



TRANSITION AGE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES & EMPLOYMENT IN UTAH

Interim Report for Social Services
Appropriations Subcommittee



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Background

During the 2018 General Legislative session, the Department of Human Services, in conjunction with the Department of Workforce Services and the Utah State Board of Education, were assigned to develop a plan to ensure the effective transition of students with disabilities from public education to appropriate non-segregated employment. This included:

1. identification of the current status and effectiveness of transition services for students with disabilities in public education as they transition to employment;
2. identification of all known barriers to access for needed transition and employment services;
3. identification of services needed to provide employment appropriate for individuals with disabilities based upon their unique abilities and needs;
4. identification of needs to ensure that the demand for those services can be met by private contract providers and state agencies;
5. a description of how to maximize state and federal funds and other funding sources that may be available to help implement the plan;
6. a report on the number of individuals with disabilities both currently enrolled in public education and those who have already transitioned from public education and their currently projected employment or their current employment status;
7. a report on the various types of needed transition and employment services, including an estimate of the number of individuals with disabilities who need appropriate employment and support services but are not currently receiving them;
8. an estimate of the number of people who would become eligible for transition from public education to employment each year for the next ten years;
9. a proposal for ways to target available funds to maximize appropriate transition and employment services;
10. any limitations that need to be considered, such as federal requirements;
11. steps that could be taken to make sure that individuals with disabilities are considered on an individual basis in accordance with federal and state disabilities policies;
12. a schedule of needed funding;
13. a discussion of innovative and creative ways that private partners and charities could work with the program to meet those needs; and
14. any other considerations needed to work towards the goal that by FY 2021 all individuals with disabilities transition from public education to employment in an appropriate job in an integrated setting.

Introduction

(10) any limitations that need to be considered, such as federal requirements;

Transitioning from school to adult life is often a challenging time for many individuals, with this period being especially complex for youth with disabilities. The Social Security Administration defines “transition-age youth” as age 14-25 who are transitioning from school to work (or higher education); though, in practice, transition age most often ranges from 14-22 (SSA, 2014). Even with improvements made in recent years to prepare youth with disabilities for life after school, many students continue to “leave secondary school each year having secured neither employment nor placement in postsecondary education” (Hill, Kline, & Richards, 2018).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), enacted in 1975, affirms the right of children with disabilities to a free and public education in the least restrictive environment possible (Washington, 2017). Prior to IDEA, opportunities for people with disabilities were limited (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). In 1970, schools in the United States only educated “one in five children with disabilities” and many states had laws that allowed schools to exclude children that experienced deafness, blindness, emotional/behavioral issues, or intellectual disability (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, and Shaver, 2011). The State of Utah, however, following *Brown v. Board of Education*, deemed exclusion of children with disabilities from schools unconstitutional in *Wolf v. State Legislature*. The *Wolf* ruling encouraged other people with disabilities and advocates to file lawsuits that challenged the legality of segregating students with disabilities in other states (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2000). Today, the majority of children with disabilities attend schools in their neighborhood with non-disabled peers and rates of high school graduation, employment, and post-secondary enrollment have increased since the enactment of IDEA, though there is still a disparity (U.S. Department of Education, 2007).

A 1990 amendment added provisions to IDEA section 300.320(b) which mandate that transition planning in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) begin no later than when the student turns 16 years (US Department of Education, n.d.). In a 2004 amendment, IDEA defined transition services for students with disabilities as a “coordinated set of activities for students; the services are designed to be results-oriented and to facilitate movement from school to post-school activities” (Hager, 2014). This means that while a student is still in school there should be goals and activities aimed at helping the person succeed in life after school. Traditional indicators of self-determination for adolescents transitioning to adulthood are “living independently, earning a postsecondary degree, obtaining full-time employment, getting married, or becoming a parent” (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, and Shaver, 2011). Despite the requirements outlined in IDEA, students with disabilities still participate in the workforce and higher education at much lower rates than those without disabilities, and

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are less prepared for life after leaving the school system than those without disabilities (Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014).

Students with disabilities are regarded as an “academically vulnerable” population, meaning that individuals within this demographic are “more likely to drop out and less likely to graduate” compared to students in mainstream or general education classrooms (Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, and Chen-Gaddini, 2014). A recent study of students in Utah with an IEP discovered that after attending four years of high school (grades 9-12), more than 50 percent dropped out or remained in school without graduating (Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, and Chen-Gaddini, 2014). People with autism, emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, traumatic brain injury, or multiple disabilities experience the lowest graduation rates (below 50 percent), while individuals with hearing, visual, or language impairments had the most favorable graduation rates comparable to students without disabilities (Barrat, Berliner, Voight, Tran, Huang, Yu, and Chen-Gaddini, 2014). Currently, 63 percent of students in the United States that have a disability graduate high school (11 percent receiving an alternative certification), which is about 20 percent lower than students without disabilities (Grindal, 2016; NCES, 2018).

Many students who have disabilities also enter segregated settings after high school, such as day programs or sheltered workshops. These programs often pay sub-minimum wage or are unpaid. Advocates argue that a “pipeline” exists that funnels too many students, who could potentially be successful in the community, into sheltered workshop environments directly after school (Hager, 2014). This is a concern due to the low-wages offered in these setting types and how they are isolating in nature. A recent study, among individuals with intellectual disabilities employed in community settings, determined a significant increase in choice and control over their lives, as well as increased community inclusion (compared to individuals in adult day or sheltered work environments) (Blick, Litz, Thornhill, & Goreczny, 2016). Another study investigated quality of life among 117 people that were employed in community-based versus sheltered employment settings found a statistically significant higher quality of life score in the group that worked in the community (Kober & Eggleton, 2005). It is well understood that employment provides people with a sense of worth, economic self-sufficiency, and helps them contribute to the country through taxes and the services they provide (US Senate, 2012). Though sheltered workshop settings provide an opportunity for employment, due to the low-wages offered in these settings, they do not help the person achieve economic self-sufficiency. Proponents of sheltered workshops argue that these settings provide an opportunity for people with disabilities to develop job skills before going out and seeking community-based employment; however, most if not all workers in sheltered workshops never leave or earn at or above minimum wage (Guilfoyle, 2015).

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), signed into law in 1990, also “expands equal opportunity and full inclusion for people with disabilities”. Title I of the ADA explicitly prohibits employers and other employment agencies from discriminating against qualified people with disabilities in hiring, job applications, advancement, firing, job training, and other privileges associated with employment (US Department of Justice, n.d.). Title II of the ADA applies to government entities and prohibits discrimination in services, programs, and activities on the

basis of disability. Title II requires that government entities providing employment or other vocational services offer these in the “most integrated setting appropriate to the needs of persons with disabilities” (ADA, n.d.). In *Olmstead v. L.C.*, the court ruled that settings that unnecessarily segregate individuals with disabilities violate the integration mandate in the ADA. Two states (Oregon and Rhode Island) have reached settlement with the Department of Justice for unnecessarily segregating people in pre-employment settings (facility-based workshops) (ADA, 2018). Though the ADA has been in existence for decades, it still remains difficult to prove discrimination has occurred in hiring/firing practice of people with disabilities and to ensure that employment services provided by government entities are truly reflective of the person's needs, informed choice, and are not in violation of the integration mandate.

Federal policy over the last few decades has supported the notion that all people with disabilities should have access to support needed to obtain a job in the community, grow assets, earn a livable wage, and advance socioeconomically (Lead, n.d.). Many states, including Utah, have affirmed this principle through passage of Employment First legislation that emphasizes that all people can contribute to their communities and prioritizes integrated employment by state service agencies (Lead, n.d.). Utah was one of the first states to adopt this type of legislation and is considered a leader in Employment First initiatives nationally (State Employment Leadership Network, 2016). A recently published study compared outcomes of students from 2010 to 2018, and found that youth with disabilities are “more socioeconomically disadvantaged and less likely to have experiences and expectations that are associated with success after high school” (Lipscomb, Laco, Liu, & Haimson, 2018). Although considerable progress has been made for people in the United States with disabilities, especially following the enactment of IDEA and the ADA, there is still a stark disparity between people that have a disability and people that do not. Overall, people with disabilities continue to have “lower employment rates, lower annual earnings, lower educational attainment and achievement; lack adequate access to housing, transportation, technology, and healthcare” and are more likely to live in poverty (National Council on Disability, 2011).

In January 2014, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) settings final rule, which further defines HCBS services and establishes requirements for quality of care (CMS, 2014). The intent of this rule is to enhance individual choice, further distinguish HCBS service providers from institutional settings, require services to be received in the most integrated setting, and maximize opportunities for people to have full access to their communities (CMS, 2014). Another aspect of the rule requires that individuals are provided the opportunity to seek employment and work in competitive integrated settings, as long as they are not isolated from the larger community (CMS, 2014). This federal rule further enhances the national priority that individuals with disabilities receiving Medicaid services have the opportunity to obtain employment in an integrated setting, and that individuals make an informed choice about whether they want to work or not.

As of May 2018, only 20.1 percent of people with disabilities participated in the labor force compared to 68.6 percent of people without disabilities (US Department of Labor, 2018). It is also estimated that people with disabilities, ages 16 to 64 years, have double the rate of unemployment compared to people without a disability (BLS, 2017). Though this disparity

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exists, 47 percent of Utahns with intellectual or developmental disabilities report not having a paid job in the community but would like one (National Core Indicator, 2017).

State	Percent Employed in Community	Rank	Percent Who Would Like a Job in the Community	Rank	Percent Who Attend Day Program or Workshop	Rank
Utah	23%	12	47%	21	66%	16
NCI Participating States (N = 38)	19%	-	46%	-	59%	-

Today, people with disabilities are also offered jobs at “much lower rates than the general population” even with anti-discrimination laws in effect, and the average hourly wage for young adults with disabilities is \$4.00 less than their non-disabled counterparts (Sabbatino and Macrine, 2007; Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, and Shaver, 2011). Additionally, young adults with disabilities enroll in four-year postsecondary degree colleges at one-third the rate of young adults without disabilities (14.6 percent of young adults with disabilities versus 37.4 percent of people without a disability) (Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, and Shaver, 2011).

Though progressive policies have been in place since the 1990’s to increase the rate of labor participation among people with disabilities, including the ADA, IDEA, and the settings rule, there remains a marked disparity between people with and without disabilities (Harris, Owen, Jones, & Caldwell, 2013). Many researchers postulate that this disparity has existed and perpetuates because of the long history of discrimination and social exclusion, undervaluation of their abilities, lower education levels, transportation issues, and lower/different productivity due to the nature of disability (Schur, 2002; Harris, Owen, Jones, & Caldwell, 2013).

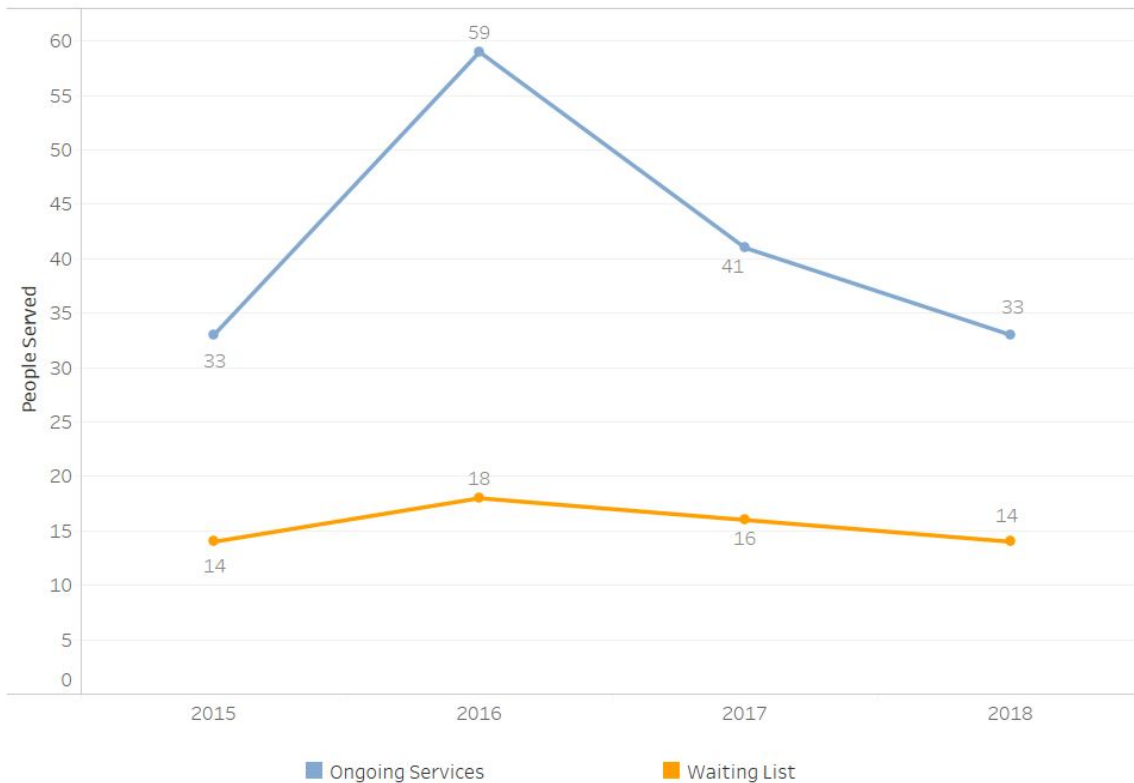
Target Population (Counts & Estimates)

The Utah Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD or the Division) serves individuals with a qualifying diagnosis of 1) an intellectual disability (including related conditions such as cerebral palsy, epilepsy, or other conditions closely related to intellectual disability), 2) a physical disability, or 3) an acquired brain injury. The Division currently serves 5,917 individuals and has 3,000 people with immediate service needs on the waiting list. In FY2018, 934 people received ongoing Supported Employment (SE) services through DSPD. This includes 33 transition age youth (see chart below). Of those receiving SE, 61 percent were employed during FY2018, making an average of \$7.00 an hour, and working an average of 14 hours per week. During FY2018, DSPD also served 503 people (including 14 transition age youth, see chart below) on the waiting list through the Supported Work Independence (SWI) program, with 47 percent employed during the program, making an average of \$8.11 an hour,

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and working an average of 14 hours per week. Of those on the DSPD waiting list in 2018 that are transition aged, 18.9 percent indicated they had an immediate need for employment services.

Transition Aged Youth: DSPD Supported Employment Services
Participation by Year

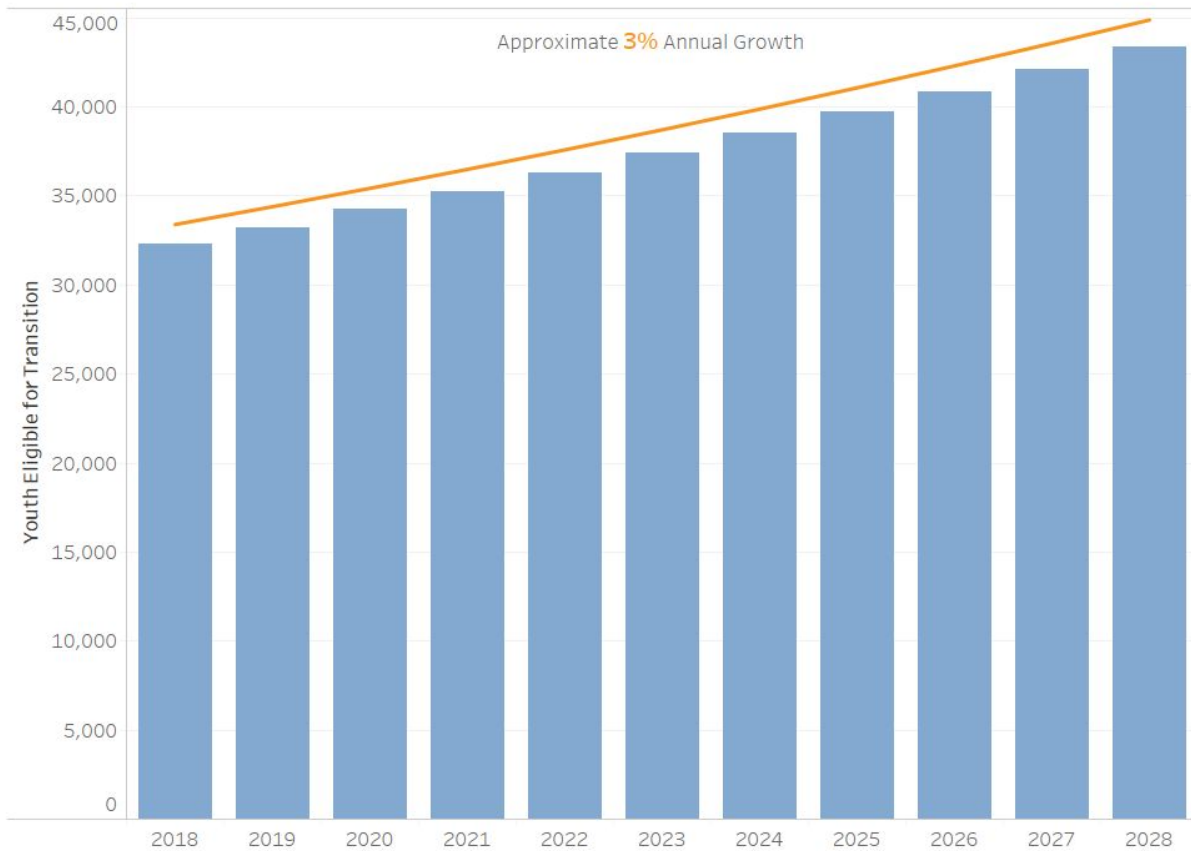


(Note: Chart only displays number of transition age youth receiving employment services through DSPD. There has been a 17.2 percent increase in individuals of all ages receiving waiting list or ongoing employment services through DSPD over the same time period. DSPD recognizes this shows better coordination is necessary between agencies that serve transition age youth.)

(8) an estimate of the number of people who would become eligible for transition from public education to employment each year for the next ten years;

Nationally, nearly 750,000 youth with disabilities transition out of school and into adulthood each year (Brandeis, 2015). Currently, there are 32,294 students with disabilities age 14-22 years (transition age) in the state of Utah, which is anticipated to grow by 3 percent each school year, based on five years of historical growth rates (43,367 total transition age students by 2028).

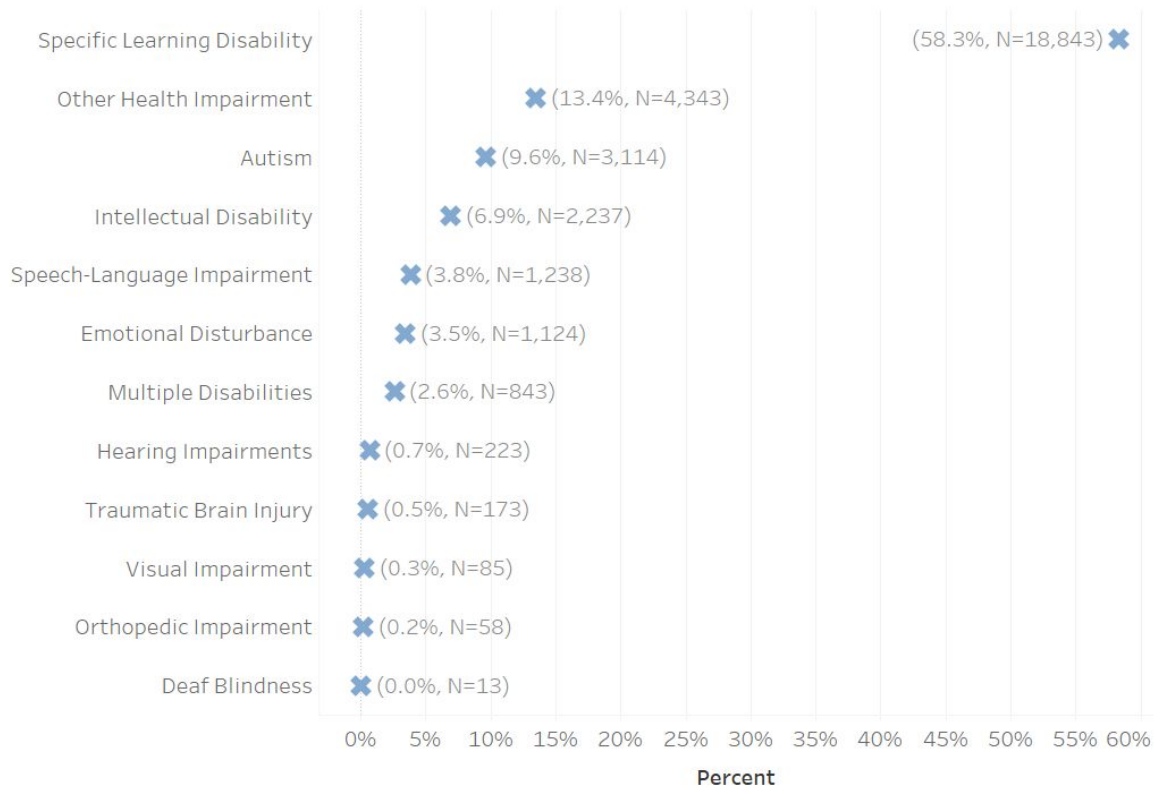
Eligible Youth Transitioning Estimated Counts Next Ten Years



During Utah's 2015-2016 school year, 4,382 students with disabilities transitioned out of public school (Utah Post High Survey, 2017). Of these students, 273 reportedly had an intellectual disability, 187 had an emotional disturbance, 2,840 had a specific learning disability, and 1,082 had a low incidence disability (autism, deaf/hearing impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, etc.) (Utah Post High Survey, 2017). Over the next ten years, an estimated 54,893 students with disabilities will leave public high school.

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Transition Age Students with Disabilities Prevalence by Disability Type



(1) identification of the current status and effectiveness of transition services for students with disabilities in public education as they transition to employment;

(7) a report on the various types of needed transition and employment services, including an estimate of the number of individuals with disabilities who need appropriate employment and support services but are not currently receiving them;

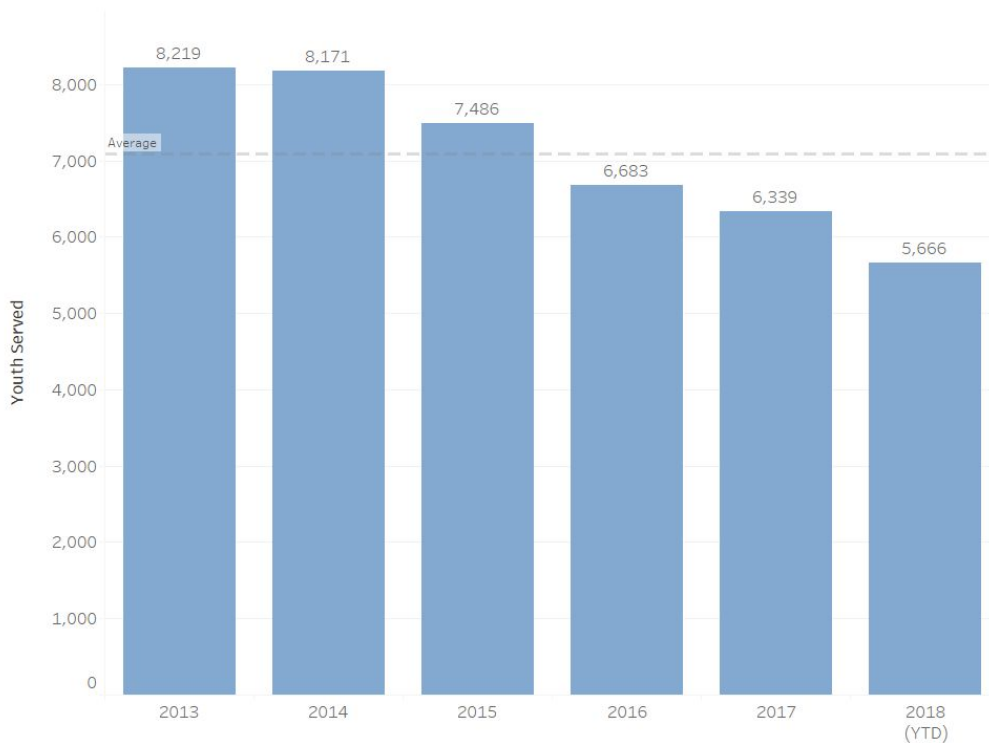
The US Department of Education reported in 2015 that by age 17, 96 percent of students with disabilities (with an IEP) had received transition planning activities facilitated by school staff; however, the efficacy of these services vary. Nationally, it is estimated that nearly 20 percent of students with disabilities in high school are in programs or receiving transition activities that are only somewhat or not well-suited to meet their transition goals (Cameto, Levine, & Wagner, 2004). The USBE reported in 2015, that 92 percent of students age 18 years or older had an IEP with measurable postsecondary goals that were annually updated; meaning that they receive transition services to some degree. Though more specific data on the status of IEP goals and needed services are not tracked at the state level. In 2015, the USBE estimated that there were 3,056 students age 18 years or older with an IEP, which indicates approximately 2,811 students (92 percent) had postsecondary goals in their IEP (245 without). Based on the national estimate that 20 percent of students' IEP transition goal activities are not well-suited for their needs would mean an estimated 562 students were not being adequately prepared for life after high

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school that had an IEP goal related to transition. The estimated total unmet need for employment services is 808 students (includes 245 without postsecondary goals and the 562 with goals not well-suited for their needs).

Utah's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency typically serves between 6,000-8,500 transition age youth with disabilities each year (approximately 22 percent of eligible youth with disabilities for transition), with the majority classified as having the most significant disabilities. Starting in 2015, the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR) began an order of selection waiting list to prioritize individuals classified as "most significantly disabled" to be served first as required by federal law. This slowed the number of people being served following this period; however, during this time the total proportion of youth with disabilities has increased from 25.3% in 2015 to 36.9% in 2017 (USOR, 2018). For more information about what Utah service agencies are doing to assist transition age youth, please see pages 24-28.

Vocational Rehabilitation: Transition Aged Youth
Served by Year



(Note: Chart demonstrates a decline due to the implementation of the order of selection waiting list, though the proportion of transition age youth served compared to the total number served by USOR increased from 2015 to 2017.)

The State of Utah conducts a survey each year among students with disabilities that have transitioned out of public school to determine participation in secondary education or employment. For the 2015-2016 school year, one year after exiting the school system:

(6) a report on the number of individuals with disabilities both currently enrolled in public education and those who have already transitioned from public education and their currently projected employment or their current employment status;

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- 57 percent were working in competitive employment (at or above minimum wage, integrated work setting, at least 20 hours or more, for at least 90 days);
- 21 percent had enrolled in higher education for at least one semester;
- 18 percent enrolled in training program for education or employment; and
- 16 percent were self employed or employed in a non-competitive setting.

During this period, 17 percent of former students were not engaged in any education or employment activities (Utah Post High Survey, 2017b).

Disability Type	Higher Education	Competitive Employment	Other Post Secondary Education	Other Employment
Intellectual Disability	7%	13%	30%	32%
Emotional Disturbance	23%	64%	11%	6%
Specific Learning Disability	22%	68%	17%	14%
Low Incidence	22%	41%	17%	19%
Total	21%	57%	18%	16%

(Note: percentages do not add up to 100 because respondents could be engaged in multiple education or employment activities)

The Utah Post School Outcomes Survey also reported the adult agencies former students most often worked with (any type of interaction) after exiting public school, which included:

Adult Agency	Any Type of Interaction
Utah State Office of Rehabilitation	21%
Social Security Administration	15%
Department of Workforce Services	13%
College or university student assistance center	13%
DSPD	10%
Another Adult Agency	5%
Disability Law Center	1%

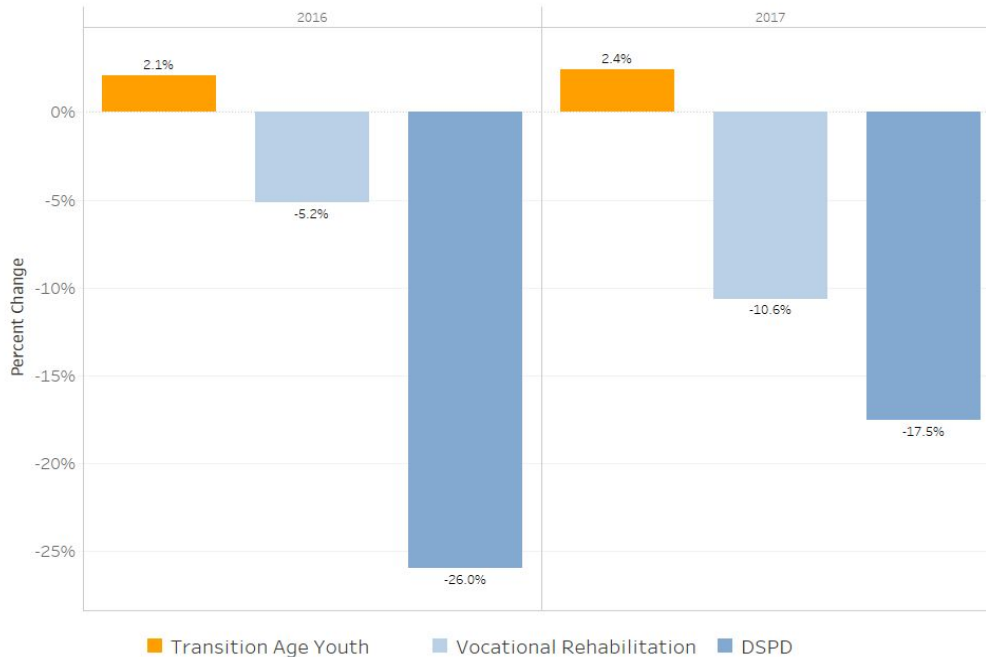
Some of the difficulties former students reported included insufficient funding (placement on waiting lists), having VR stop providing a job coach, and not having sufficient transportation to get to school or work (Utah Post High Survey, 2017b).

The number of students with disabilities (as previously described) is anticipated to grow over the next decade. Meanwhile, the total number of transition age youth receiving services through VR have declined since 2015 (due to order of selection wait list) and DSPD employment services have also modestly decreased since 2016. This trend will naturally create a gap if USOR

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and DSPD services do not increase to meet the growing demand as more students with disabilities become eligible for transition services.

Transition Age Youth
Trends



(Note: As previously described on pg. 8 chart note, DSPD has increased the number of employment services provided to individuals of all ages, though the number of transition age youth served has declined. It is unclear if this is an anomaly, or will continue over time. USOR also experienced a decline due to the implementation of order of selection. It is unclear if this will continue to reduce the number served over time.)

Literature

Types of Employment Settings

There are three major types of employment settings people with disabilities tend to work in after exiting the school system: 1) competitive integrated employment, 2) integrated employment, and 3) isolated pre-vocational. Competitive integrated employment (CIE) is often considered the ideal outcome, with the person working part or full time at least at minimum wage in an integrated setting. In this type of setting, the person is working with people that do not have disabilities and has the opportunity to seek advancement or negotiate benefits just as other employees without disabilities have the ability to do. Integrated employment is also considered a good outcome, with the person working in an integrated setting that naturally facilitates interactions with non-disabled peers throughout the work day. This type of setting, however, can be paid at sub-minimum wage and often does not allow negotiation of wages or benefits which makes it less ideal. Finally, isolated pre-vocational settings, often being facility-based or sheltered work, is another work setting. People working at these sites are largely paid below minimum wage, are unable to negotiate wage or benefits, are in facilities

that are mostly comprised of people with disabilities and staff, and are performing tasks that may not be individualized for their ability or skills.

Benefits of Employment

Having a job provides a sense of dignity, responsibility, and economic security (NDC, 2007). This remains true for Utahns with disabilities; however, rates of labor force participation are still much lower among people with disabilities compared to those without (20.1 percent compared to 68.6 percent) (US Department of Labor, 2018). People with disabilities also consistently earn less than people without disabilities. In a recent national report, researchers determined that over a ten year period comparing the median earning of people with and without disabilities that those without disabilities consistently earned on average \$10,000 more annually than those with disabilities (Disability Compendium, 2018). Unsurprisingly, the rate of poverty among working age people with disabilities is also higher than those without by 7-25 percent across the country (Disability Compendium, 2018).

(14) any other considerations needed to work towards the goal that by FY 2021 all individuals with disabilities transition from public education to employment in an appropriate job in an integrated setting.

Research has also demonstrated that hiring people with disabilities “saves the federal and state government money by reducing dependency on cash and medical and disability benefits” (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016). Employment also improves economic self-sufficiency, opportunity to use and grow skills, and be more involved in the community among people without disabilities (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2016). A study conducted using 2002-2007 data from 104,213 supported employment (SE) recipients with intellectual disabilities investigated if it were more financially beneficial to work at competitive wages in the community (potentially losing some government benefits) compared to not working or working at less than minimum wage. The researchers found that the monthly net benefit of working competitively was \$475.35, meaning that individuals with disabilities experienced greater financial benefits when working in the community even if they had lost some government benefits (Cimera, 2012). This study included all participants funded by vocational rehabilitation, so it was not subject to sampling error or bias (Cimera, 2012). Another study found that every \$1.00 spent on SE gave taxpayers \$1.17 back in taxes paid, reduced government services, and decreased alternative program costs (Cimera, 2012; Hill & Wehman, 1983).

Employment is also associated with mental health benefits including a decrease in mental illness symptoms (Goodman, 2015). A 10-year study conducted through Dartmouth Medical School discovered that among individuals with mental illness who maintained at least part time employment, had lower mental health costs compared to those who were not employed or not regularly employed (Bush, Drake, Xie, McHugo, & Haslet, 2009; Goodman, 2015). The researchers at Dartmouth controlled for factors such as education, age, previous work, and severity of illness and found the relationship still existed. Additionally, the researchers compared outcomes over time to determine if the behavior of working proceeded the health benefits, and concluded that the health cost reduction occurred after employment (Bush, Drake, Xie, McHugo, & Haslet, 2009; Goodman, 2015). Some researchers postulate that the

nature of employment facilitates this improvement due to increased social connections, structured day activities, engagement in group efforts, and improved sense of self-worth (Goodman, 2015; Turner & Turner, 2004).

Over time, research has consistently demonstrated that employment is correlated with increases in health status and is even known as a protective factor for health (Goodman, 2015). A study conducted in Kansas found that among Medicaid recipients with disabilities, those that had any level of paid employment had significantly lower per month Medicaid expenditures than those that were not employed and a better reported quality of life (Hall, Kurth, & Hunt, 2013). This is important, because the cost of serving people with disabilities through Medicaid consistently increases per year. It is reasonable to suggest that increasing the rate of employment among people with disabilities could potentially reduce healthcare and Medicaid costs.

There are many benefits to hiring people with disabilities including lower turnover rates for businesses, increased productivity, increased workforce morale, broader pool of skilled workers, and improved public image (Business and Disability, n.d.; Rall, Reed, & Essex, 2016). However, there is still fear among employers that may influence whether or not they hire someone with a disability. A recently conducted study found that the most common fears reported by employers are the cost of making accomodation, fear of “being stuck with a worker who cannot be disciplined or fired,” amount of supervision needed, and worry that the person with a disability will not be able to perform as well as a worker without a disability (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). When asked by researchers what would ease their concerns, respondents reported: government subsidized accommodations, no-cost technical assistance, better training on disability issues for the business community, and written guidelines for dealing with common disability issues would make them more likely to hire people with disabilities (Kaye, Jans, & Jones, 2011). USOR has a dedicaited team available to help employers understand tax credits and other benefits of hiring people with disabilities, though this work should continue to expand to improve perceptions among employers throughout the state.

(11) steps that could be taken to make sure that individuals with disabilities are considered on an individual basis in accordance with federal and state disabilities policies;

National Best Practices

Research has been conducted over the past few decades to determine the most effective strategies to improve post high school outcomes among young adults with disabilities. The U.S. Department of Education released a report in 2013 that outlined several key strategies to improve post high outcomes based on a comprehensive literature review. This included offering work experiences and career technical classes prior to leaving school, receiving their education in an inclusive setting, and increased training in computers or other functional skills are likely to improve outcomes among young adults with disabilities (US Department of Education, 2015). Another meta-analysis study conducted through Boston University also determined that inclusion in general education, paid work experience prior to graduation, independent living skill development, career awareness, and interagency collaboration were positively correlated with improved post high education and employment

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outcomes among youth with disabilities (Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kortering, & Kohler, 2009).

Brandeis University also reported several common characteristics out of the 16 “high performing states” that are postulated to have contributed to their high rates of integrated employment, including: 1) flexible policies that identify employment as the preferred outcome, 2) flexible funding to accommodate each person’s changing employment needs, 3) effective weaving of multiple funding sources to support employment and transition, 4) incentives to implement customized integrated employment, 5) data monitoring and regular evaluation of goals, and 6) effective training and development of employment support professionals. Additionally, they found that the most significant factors to improve post high outcomes is providing authentic work experiences prior to leaving school and having high expectations from parents (Brandeis, 2015).

It is also important to improve teacher training on how to plan more effective transition services for students, as required by IDEA, to improve post-school outcomes. This includes involving the student in transition planning during the IEP, clearly defining measurable and achievable goals, and using age appropriate transition tools (Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014). Researchers also recommend teachers of transition age students with disabilities teach self-advocacy, goal setting, and problem solving skills in the classroom (Rowe et al., 2013; Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014). Currently, many teacher special education programs do not have any courses that instruct them on how to effectively create and implement a transition plan. Of the colleges and universities that offer special education teaching programs in Utah, only two (Southern Utah University and Westminster College) offer courses that specifically go over transition planning and needs. Utah State University offers a transition specialization for masters students, but this is not available to undergraduate students. Many programs do not offer a specific course focused on transition because there is so much that needs to be covered in the special education curriculum; however, this creates a knowledge gap in instructors that work with transition age youth. One reason some researchers believe the disparity in post-high outcomes is so distinct is that special educators are not sufficiently trained at putting together transition plans, which reduces the efficacy of the planning process (Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014). It is important for teachers to be prepared on best practices for transition, how to create an effective transition plan, and innovative ways to implement them in order to improve post-school outcomes among students with disabilities (Morningstar & Mazzotti, 2014).

Another national best practice is Customized Employment (CE), which is a relatively new initiative aimed at improving community-based employment outcomes among youth with disabilities. CE was first proposed by the US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment (ODEP) in 2001. It is defined as “competitive, integrated employment for an individual with a significant disability that is based on an individualized determination of the strengths, needs, and interests of the individual with a disability, and is designed to meet the specific abilities of the individual... and the business needs of the

(3) identification of services needed to provide employment appropriate for individuals with disabilities based upon their unique abilities and needs;

employer” (Riesen, Morgan, & Griffin, 2015). There are four essential elements of customized employment including:

1. Discovery: gathering information about the job seekers interests, skills, and preferences related to employment;
2. Job Search Planning: using information gathered in discovery to develop a plan for meaningful employment, creating a list of potential employers, and conducting an analysis on benefits;
3. Job Development and Negotiation: working with the job seeker and employer to negotiate a customized job that matches the interests, skills, needed accommodations, and needs of the employer; and
4. Post-Employment Support: ongoing support to ensure person and employer are supported and satisfied (DOL, 2009).

Studies have demonstrated that CE improves wages, hours worked, and quality of life (Riesen, Morgan, & Griffin, 2015). A recent meta-analysis reviewed 11 randomized control trials of CE and determined among those that had received individualized supported employment services, the competitive employment rate was 61 percent compared to 23 percent for those who did not receive individualized supported employment services. Additionally, those who received supported employment assistance obtained their job nearly 10 weeks sooner than those who did not (Bond, Drake, & Becker, 2008).

Recent studies postulate that early intervention is something that has been underutilized in the transition community and could be a contributing factor to the stagnated employment outcomes (Mamum, Carter, Fraker, & Timmins, 2017). Paid work experience while still in high school has been positively correlated with post-school outcomes in numerous studies. For example, one such study determined that adolescents with severe disabilities who had paid work experience were more than twice as likely to obtain paid employment after school than peers who did not (Carter et al., 2012). Another study determined that adolescents with all types of disabilities who had paid employment prior to leaving school increased the likelihood of employment after school by 17 percent (Mamum, Carter, Fraker, & Timmins, 2017). This relationship is not causal, however, because it does not control for other factors that influence an adolescent’s likelihood to work or not, such as strong parent/guardian support, personal motivation, and other individual characteristics (Mamum, Carter, Fraker, & Timmins, 2017).

Expectations also have a significant impact on whether a youth with severe disabilities will work later in life. Nationally, students with severe disabilities that had parents who expected them to work were five times as likely to be employed competitively in the community following graduation (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). Additionally, students with intellectual disabilities whose parents expected they would be employed after leaving school were “50 times more likely to be employed between two and four years out of high school than youth whose parents did not” (Southward & Kyzar, 2017).

Though there has been considerable work in the past few decades to better understand how to improve post-high outcomes, the rate of employment two to five years after exiting school has

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TRANSITION AGE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES & EMPLOYMENT IN UTAH

of the challenges people with disabilities face during their crucial transition from education into employment.

There are many barriers that a young person with a disability faces when they are transitioning from school into employment. The focus groups tended to have similar responses regarding basic job readiness skills. Some of these include timeliness, communication/social skills, hygiene, and transportation. The ability to effectively manage time and self-regulate a schedule was also discussed among several groups as being crucial to any employment situation. Hard skills, such as money management, basic math, and computer literacy were discussed, as well as soft skills including etiquette, listening to instructions, and mindfulness. Safety skills, understanding of benefits, behavior management, and authority recognition were also mentioned as skills that an individual may need help understanding.

While these skills may come more naturally to an individual without a disability, the focus groups felt like these types of skills may not be as easily developed for youth with a disability. There were many individuals and groups listed as responsible parties for teaching these skills. The parties discussed across each of the focus groups include family, schools/educators, providers/Vocational Rehabilitation, DSPD, support coordinators, and employers. A couple of groups also discussed the role of the general public. Instilling societal norms and skills for social interactions should be a task taken on by everyone who comes into contact with a person with a disability.

Focus groups also discussed some of the challenges in implementing employment goals from an IEP. One of the biggest obstacles discussed was limited funding within schools leading to a lack of resources across districts. In addition to tangible resources, limited funding leads to a higher rate of turnover and inexperienced, untrained staff. Parental fear, insufficient transportation, and difficulty finding willing employers are other barriers in IEP goal implementation. Many of these challenges are exacerbated in rural areas, making employment even more difficult to achieve for people with disabilities.

Despite all of these barriers, each of the groups agreed that as long as a job is individualized to the person, people with disabilities can be successful in just about any position. Some of the groups listed jobs that are more “typical” for people with disabilities to work in including: fast food, movies, grocery stores, and janitorial work. While these settings are frequently seen, there are a host of other places that a person with disabilities can thrive. Some characteristics

Three Transition Age Employment Themes
• Insufficient foundational skills
• Lack of funding
• Difficulty implementing employment goals

mentioned in the discussions include: a place with structure and breaks, a smaller, less stressful environment, somewhere close to home in order to limit transportation, and an employer with flexible hours, and/or overall flexibility in the position. Other important characteristics could include a place where they are

helping others in order to give a sense of purpose, repetitive or list based tasks, and somewhere that the individual feels safe and gains a sense of trust. While these types of settings may be a good fit for some, the perceptions do not hold true for all people with disabilities. Understanding the value of finding a job that best fits the person and individualizing each employment situation are the keys to successful job placement.

State Case Studies

Mississippi

From October 2003 to September 2009, the Mississippi Model Youth Transition Innovation (MYTI) program was implemented to improve employment outcomes among transition age youth. This included four specific phases dependant on the students age:

- Phase 1, students age 10-13 years. Teachers facilitate life portfolio, future plan, what works for them, and refer for benefit analysis.
- Phase 2, students age 14-18 years. Teachers facilitate discovery of employment-related plans, develop plan for future, and refer for benefit analysis.
- Phase 3, students 19-21 years. Teachers and staff facilitate discovery, develop vocational profiles, develop customized employment plan with budget, develop benefit analysis, and arrange site visits for employment.
- Phase 4, students 22-25 years. Students continue to receive previous phase services as needed.

Schools were the primary entities responsible for working with students with disabilities and providing transition services for the MYTI project. The project provided customized employment services to a total of 210 students with a variety of disabilities. At the end of the program, students had participated in 84 unique paid employment experiences at an average hourly wage of \$6.76.

Mississippi recommended there should be early expectations of work (similar to students without disabilities) by at least 10 years of age. Throughout the course of the program, administrators determined that the primary reasons for non-employment among students were a lack of available resources and reluctance among family or school personnel about the student working. Additionally, program administrators found that families and students were much more likely to want to work once they had received the benefit analysis and understood how much they could earn before impacting benefits (MYTI, 2009).

Tennessee

Since 2011, TennesseeWorks has worked to strengthen state policies and systems to promote employment among young adults with disabilities. It was funded initially by a grant and is a collaborative effort between the state disability services agency and Vanderbilt University's Kennedy Center. A monthly council was formed which included parent organizations, disability nonprofits, employment agencies, and various state agency partners to discuss the program

and develop strategies to improve the employment service system in the state.

TennesseeWorks has focused on investing efforts in 1) providing early expectations that students with disabilities can and should aspire to competitive work from a young age, 2) helping families with knowledge and resources to pursue competitive work for their family member with a disability, 3) assisting educators to prepare students for competitive work during school, 4) improving service systems to support competitive work across the state, and 5) conducting outreach and education to communities about how people with disabilities can contribute.

When TennesseeWorks began, only 19.5 percent of people with disabilities were employed, with many in segregated settings or with jobs that did not match their interest or skill set. Initially, program administrators determined barriers to employment and which issues they could address. The focus areas include:

- Aligning service delivery systems and coordination to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities;
- Building community commitment to “Employment First”;
- Increasing the number of businesses that actively seek out and hire people with disabilities;
- Making the state a model public sector employer by employing more people with disabilities; and
- Better preparing students in schools for employment through education and connecting them to essential services at younger ages.

Tennessee conducted multiple large-scale studies aimed at identifying parent expectations of their child with a disability after leaving school, determining what resources teachers would need to adequately prepare students for transition and improve post-school outcomes, and determining employer concerns about hiring people with disabilities. Additionally, TennesseeWorks carried out a campaign (“Hire My Strengths”) aimed at providing awareness to employers on the benefits of hiring people with disabilities and highlighting what they have to offer in the workplace. Tennessee relied on a data-driven approach to create the policies and procedures to improve employment outcomes (TennesseeWorks, 2017). As of 2018, 31 percent of Tennesseans with disabilities were employed (TennesseeWorks, 2018; Carter, McMillan, Willis, & The TennesseeWorks Partnership, 2017).

North Dakota

North Dakota has one of the highest rates of employment among people with disabilities in the country (50.6 percent) (Voorhees, 2017). The director of the state’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program said part of the reason why North Dakota has such a high rate of employment is that it has “an expectation that people work” among people with disabilities, parent/guardians, and teachers. Their VR program also has a strong connection with local businesses and even has certain VR counselors hired specifically to foster relationships with the business community (Voorhees, 2017).

TRANSITION AGE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES & EMPLOYMENT IN UTAH

In 2015, North Dakota's State Division of Vocational Rehabilitation partnered with Minot State University's North Dakota Center for Persons with Disabilities and WISE to conduct a three year project to design and expand customized employment services that lead to integrated, competitive employment for those currently receiving day or center based employment services. This took place at four pilot sites located in Fargo, Mandan, Bismarck, and Minot. Annually, training was offered to each pilot site area including: two-day on-site visits offered twice per year, two face to face trainings sessions for all participating sites, 20 hours of technical assistance to each site, and two webinars. At the end of the first year, 16 percent of job candidates participating in the pilot were employed, and by end of year two, 61 percent of job candidates were employed. Year three has not been completed yet, but based on preliminary data, the project managers estimate it will be similar to year two.

In the North Dakota Department of Human Services provider manual, they also describe that prevocational services are required to have a goal that outlines a plan for transitioning to integrated employment and updated annually (including documentation on the person's progress toward completing prevocational training) (NDDD, 2018). Participants are allotted 12 months of prevocational training, but must receive approval by the program administrator if they want to continue to remain in a prevocational setting for up to two additional 12 months approvals.

Vermont

In fiscal year 2017, the employment rate for Vermonters who received developmental disabilities services was 48 percent, earning on average \$10.44 per hour, and working eight hours per week on average (Vermont Legislature, 2017). Vermont also has demonstrated high efficacy in their employment supports, with 61 percent finding a job in the community within one year of receiving state employment supports. This is more than double the rate of the rest of the country (Seres, 2015). Over the past 14 years, the number of individuals working (receiving supported employment services) has steadily increased each year (Vermont Legislature, 2017). This has progressed over time, even through larger job market fluctuations. The Vermont Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDS) estimated in 2017, that the tax contribution from working people with disabilities was \$613,585 (based on \$4,090,572 total wages of people receiving supported employment services) (Vermont Legislature, 2017).

DDS also collaborates with the University of Vermont to provide technical assistance and training on community inclusion, improving employment, and identifying people that may need employment assistance. Additionally, DDS has a pilot project to help supported employment staff mentor businesses on reasonable accommodations, benefits of hiring people with disabilities, how to facilitate authentic inclusion, and how to better support the employee (Vermont Legislature, 2017). Outreach helped ease employer fears about hiring a person with a disability and created a more robust network of employers willing to hire and retain staff with disabilities.

Four Vermont colleges (Castleton University, Northern Vermont University, Southern Vermont College, and University of Vermont) created post-secondary programs for students with

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occasionally (58.5 percent). Some of the barriers to securing and maintaining employment identified included: 1) lack of self confidence, 2) employer judgement, not giving the youth a chance, 3) insufficient soft and hard skills, 4) transportation, and 5) lack of family support.

The Clubhouse program is an international program that teaches people with mental illness skills that will assist them with employment and maintaining activities of daily living. There are four accredited Clubhouse programs in Utah that provide support services for people whose lives have been severely disrupted because of their mental illness and who need the support of others in recovery. The daily activity of a Clubhouse is organized around a structured system known as the work-ordered day, which includes the opportunity to learn work-related skills such as culinary skills, clerical skills, and computer skills. Clubhouses provide members with opportunities to return to paid employment in integrated work settings through Transitional, Supported, and Independent Employment programs. This program has been very helpful for adults with mental illness; however, it often does not serve young adults transitioning out of public school. There are a few youth focused Clubhouse programs, but often adults are the primary service populations.

Proposal to Maximize Employment During Transition & Schedule of Needed Funding

(9) a proposal for ways to target available funds to maximize appropriate transition and employment services;

After reviewing efforts to improve employment outcomes among transition age youth, the Division, USOR, and USBE developed a plan to implement national best practices that have been outlined in current research. The recommendations could help improve outcomes among transition age youth and ensure that services are conducted in an individualized manner.

1. Make Interagency Disability Employment Council Permanent in 2021

A best practice identified in the literature was to ensure that services provided through multiple funding sources were effectively blended or braided to reduce duplication of efforts, improve transition between agencies while receiving services, and ultimately improve outcomes. The Division currently leads a temporary council, as previously described for the USWP, that aims to improve outcomes among transition age youth through policy and increasing the use of customized employment. **DSPD recommends that an ongoing council is created by statute or by the Governor, after the temporary council dissolves in 2021,** that would include but is not limited to: DSPD, Utah State Board of Education, Utah Department of Workforce Services Vocational Rehabilitation, Utah Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, Utah State Center for Persons with Disabilities, the Utah Parent Center, Utah Developmental Disabilities Council, Utah Department of Health, Governor's Committee on Employment for People with Disabilities, and various advocates. This council would hold public meetings at least quarterly,

published according to Utah Code § 52-4, as well as provide the forum for regular discussion about current and proposed activities regarding transition age youth with disabilities. This would help agencies determine how they could support other initiatives, address service gaps, ensure continuity of care between organizations, and determine how to communicate better with locals and stakeholders about services. USBE also recommends that this council create a “tool box” for the partner agencies (DSPD, USOR, USBE, LEA’s, stakeholders, etc.) to more effectively coordinate and deliver services to transition age youth. Additionally, **the agencies involved in this ongoing council could establish data sharing agreements** to more effectively track 1) number of transition age youth with disabilities, 2) IEP transition goals and needed services for employment after leaving the school system, 3) referrals to agencies from the schools, 4) outcomes from the agencies if services were provided, and 5) the unmet service need among transition age students with disabilities.

The ongoing council should also focus on how to build partnerships with non-government entities. The Utah Parent Center Family to Family Network, a statewide parent peer support group designed to support families of people with disabilities, could be a good partnership to enhance. This network hosts statewide meetings in-person and online, and offers tips on how to better advocate. The Family to Family Network also helps families navigate adult services and life after their child leaves the school system. The council could also investigate partnerships with private businesses in the state. **A prominent bank has provided funding donations to Department of Human Service programs in the past,** which could be pursued in the future for transition programs that would serve youth with disabilities. Additionally, partnerships with religious non-government entities such as LDS Employment Services could help provide additional job training opportunities and connect individuals to gainful employment. It may be helpful to also partner with DSAMH to expand upon the certified peer support specialist network to include people with disabilities, especially to provide perspective and comfort when people are nervous about working in the community.

2. Offer Incentivized, Flexible Employment Service Options

CE services should be prioritized and offered by agencies serving transition age youth with disabilities seeking employment, as consistent with national best practices. Currently, VR offers CE service delivery to better serve individuals with the most significant disabilities. USOR established several workgroups in collaboration with the Workforce Innovation National Technical Assistance Center to review and revise service delivery models provided by approved Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRPs) vendors. The purpose of this transformation was to improve the quality and outcome of supported employment, customized employment, and supported job-based training services. **USOR is projecting to add two new fees for CRPs providing Customized Employment:** a Customized Job Placement Fee and a Customized Employment Stability Fee. In addition, USOR has partnered with Source America to expand the Pathways to Careers Initiative which will provide opportunities for further expansion of Customized Employment. **For clients that are served by both VR and DSPD, VR typically funds CE first.** DSPD has also sought to shift the employment service model to be more customized and align better with national best practices. The Division formed a workgroup in 2016 consisting of federal experts, providers, support coordinators, parent advocates, self advocates,

vocational rehabilitation, and Division staff, to put together CE codes over a period of 18 months. These codes offer more flexibility to providers (identified as a provider need, pg. 31) to take the individuals they serve into the community, job shadow, develop comprehensive plans for employment, build job skills, and provide support during employment. These codes also incentivize community employment due to their higher rates, though they have not yet been put into practice.

3. Build Education Employment Transition Capacity

The USWP has been an innovative way to train educators and work more collaboratively with partner agencies that serve transition age youth in the state; however, its scope has been limited since it is still a new program and the funding ends in 2021. **Sustaining and expanding the USWP activities would help address the barrier of special education teachers not having appropriate training to effectively plan for student transition out of school.** Expanding upon this effort to help ensure there is consistent transition training at each Local Education Authority (LEA). **High educator turnover makes it necessary to offer consistent training at the local level on how to more effectively plan and carry out transition activities as staffing changes** (Jacobson, 2018). This funding would allow the Division, partner agencies, and providers to continue intensively training educators and administrators in CE, how to improve transition for their students over the school year, and to provide CE services to students with the most significant disabilities. Educators are then encouraged to train others in their schools or districts on what they learned through the program, which will ultimately build the existing educator capacity. Over time, it is anticipated that as more educators and local agencies are trained there will be less reliance on federal technical assistance and shift more toward utilizing local expertise (from educators/organizations that have gone through the training and partnership through local universities).

USWP activities could be expanded to include an estimated 90 additional sites per year and sustain the existing nine sites as needed. There are roughly 100 LEAs (45 public, 55 charter) that serve transition age youth in Utah, which could utilize the program assistance. Additionally, the USBE recommends that educators receive compensation for their efforts related to the project that are outside of their contract including: 1) summer meetings, 2) providing technical assistance to others after completing training, 3) and other activities related to the project. **This would require an estimated nine additional coordinators and one transition specialist at DSPD**

(12) a schedule of needed funding;

to manage and coordinate activities at the selected school sites. The recommendation to expand and sustain current USWP activities would cost approximately \$885,540 each year. Upfront costs would be higher, however, as the need for technical assistance starts to phase out, costs will begin to decrease. Breakdown of annual costs includes continuation of personnel costs, training/materials, and the contract extension of Griffin-Hammis Associates. Annual personnel costs are estimated at \$727,140 and include wages, fringe benefits and other indirect costs. Training and material cost is estimated at \$13,400 annually. The contract extension with Griffin-Hammis Associates would cost \$145,000 annually.

To build capacity for improved transition services and outcomes for students at the LEA level, the education system would benefit from hiring five regional transition specialists. This includes one specialist located in the Wasatch Front and one at each of the four service centers under the Southwest Educational Development Center (SEDC). These five transition specialists would be licensed secondary special educators under the supervision of the USBE special education section. Their role would be coordinate services, provide teacher and special education director training, and coordinate local interagency transition councils. The estimated cost is roughly \$1,000,000 per year for salaries, benefits, and travel costs.

(4) identification of needs to ensure that the demand for those services can be met by private contract providers and state agencies;

What Providers & State Agencies Need

Provider companies reported (in focus groups) that in order to offer more customized employment services and improve outcomes among transition age youth, they need higher paying and more flexible transportation, employment, and day service codes to adequately compensate for the time and resources a more customized approach requires. This need remains true

whether transition age youth are referred for CE services by LEAs, USOR, or DSPD. Providers report that increasing clarity between the roles and responsibilities of state agencies would be beneficial to providers, educators, and family members. Providers recommended that state agencies work to reduce the “lag time” that often occurs following graduation and initiating post school services. Finally, providers also advised agencies to focus on improving expectations within the community, among family members, and potential employers that individuals with disabilities can work and contribute.

DSPD will continue to collaborate and seek ways to increase access to benefits education and counseling. As previously discussed, fear of losing benefits is a barrier to employment among people with disabilities. There are private organizations that the Division or USOR could potentially contract with to offer online benefits counseling assistance or other fee for service resources. The Division and our partner agencies will investigate this moving forward.

Stakeholder Feedback

A webinar was conducted on September 19, 2018 to present this study to stakeholders who might be impacted by any legislative action stemming from the findings. The presentation was posted online so anyone who missed the webinar could watch. At the end of the presentation, DSPD solicited input from stakeholders. Overall, the feedback received on the recommendations was positive. There were several suggestions which the agencies will explore further. When discussing the interagency council, webinar participants suggested several partners who could potentially add value. Participants suggested that the council incorporate parent representation, self-advocates, a legislator, and look into other outside partners. Participants were also supportive of expanding capacity for transition age employment. Participants explicitly mentioned expanding the number of schools and districts at which

educators are trained, and include employment focused train the trainer at the Utah Parent Center. Several participants also commented on their support for more flexible community employment options.

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