

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, GDOL/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. GDOL/VR directs 38% of its resources towards transitioning students from school to post-secondary opportunities; employment is the predominant outcome. In FY 2004, 1,799 students with disabilities received services through the GDOL/VR Program and 256 achieved a successful rehabilitation outcome.

GDOL/VR shares a strong and effective partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (DOE). 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.

In addition to the state level agreement, GDOL/VR has also established a collaborative agreement opportunity with DOE 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 2004, eighty (80) LSS's took advantage of this opportunity.

GDOL/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 GDOL/VR Counselor works with each eligible student to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE or "Work Plan") and determine the GDOL/VR 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, GDOL/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 GDOL/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. GDOL/VR is involved in school transition planning and Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings with students, parents, and school staffs. GDOL/VR staff participate in community resource fairs, attend parent/teacher functions, and serve on interagency councils to further promote the availability of VR services. In addition, GDOL/VR staff share information on community resources and partners in the transition process, and provide workshops for groups of students and support to families and school personnel.

In FY 2004, GDOL/VR furthered its already strong partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) by organizing and hosting joint meetings in all twelve GDOL/VR Regions. The GDOL/VR State Transition Coordinator, Regional Directors, and HRD-CQI Specialists organized and hosted the meetings. Each LSS's Special Education Director and transition-involved school staff were invited to talk about what we are doing together that works well, what

could be improved, and how can we address the needs of students with disabilities even more efficiently and effectively.

In addition, both the Georgia Department of Human Resources (DHR)/Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Addictive Diseases (MHDDAD) and the Georgia Department of Technical and Adult Education (DTAE) expressed interest in participating and were invited. They sent local representatives to each regional meeting. LSS parent mentor representatives also attended.

Outcome goals for these meetings included: development of ongoing, local interagency councils focused on transition or joining efforts with already existing and functioning councils; and active outreach to include additional local partners who can help students with disabilities transition from school to independence and self-sufficiency.

Efforts are under way to strengthen ties with High School/High Tech as a service 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.

FY 2004 has been the third year in a three-year partnership between GDOL/VR and DTAE. GDOL/VR staff worked on a task group with Learning Disabled Adults of Georgia (LDAG) and DTAE to develop the Learning Disabilities Pilot Project, funded by DTAE. The goal of this project is to ensure that technical colleges provide appropriate services and accommodations for students with documented learning disabilities. Approximately 100 students have been screened and tested.

GDOL/VR has provided technical assistance with assistive technology and training in self-advocacy for the students, faculty, and approximately forty-five DTAE Special Populations Coordinators. Data from the project is currently being collected to determine the following: the number of students screened and tested who were diagnosed with learning disabilities; how many students were or have become VR clients, and the number who successfully finished the program and became employed.

The GDOL/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 quarterly to address transition issues, share resources, and develop strategies to challenge current practices in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. The GDOL/VR State Transition Coordinator served on a subcommittee of this group that produced a new Transition Manual aimed at providing comprehensive information to all interested parties on subjects related to transition. The Department of Education is the source for copies of the Transition Manual, and a regularly updated edition may be found at www.doe.k12.ga.us under the link to Special Education.

Members of the DOE 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 GDOL/VR Program. Through regular involvement with these groups, the GDOL/VR State Transition Coordinator both shares information about vocational rehabilitation services and learns about other services/resources that may assist transition, statewide.

During FY 2004, the GDOL/VR Leadership Team and the GDOL/VR State Transition Coordinator proposed a new Transition Plan for Georgia. The first initiative was to develop and distribute a survey to all GDOL/VR School Transition Counselors. The response rate was over 76 %; responses were compiled and used in the FY 2005 objective of full implementation of the Transition Plan.

The GDOL/VR State Transition Coordinator also organized a statewide GDOL/VR Transition Team under the leadership of three GDOL/VR Regional Directors. This Team studied the proposed Transition Plan for Georgia, developed specific aspects and made recommendations for implementation to the VR Leadership Team (VRLT). All recommendations were approved by the VRLT early in FY 2005, with implementation to begin immediately.

The GDOL/VR State Transition Coordinator was a member of the Planning Committee for the Power Up for the Future Expo/Transition Conference, which occurred in October 2004. Transition was the theme of the entire event, and multiple partners were involved as sponsors. A collaborative breakout session focused on transition for GDOL/VR School Counselors, LSS Special Education/Transition Staff, and all other interested attendees, aimed at developing Interagency Transition Councils, was held to standing room only participation. Conference evaluations and ongoing feedback from all over the state reflected an exceptionally high success rate in meeting all the goals of the entire conference.

Summary of FY 2006 Objectives

1. Use survey responses from GDOL/VR School Counselors to implement the GDOL/VR Transition Plan for Georgia.
2. Continue implementation of the GDOL/VR Transition Plan for Georgia.
3. Apply above survey responses to development of an Orientation to Education Seminar for counselors (and other unit team members – at the option of the Regional Directors) in July 2005. The agenda will be developed in collaboration with speakers from the Georgia Department of Education.
4. Collaborate with Georgia's DOE-Division for Exceptional Students (DES), DHR/D-MHDDAD, and DTAE to follow up on the progress of establishing local interagency transition councils, statewide..
5. Continue participation on statewide committees and relationships with strategic partners.