
Issue Brief – Vocational Rehabilitation

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION – OFFICE OF REHABILITATION

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SUMMARY

Vocational Rehabilitation programs offered by the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR) provide services to disabled individuals directed with the end goal of employment or increased independence from social interventions. Services include counseling and guidance, assistive technology, job training, job placement, and post employment follow-up. To receive Vocational Rehabilitation services, individuals must have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes a substantial impediment to employment. Eligible individuals work with counselors to develop an individualized rehabilitation program that leads to employment.

OBJECTIVE

This brief provides information on two Vocational Rehabilitation programs identified by the State Board of Education. These programs provide direct services to disabled individuals.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Increased caseload size represents one of the most significant issues facing Vocational Rehabilitation. The USOR has identified, and requests funding increases, for the following programs. The increased funding will be used to address caseload size or increase the number of individuals that can obtain Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Vocational Rehabilitation – Transitional Services ***\$723,500***

Transitional Services aids students (16-22 years old) as they transition from “entitlement” services offered while they are in high school and “eligibility” based services that are available to adults. Transition students currently comprise approximately 14 percent of all referrals coming into the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

Currently, Vocational Rehabilitation provides services within one year of a student leaving school, usually around the age of 17 to 20 years old, to facilitate transition to employment or post secondary training. In addition to an increase in the number of Vocational Rehabilitation counselors that assist students, federal regulations require these counselors to perform additional job tasks not required of traditional Vocational Rehabilitation counselors. These additional tasks include attending Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings and cross-training with Special Education staff.

Requested funds will provide for an additional 9 FTE: 6 Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and 3 secretaries.

Recommendation: The Analyst recommends that the subcommittee prioritize the request for \$723,500 in ongoing Uniform School Fund revenue to provide for Transitional Services request detailed above.

Vocational Rehabilitation – Assistive Technology
\$500,000 One-Time

Assistive technology represents items, equipment, products, or systems that are used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities. These items enable individuals with disabilities to improve their quality of life, increase independence, or function in the workplace. Individuals seeking assistive technology services must pass a financial needs test – funding goes specifically to individuals who cannot afford the services without assistance.

Each year, requests for assistive technology surpass the funding available. Once all revenue for a fiscal year has been encumbered, individuals seeking assistive technology services are placed on a waiting list to receive services the next fiscal year.

The Legislature has funded assistive technology on a regular basis over the past several years. Assistive technology has an ongoing pool of revenue to provide services. However, these ongoing funds rarely meet the requests for assistive technology services in a year. The ongoing revenue, and any one-time revenue appropriated by the Legislature, is often encumbered by the end of the second quarter in a fiscal year.

Over the past several years, the Legislature has appropriated additional one-time revenue to help with the assistive technology waiting list. One-time appropriations fit well within the assistive technology framework because the revenue is used to purchase products or make improvement.

Recommendation: The Analyst recommends that the subcommittee prioritize the request of \$500,000 in one-time Uniform School Funds to support assistive technology among the other requested items before the subcommittee.

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

This section provides a guide of what actions might be taken if the Legislature wishes to adopt the recommendations presented in this brief.

1. Consider prioritizing an increase of \$723,500 and an increase of 9 FTE employees to the Division of Rehabilitation Services to provide for Transitional Services.
2. Prioritize the requested increase of \$500,000 in one-time revenue to the Division of Rehabilitation Services to provide Assistive Technology products. Since this request supplements an ongoing appropriation, the subcommittee can determine the level of funding relative to available revenue.