going legal problems that make placement in a work setting difficult
- Youth who need long-term services, extensive training or attend a 2 or 4-year college full time program.

Referrals:

The appropriate time for referral is when an individual’s primary focus is employment and they are available for services. Referrals can be made from the schools through the IEP or 504 process, through a DVR counselor, or directly to a SWAP office. To make a referral contact the coordinator in the community in which the youth lives.

The contents of this handout were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

My name is Emily Romero, I am a sophomore at Regis University in Denver, CO, and my experiences with DVR are as follows. I applied for services through the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) during my sophomore year of high school at the age of 16. I had some pre-vocational goals in mind, including receiving training for the summer at the Colorado Center for the Blind which would help me with college and work readiness. Unfortunately, I was denied for services and placed on the wait-list, and I was not removed from the wait-list until August 19th, 2014, one day before I was due to move into my college dorm at Regis University in Denver. This meant that I would not be able to receive any services or student benefits through DVR for my entire freshman year. College was and is the cornerstone of my vocational readiness, so this late removal from the wait-list severely hampered DVR's ability to assist me in achieving readiness for employment.

I have always had self-confidence and the ability to set goals for myself and fulfill them despite my disability; the only time I have felt belittled or inferior due to my total blindness was when my DVR counselor found out I was planning on attending Regis University (which is prestigious, academically rigorous, and a private university) and he asked what the need for this was, and why I wasn't taking my classes at community college. While community college is a perfectly respectable option and is an option which works well for many, it was obvious that my counselor was only asking me why I was going to a four year university because I was blind. His implied meaning was clear to me: He did not expect that any blind person could navigate the mobility challenges, academic rigor, and general environment of a full-time university.

This is but one example of the largest problem facing persons who are blind like myself as we attempt to navigate DVR's system: counselors are uneducated on what blindness actually means for a person's employability and educability. Many hold a view of blindness as a completely catastrophic impediment to success in all its forms, when in fact blindness, in actuality is a condition of being which requires some relatively minor adjustments in life (such as having things verbally described or using technology in different ways than otherwise would be the case). This lack of an understanding of what blindness means for a person's goals is the single most inhibitory factor in my receiving services through DVR.