

Understanding the Role of Vocational Rehabilitation in Transition from School to Work

Questions Asked by Attendees / Responses Provided by Client Assistance Program (CAP) Staff of Disability Law & Advocacy Center of Tennessee

Q: How early can a student apply?

A: According to the Interagency Agreement, students should be referred to VR at least 12-18 months prior to exit from school OR at beginning of junior year. There is no minimum age for application for VR services.

Q: Is there a public VR manual that is available to understand the process better?

A: VR has a general policy manual which you can request from your local VR office. In addition, more detailed information is contained in the Standard Procedure Directives (SPD) and you can request that VR provide you with the SPDs that relate to your specific question/issue.

Q: Could we get a copy of Becky's PowerPoint?

A: STEP will post a copy of the PowerPoint with the archived webinar.

Q: how is entitlement defined?

A: A government program providing benefits to members of a specified group; *also*: funds supporting or distributed by such a program (Merriam-Webster definition)

VR has eligibility criteria and a financial participation assessment which must be considered in the process of determining the provision of services. Even though an individual may be identified as having a disability, he/she must be determined to be eligible for VR services as explained during the webinar. Except for clients receiving SSI or SSDI benefits due to their own disability, the client's household income must be considered in determining the client's financial participation in the provision of VR services. Also, clients are required to use available comparable benefits such as Pell grants and health insurance before VR will fund or provide a service covered by those benefits. In addition, the VR services provided to a client are dependent upon the need for the services in order for the individual to attain his/her employment objective which has been agreed to by VR. Eligible individuals are not automatically entitled to any or all VR services.

Q: What is the income that is allowed for families for a client to be eligible?

A: Financial participation decisions are based upon the client's household income as well as the number of people living in the client's household. Contact your local VR office to request the specific information.

Q: What happens when VR doesn't reach out to someone?

A: VR is emphasizing outreach to transition age youth. However, the schools, youth or parents need to initiate direct contact with VR in order to begin the application process.

Q: Are CRP agencies allowed to recruit at the high schools? For example: can I as a job developer go to HSs and pass out information and direct students to VR?

A: The Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) must follow the schools' policies regarding such activity. Check with schools in your district regarding opportunities that may be available for you to talk to students about the services you can provide through VR if the student is determined eligible by VR. There are often Career Fairs and other events held at local schools where there may be an opportunity to reach students.

Q: Is there a waiting list for services?

A: Once a student is identified as an eligible individual, VR will determine the student's Priority Category (PC) status. The individual is either determined to be in a PC that is receiving services (currently PC 1 or PC 2) or is in a PC that is not receiving services (currently PC 3 or PC 4). A student that is assigned to a PC not currently receiving services will only be eligible for VR services when VR opens that PC. However, VR should provide information to that student about other available resources for assistance in preparing for or finding a job.

Q: Are private schools covered?

A: Yes, students attending private schools may apply for VR services. Students with disabilities who attend private schools should contact the local VR office to apply for services.

Q: Are the parents liable to pay for any of the evaluations that VR needs to determine eligibility and needed services?

A: Diagnostic assessments required for determining eligibility are identified and paid for by VR. Additional assessments included in the Employment Needs Assessment process are also paid for by VR. The client may be involved in selecting the service provider but that provider must be a vendor for VR services and must accept VR fees.

Q: Are trial work experiences for a set time or based on each individual's need?

A: Trial work experiences are conducted by VR when the VR counselor doubts the individual's ability to work due to the severity of his or her disability. Trial work experiences must be provided in the most integrated setting possible and be of sufficient variety and over a sufficient period of time to provide VR with information to decide if its services can help the individual achieve an employment goal. VR must provide appropriate supports, like assistive technology devices and personal assistance services that the individual needs to participate in the trial work experience.

Q: Is it better for the school to make the referral or the parent? And is the intake interview done at school through the IEP meeting process?

A: The referral can be made by either the school or the parent; however, it is most helpful if all parties work together in the process. The intake interview is generally conducted separately from the IEP meeting. The intake interview is the initial meeting between the VR Counselor and the applicant and can be conducted at a location agreed upon by the counselor and the applicant (e.g., VR office, school).

Q: Does TN have partnerships with community businesses so that students can get work experience?

A: VR is open to working with community businesses to provide work experiences for clients. Contact your local VR office for information specific to your area.

Q: is it possible to get guidance on what services might be useful in the private sector for categories 3 and 4?

A: VR provides information and referral services for community agencies to individuals who are determined to be in PC 3 or PC 4.

Q: What would be considered a disability that is too severe to be eligible?

A: There is no specific disability that is automatically considered to be too severe to be eligible for VR services. Such determinations are made on an individual basis after trial work experiences. In rare cases where an individual cannot participate in trial work experiences, VR may conduct a process called an extended evaluation to decide if the person's disability is too severe for the person to benefit from VR services in terms of achieving an employment goal.

Q: What if the school does not do their due diligence to refer the student to VR before graduation? Is there a complaint process the parent or student can use?

A: It is important to remember that the student or the parent can also contact the local VR office to apply for VR services. They do not have to wait on the school to make the referral. A letter can also be written to the school administrator to request the initiation of the referral. Either of these options will yield a faster result than filing a complaint.

Q: If a person is determined no longer eligible for SSI @ age 18, but they are still disabled, would they be eligible to receive VR services?

A: Only the VR Counselor can make the determination of eligibility for VR. It is important to still make the referral to VR whether or not the individual receives SSI.

LIST OF SCHOOLS WHO HAVE A VR COUNSELOR: All schools are assigned a VR Counselor to take applications from students. The majority of these counselors are located in offices outside of the schools such as in local VR offices or Career Centers across the state. In addition, VR has third-party contracts with the following Local Education Agencies and VR Counselors are generally housed in these school systems:

Anderson County Schools

Bledsoe County Schools

Blount County Schools

Carter County Schools and Johnson County Schools

Clarksville Montgomery County Schools

Cocke County Schools

Elizabethton City Schools

Greene County Schools and Greeneville City Schools

Hamblen County Schools

Henderson County Schools

Humboldt City Schools, Trenton Special School District, Milan Special School District

Jackson-Madison County Schools

Knox County Schools

McMinn County Schools

Putnam County Schools

Robertson County School

Sequatchie County Schools

Sevier County Schools

Union County Schools

Washington County Schools

COMPLETE LIST OF VR OFFICES: Visit the VR website at www.state.tn.us/humanserv/rehab/vrs.html to locate VR offices by county.