

PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
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PENN*LINK

TO: School District Superintendents
School District Special Education Directors
Intermediate Unit Executive Directors
Intermediate Unit Special Education Directors
Charter School Chief Executive Officers
Charter School Special Education Directors

FROM: Patricia Hozella, Director
Bureau of Special Education

SUBJECT: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

On July 22, 2014, President Obama signed into law Public Law No. 113-128, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). WIOA is the first legislative reform of the public workforce system in more than 15 years. It supersedes the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and amends the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. WIOA reaffirms the role of the customer-focused one-stop delivery system, a cornerstone of the public workforce development system, and enhances and increases coordination among several key employment, education, and training programs.

The goal of WIOA is to improve the quality of the workforce, reduce welfare dependency, increase economic self-sufficiency, meet skills requirements of employers, and enhance the productivity and competitiveness of the nation. It is aimed at increasing opportunities, particularly for those individuals with disabilities who face barriers to employment, and invests in the important connection between education and career preparation.

Throughout WIOA, especially in the amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, there is a significant emphasis on the provision of services to youth with disabilities. To that end, WIOA:

1. Emphasizes the need for youth with disabilities to have more opportunities to practice and improve their workplace skills, to consider their career interests, and to get real world work experience.
2. Requires state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to make available to all students with disabilities the following five required "pre-employment transition services":
 - a. job exploration counseling,
 - b. work-based learning experiences that are provided in an integrated environment to the maximum extent possible,
 - c. counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education,
 - d. workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and
 - e. instruction in self-advocacy, which may include peer mentoring.
3. Requires state VR agencies to set aside at least 15 percent of their federal VR program funds to provide pre-employment transition services to assist students with disabilities make the transition from secondary school to postsecondary education programs and competitive integrated employment.

4. Allows state VR agencies to prioritize serving students with disabilities.
5. Allows state VR agencies to support advanced training in science, technology, engineering, math, and other technical professions.
6. Dedicates half of the federal Supported Employment Program funds to provide youth with the most significant disabilities with the supports they need, including extended services, to enable them to obtain competitive integrated employment.

For transition-age students, WIOA focuses VR outcomes on competitive integrated employment and promotes greater emphasis on transition services for youth with disabilities. It also provides increased emphasis on coordination between VR and other agencies, including school systems.

The coordination with school systems provides pre-employment transition services for all eligible students with disabilities. These services include:

1. Attending individualized education program meetings, when invited;
2. Working with the local workforce development boards, one-stop centers (American Job Centers), and employers to develop employment opportunities for students with disabilities;
3. Working with schools, to coordinate and ensure the provision of pre-employment transition services; and
4. Attending person-centered planning meetings, when invited, for individuals receiving services funded by Medicaid.

It is critical that local educational agency transition staff is aware of WIOA. The primary employment goal for people with disabilities, even those with the most significant or severe disabilities, is full- or part-time work at minimum wage or higher in an environment that is fully integrated with co-workers who do not have disabilities.

During the 2016-17 school year, the Bureau of Special Education (BSE), in collaboration with the Department of Labor and Industry's Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), will offer transition trainings through the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network and will provide information regarding secondary transition resources and supports for students with disabilities. Additional information can be found at www.pattan.net

Youth, families and education staff are encouraged to review the resources available on the Postsecondary Education and Training section of the Pennsylvania Secondary Transition Guide website: www.secondarytransition.org.

To access Public Law 113–128 titled the “Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act” (WIOA), use the following link: <https://www.congress.gov/113/plaws/publ128/PLAW-113publ128.pdf>.

For more information about the PA Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, please visit: www.dli.pa.gov.

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