

## **COORDINATION WITH EDUCATION OFFICIALS**

The Georgia Department of Labor (GDOL)/Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program recognizes the critical relationship among education, employment, independence and self-sufficiency; therefore, VR makes outreach and services to students with disabilities a top priority. Eligible students with disabilities are provided equal access to vocational rehabilitation services, whether they participate in special education or in general education classes and services. VR directs 38% of its resources towards transitioning students from school to post-secondary opportunities; employment is the predominant outcome. In FY 2006, over 5,900 students with disabilities received services through the VR Program and 760 achieved a successful rehabilitation outcome.

VR shares a strong and effective partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (GDOE). The two agencies have established a state level cooperative agreement to assure that cooperation and collaboration exist in implementing and maintaining a system of vocational rehabilitation service delivery to eligible students with disabilities.

The current Cooperative Agreement between GDOE and VR became effective as of December 1, 2005, and will remain in effect for ten (10) years, unless a revised agreement is developed and signed prior to the end of that time frame. The current Cooperative Agreement stipulates that VR shall:

- ▶ provide the GDOE with a written statement describing the eligibility criteria for vocational rehabilitation services;
- ▶ work collaboratively with local school systems to identify and locate students with disabilities who may be in need of vocational rehabilitation services; and
- ▶ develop, in conjunction with the eligible student, an individualized plan for employment (IPE) prior to the student's graduation, including the vocational rehabilitation services that are determined to be appropriate for the student.

The current Cooperative Agreement defines terms and specifies the roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency. In particular, GDOE is responsible for identifying and referring to VR those students with disabilities who do not qualify for special education and related services but who appear to meet the requirements for eligibility for VR services.

The stipulations of the Cooperative Agreement are detailed in the VR Client Services Policy Manual, Section 450.0.00 and related references, including consultative and technical assistance services provided by VR to the GDOE and local school systems.

In addition to the state level agreement, VR has also established a collaborative agreement opportunity with GDOE and local school systems (LSS). Each involved LSS receives intensive, dedicated rehabilitation services for the purpose of earlier identification of and intervention with students with disabilities. In FY 2006, eighty (80) LSSs took advantage of this opportunity.

VR and the LSS share financial responsibilities under the collaborative agreement; each agency contributes monetary and in-kind services to support projects that promote transition for students with disabilities. The VR Counselor works with each eligible student to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE or "Work Plan") and determine the vocational rehabilitation services appropriate to the student's goal. While the student is in school, existing resources in the school and in the community sponsor needed services. However, VR will sponsor required, employment-related services if they are unavailable through the school/community and if a student is eligible for those services under the VR Program.

A goal of the vocational rehabilitation team is to facilitate the successful transition of students with disabilities from receipt of education and transition services in school to receipt of vocational rehabilitation services. VR is involved in school transition planning and Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings with students, parents, and school staffs. VR staff participate in community resource fairs, attend parent/teacher functions, and serve on interagency transition councils to further promote the availability of VR services. In addition, VR staff share information on community resources and partner in the transition process, and provide workshops for groups of students and support to families and school personnel.

All the activities noted above are included in VR's procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services. Further outreach efforts involve participation in community/transition/employment resource fairs, parent/teacher functions, interagency transition councils, and carrying out workshops for school staff, families and students on VR services and opportunities. Collaboration with community partners is essential to identifying students with disabilities who need transition services. These relationships include, the local Workforce Investment Board, Family Connections, local community service boards, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, supported employment providers, local four-year, two-year, and technical colleges, Department of Family and Children's Services, Public Health, Brain & Spinal Cord Injury Trust Fund, and local employer committees.

In FY 2007, VR joined with the Georgia Department of Education and Tools for Life in the biannual Touch the Future and Transition (TTF/T) Conference by holding GDOL's annual Workforce Development Conference in coordination with TTF/Transition. The joint conference was well attended by transition-involved school staff, VR Counselors who work with transitioning students in local school systems, and other GDOL employees involved in workforce development. Attendees responded very positively to the opportunity to learn about areas of endeavor in addition to their own. The Honorable John H Hager, Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, took the time to come and announce two significant grant awards to VR's Tools for Life.

The VR Transition Services Coordinator is collaborating with the GDOE Transition Specialist and Tools for Life to develop a web site to support Georgia's Interagency Transition Councils in their development and assistance to students with disabilities in transition. Since 2004, when VR, GDOE, the Department of Human Resources (DHR) – Division of Mental Health/Developmental Disabilities/Addictive Diseases (MH/DD/AD), and the Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE) launched an effort to revitalize Interagency Transition

Councils (ITCs) as a vital local resource for students with disabilities. ITCs have increased from 12 to 38, either functional or in development.

Additional efforts are under way to strengthen ties with High School/High Tech and collaborate on services to Transition Students. High School/High Tech is a community based enrichment initiative for high school students with disabilities who are interested in science, engineering and technology-related careers.

In FY 2006 the final report of a five-year program, the Learning Disabilities Pilot Project, was produced. The Project included a partnership between DTAE and VR staff as part of a task group working with Learning Disabled Adults of Georgia (LDAG); it was funded by DTAE. The goal of the project was to ensure that technical colleges were providing appropriate services and accommodations for students with documented learning disabilities. Approximately 100 students participated in the Athens area. VR provided students in the last two years of the Project with evaluations for learning disabilities, as well as assistance with assistive technology and training in self-advocacy for the students, faculty, and approximately forty-five DTAE Special Populations Coordinators. VR also shared information about the Project, the process and the successful outcomes, with VR, statewide.

The VR State Transition Coordinator promotes school to work activities through participation on statewide committees and relationships with strategic partners. The Statewide Interagency Transition Committee is comprised of teachers and school vocational counselors, private employment representatives, other service providers, parents and advocacy groups, post-secondary and state agency representatives. The Committee meets at least three times during the year to address transition issues, share resources, and develop strategies to challenge current practices in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

Members of the GDOE State Advisory Panel for Special Education include representatives from parents/parent mentors, advocates, both special and regular education teachers, school administrators and special education directors, the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities, the Department of Corrections, and the VR Program. Through regular involvement with these groups, the VR State Transition Coordinator both shares information about vocational rehabilitation services and learns about other services/resources that may assist transition, statewide.