



Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center

Building Positive Futures for Virginia's Children

Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services: How it Works

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Eligibility: Special Education is an entitlement. Once a student has qualified as being eligible for special education, all appropriate services are free and must be provided. There are no restrictions in education for students who are ineligible to work in the US. There is no entitlement to Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Programs. Not every person with a disability will be eligible for services. For example, those not eligible to work in the U.S. are ineligible for VR services (but they may be referred to other DRS programs and non-employment programs such as Centers for Independent Living (CILs), Community Services Boards (CSBs), etc.). DRS will consider services for any individual with a disability; however, a case may be closed if there is evidence that a person's disability is too severe to achieve employment. Schools are required under IDEA'04 to work with all students up to age 22 regardless of the severity of their disability. While school personnel may be trained to recognize appropriate referrals to DRS, only a VR Counselor is qualified by federal law to determine eligibility.

All students who have a disability, even students who are not served in school by special education or 504 plans, may be considered for VR transition services; however, DRS eligibility criteria must be met and financial needs of the family must be considered for cost services beyond assessment. The VR Counselor can work with students and their families to discuss these issues and help them chart a plan of action that will lead to employment.

The following criteria must be considered for any person to be eligible for DRS services and a VR Counselor will consider these criteria for any student who applies for services. The student must:

- be eligible to work in the US;
- have a documented disability or be perceived as having a disability;
- have a disability that is a barrier to employment;
- be able to benefit from VR services; and
- require services to prepare for, enter, engage in or retain employment.



Who Refers? Students in transition must apply to DRS if they wish to be considered for VR services. Any student who has a disability or is suspected of having a disability may be referred to a VR Counselor for DRS services. Typically, transition coordinators or special education teachers make the referral for the student to the VR Counselor who serves their school. Students may refer themselves. Families may refer their child, or others interested in the student's welfare may refer the student for VR services. The best approach to referring a student is to communicate with the local DRS office. DRS office locations may be found at the following link on the website: www.vadrs.org/officelist.asp. It should be noted that DRS is a voluntary program and neither the school division nor the families can mandate that a student apply for services.

When to Refer? All high school transition students who are DRS clients must have an employment plan in place before graduation. Referrals should be made three years before the student plans to exit school and should be included in the student's IEP. This allows time for the VR Counselor to get to know the student and start career exploration and program planning. Also, some students may need complex services coordinated by multiple agencies over an extended period of time.

A student who is ready to begin planning for their future employment goal and is willing to work with his or her transition team to develop a plan should have a VR Counselor involved in the planning process. The VR Counselor may assist the student by providing guidance and counseling, appropriate assessments and assist the student in identifying steps that will lead to employment.

While school divisions are focused on academic achievement, DRS is an employment program. Students working with DRS may have an opportunity to engage in assessments to identify career interests and aptitudes. DRS can also help the student identify what will be required to reach a chosen vocational goal or career option. DRS can also help students learn about what jobs are currently in demand and are likely to be in demand in the future. They also know what skills and work attitudes employers are looking for within their industries and labor markets. Career exploration, information interviewing and possible job shadowing can help students to learn about the world of work. DRS can help students find jobs and will work with the student and employer to make sure that the employment is a good match for both parties.

With early involvement, (preferably 3 years before exiting the school system) students can develop a relationship with their counselor and the VR counselor can get to know the student's interests, aptitudes and skills that will need to be considered in future training and employment endeavors.

Working collaboratively with all transition partners is key to a successful journey toward employment.

From "Exploring the Future and Creating a Timeline" webcast – a partnership between PEATC and VCU/RRTC. For a free download please visit:

<http://www.worksupport.com/training/webcastDetails.cfm/122>

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Introducing the TACE Centers

Regional Technical Assistance and Continuing Education (TACE) Centers provide technical support and continuing education programs to state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies and their partners. The Centers are VR's resource for current, reliable information on quality management practices, service delivery and vocational rehabilitation skill sets. The Centers have the resources of the entire TA Network to help each agency improve its organizational performance and ultimately improve employment outcomes for consumers with disabilities.

For more information on current or planned activities in a federal region, contact the TACE Centers as follows:

Region 1 – CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT

University of Massachusetts, Boston

Institute for Community Inclusion/ UCEDD
 100 Morrissey Blvd.
 Boston, MA 02125
 Phone: (617) 287-4342
 TTY: (617) 287-4350
 Web site: <http://www.nercep.org>

Region 2 – NJ, NY, PR, VI

State University of New York, Buffalo

316 Parker Hall, 3435 Main St.
 Buffalo, NY 14214-3007
 Phone: (716) 829-3934
 Web site: <http://www.rcep2.buffalo.edu>

Region 3 – DE, DC, MD, PA, VA, WV

George Washington University

2011 Eye St. N.W., Ste 300
 Washington, D.C. 20006
 Phone: (202) 973-1550
 TTY (202) 973-1544
 Web site: <http://www.gwu.edu/~rcep/>

Region 4 – AL, FL, GA, KY, NC, SC, MS, TN

TACE Southeast

1419 Mayson St.
 Atlanta, GA 30309
 Phone: 404-541-9001
 Web site: <http://www.tacesoutheast.org>

Region 5 – IL, IN, MI, MN, OH, WI

Southern Illinois University – Carbondale

Norhtwest Annex, Wing B, Ste 101
 Carbondale, IL 62901-6703
 Phone: (618) 536-2461
 Web site: <http://www.rcepV.siu.edu/>

Region 6 AR, LA, NM, OK, TX

University of Arkansas

Graduate Education Building
 College of Education and Health Professions
 Fayetteville, AR 72701
 Phone: (501) 623-7700
 Web site: <http://www.uacurrents.org>

Region 7 IA, KS, MO, NE

University of Missouri-Columbia

98 Corporate Lake Drive
 Columbia, MO 65203
 Phone: (417) 532-7192

Region 8 CO, MT, ND, SD, UT, WY

University of Northern Colorado

Gunter Hall, Room 0290
 Campus Box 82
 Greeley, CO 80639
 Phone: (970) 351-1320, (800) 765-8230
 Web site: <http://www.unco.edu/TACE>

Region 9 AZ, CA, HI, NV, Pacific Basin

San Diego State University

Interwork Institute
 5500 Campanile Drive
 San Diego, CA 92182
 Phone: (619) 594-7183
 Web site: <http://interwork.sdsu.edu/>

Region 10 AK, ID, OR, WA

University of Washington

Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation
 6912 220th St. SW, Suite 105
 Mountlake Terrace, WA 98043
 Phone: (425) 774-9303
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<http://www.ccer.org>