

**DRAFT
2022 NYS WIOA Combined State Plan Modification
ACCES-VR Section**

a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

1. Input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Councils functions.

Current Narrative:

The New York State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) advises NYSED/ACCES-VR on issues related to WIOA priorities and the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities. The SRC represents a diverse cross-section of NYSED/ACCES-VR participants, agencies and organizational stakeholders committed to improving employment outcomes for people with disabilities. The responsibilities of the SRC include, but are not limited to, the review and feedback on substantive policy changes, review of participant satisfaction surveys, and supporting the alignment of SRC and NYSED/ACCES-VR priorities with WIOA priorities. In PY 20, the SRC realigned its committees to better support their work and advisement to NYSED/ACCES-VR. The following are the committees that manage and complete the SRC's responsibilities: Executive Committee; Membership Committee; Policy and Planning Committee; Quality Assurance and Improvement Committee; Business Engagement; and Annual Report Committee. The SRC identified that the advisement on issues related to youth and transition would be better served by not limiting the discussion to a transition committee. Therefore, the SRC retired the transition committee and transition issues are now infused within all the committees.

Council Reports

As noted above, the SRC focuses on aligning its priorities with NYSED/ACCES-VR's Combined State Plan Goals and Priorities. This includes identifying how the activities of the SRC, such as presentations at quarterly meetings and committee work, are utilized for the development of its recommendations to NYSED/ACCES-VR. The SRC's 2020 annual report outlines collaborations with NYSED/ACCES-VR that will help to advance the work toward the identified Combined State Plan Goals and Priorities including:

Executive Committee:

- Maintain open communication between SRC and NYSED/ACCES-VR leadership;
- Adopt annual and quarterly meeting themes and priorities;
- Work with NYSED/ACCES-VR to coordinate standing committee operations; and
- Work with NYSED/ACCES-VR to support SRC leadership and succession planning.

- ***Business Engagement Committee:*** Review and provide input on the WIOA priority to effectively serve business;
- Advance recommendations on increasing both business penetration and repeat services to business customers, and
- Support the building of effective community partnerships to better serve individuals with disabilities and improve employment outcomes.
- ***Annual Report Committee:*** Coordinate the preparation and submission of the NYS SRC annual report in collaboration with NYSED/ACCES-VR

Policy and Planning Committee:

- Participate in activities leading up to revisions in NYSED/ACCES-VR policies;
- Review and advance recommendations associated with implementation of new WIOA services (i.e., pre-employment transition, customized employment, assistive technology, and postsecondary education); and
- Review and advance recommendations on collaborations and other Combined State Plan provisions.

Quality Assurance & Improvement Committee:

- Review and advise NYSED/ACCES-VR on its efforts to improve the quality of vocational rehabilitation services;
- Advise on the selection of performance indicators for quality assurance and/or improvement and review and provide input on the NYSED/ACCES-VR services that meet WIOA priorities;
- Advise NYSED/ACCES-VR on its efforts to improve the quality of due process opportunities for participants and due process related data provided by NYSED/ACCES-VR; and
- Advance quality service recommendations to NYSED/ACCES-VR both informally and via the 4.2 process.

Membership Committee:

- Recruit and retain SRC members who are interested individuals with disabilities, and/or advocates, family, or guardians and/or organizations representing a broad range of individuals with disabilities;
- Management of SRC orientation and mentoring of new SRC members; and

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- Review the attendance, participation, and professional contribution of SRC members during their first term to determine whether the member may continue to serve for a second consecutive term.

State Plan Public Hearings and State Rehabilitation Council Recommendations

NYSED/ACCES-VR submitted a draft of its section of the Combined State Plan in January 2022 to the SRC for their review and feedback. The draft will be posted for public comment, and five (5) virtual/telephone public hearings will be held in February 2022 to solicit feedback from participants, families, vendors, and the public. Please note, the holding of public hearings virtually or by telephone was necessary due to the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Upon completion of its review, SRC recommendations and ACCES-VR's responses will be incorporated into the NYSED/ACCES-VR section of the 2022 NYS WIOA Combined State Plan modification. Additionally, public comment will be reviewed and considered for incorporation, when appropriate, upon completion of the public hearings.

2. The designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations

Current Narrative:

Please see section a., for a summary of the SRC's recommendations and NYSED/ACCES-VR's responses.

3. The designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR recognizes the value of stakeholder feedback. Input from the SRC resulted in either changes to the NYSED/ACCES-VR section of the WIOA Combined State Plan or it was taken under advisement.

b. Request for Waiver of Statewideness

1. A local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR does not request a waiver of statewideness. The services provided under the Combined State Plan are available statewide.

2. The designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect;

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR does not request a waiver of statewideness.

3. Requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to coordinate and work cooperatively with State agencies that do not participate in the System to improve access to appropriate vocational training and employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Interagency cooperation and coordination in service delivery is a driving force within Title IV of WIOA and Chapter 515 of the Laws of 1992, NYS Integrated Employment legislation, and is essential for supporting people with disabilities to obtain and maintain their competitive integrated employment. This interagency collaboration occurs at both the state and local levels. NYSED/ACCES-VR executed several MOUs and MOAs to formally support these collaborations and participates in statewide and local meetings, workshops, and trainings to maintain communication with all partners.

Memoranda of Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding

NYSED/ACCES-VR works closely with a variety of entities to enhance vocational rehabilitation services and placement opportunities for NYSED/ACCES-VR participants. Many of these efforts are described in MOAs and MOUs. Although some partner agreements have not been updated recently, they demonstrate NYSED/ACCES-VR's overall value and commitment to collaboration to best support people with disabilities. More importantly, the agreements and understandings have established a foundation for relationships that continue to evolve and grow to meet participants' changing needs. Because formalized structures may limit innovation, NYSED/ACCES-VR's approach is to maintain flexibility with its collaborations.

Several of the key agreements include:

- Memorandum of Interagency Understanding regarding Supported Employment, between NYSED/ACCES-VR, OCFS/NYSCB, OMH, and OPWDD, January 2001;
- Joint Agreement between NYSED/ACCES-VR and the Office of P-12 Education – Office of Special Education, regarding the Provision of Transition Services, April 2020;
- MOU between NYSED/ACCES-VR to enhance access to assistive technology through the Technology Related Assistance to Individuals with Disabilities (TRAID) centers, April 2021;

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- MOA for WIA: Title II, Adult Education and Family Literacy between NYSED and Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIB), June 30, 2000;
- MOA to Provide Services to Individuals who are Deaf/Blind, November 1999 between NYSED/ACCES-VR and OCFS/NYSCB;
- MOU between NYSED/ACCES-VR and OMH, October 1999;
- MOU between NYSED/ACCES-VR and OASAS, July 2010;
- MOA to promote and expand vocational rehabilitation services between NYSED/ACCES-VR and the St. Regis Mohawk Tribe, September 2010;
- MOA between NYSED/ACCES-VR and the Seneca Nation of Indians' Vocational Rehabilitation Program, July 2019;
- Statement of collaboration between NYSED/ACCES-VR and New York State Financial Aid Administrators Association (NYSFAAA), March 1, 1998;
- Joint Agreement between NYSED/ACCES-VR and the Office of Higher and Professional Education (OHPE), August 4, 1994; and
- Joint Agreement between NYSED/ACCES-VR and Public Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), (SUNY and CUNY) August 2007.

2. State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;

Current Narrative:

The NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs administers the TRAUD program as the lead agency under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. The TRAUD program's mission is to coordinate statewide activities to increase access to, and acquisition of, assistive technology for people with disabilities. NYSED/ACCES-VR has a MOU with the Justice Center that supports the 12 TRAUD Centers across NYS.

3. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR does not currently have a formal partnership with USDA Rural Development, however, several District Offices serve rural communities and partner with businesses, community organizations and government entities in these communities to provide vocational rehabilitation services to people with disabilities who live in rural parts of NYS.

4. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and

Current Narrative:

As referenced above in c. 1, NYSED/ACCES-VR works closely with several state agencies (i.e., OMH, OASAS, OPWDD) that provide services to individuals with

disabilities, including out-of-school youth. NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to work with the Job Corps and Youth Build programs to best meet and serve the needs of out-of-school youth. NYSED/ACCES-VR has engaged in discussions with the NYS Office of Children and Family Services (NYS OCFS) which serves youth in foster care, in juvenile detention and in community supervision. It is anticipated that future discussions with NYS OCFS may be reopened upon a more consistent decline and management of the COVID-19 pandemic. Opportunities to expand these relationships and initiate new ones continues to be a priority and will be engaged in as entities are able to while managing the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. State use contracting programs.

Current Narrative:

All NYS agencies must procure commodities, services, and technology in accordance with Article 11 of NYS Finance Law which states in Section 162 the following: “To advance special social and economic goals, selected providers shall have preferred source status for the purposes of procurement in accordance with the provisions of this section. Procurement from these providers shall be exempted from the competitive procurement provisions of Section 163 of this article and other competitive procurement statutes. Such exemptions shall apply to commodities produced, manufactured or assembled, including those repackaged to meet the form, function and utility required by state agencies, in New York State and, where so designated, services provided by those sources in accordance with this section.”

Two of the three preferred sources are the NYS Preferred Source Program for New Yorkers who are Blind and the NYS Industries for the Disabled (NYSID). NYSED/ACCES-VR fully complies with NYS procurement requirements and purchases from each of these preferred sources.

d. Coordination with Education Officials

1. The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR considers the coordination of services to students and youth with disabilities as one of its main priorities. NYSED/ACCES-VR works closely with the NYSED Office of Special Education and local school districts to support students with disabilities in preparation for employment, postsecondary education and training, and community living when they leave school through the provision of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) and/or vocational rehabilitation services. In PY 20,

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NYSED/ACCES-VR served approximately 30,600 students representing close to 45% of the participants served that program year. For students with an IEP, NYSED/ACCES-VR staff work with the student, parents (when appropriate), and the school to coordinate the IPE with the IEP. NYSED/ACCES-VR policies identify the requirement to develop timely IPEs, within 90 days from the date of eligibility determination, for all individuals including students and youth.

Formal Interagency Agreement with the State Educational Agency

The NYS Education Agency Agreement (SEA) between NYSED/ACCES-VR and the Office of Special Education (OSE) was signed by the two offices in April 2020. The agreement outlines that NYSED/ACCES-VR and OSE share responsibility to prepare students with disabilities for successful competitive integrated employment. The purpose of this agreement is to facilitate and foster a common understanding of transition requirements and responsibilities, and to build a partnership between NYSED/ACCES-VR and OSE in order to enable students with disabilities who are eligible, or potentially eligible, for NYSED/ACCES-VR services to successfully transition from school to post-school activities, including the receipt of pre-employment transition services, transition services, and other NYSEC/ACCES-VR services. Specifically, the intent of this agreement is to:

- Strengthen shared efforts to prepare students with disabilities for successful community work experiences, careers, and independent living;
- Outline a collaborative framework for coordinating State and local services and resources; and
- Provide guidance for coordinating plans, policies, and procedures developed to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including the receipt of vocational rehabilitation services leading to employment.

Section 511 Requirements

NYSED/ACCES-VR and the NYSED Office of Special Education (OSE) have a joint agreement, as identified in c.1. This agreement includes a section dedicated to defining responsibilities and coordination efforts for the provision of consultation and technical assistance to school districts to satisfy the documentation requirements regarding students with disabilities who are considering sub-minimum wage employment as a post-high school option (Section 511) and pre-employment transition services (Section 113). This section of the agreement identifies the following:

- NYSED/ACCES-VR provides technical assistance to school districts about the regulatory requirements of Section 511.
- School districts refer students known to be seeking sub-minimum wage employment to NYSED/ACCES-VR.
- NYSED/ACCES-VR collaborates with school districts to identify students with disabilities interested in seeking sub-minimum wage employment and prior to beginning work to ensure that the student has documentation of the completion of the required activities identified in Section 511 of WIOA and transition services provided under IDEA.

2. Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:

A. Consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;

Current Narrative:

Recognizing the importance of having a dedicated focus on students and youth, NYSED/ACCES-VR implemented the Transition and Youth Services (TAYS) Team in 2014 by creating Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors in Transition and Youth (SRVC TAYS) positions in each of its 15 District Offices. In addition to the SVRC TAYS, positions for a Transition and Youth Services Manager and Associate Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor were created and are based in the NYSED/ACCES-VR Central Office.

The TAYS team assists NYSED/ACCES-VR to meet its WIOA priorities related to students and youth. Based on these priorities, the TAYS work to:

1. Engage students, youth, parents, high schools, transition specialists, and youth organizations in exploring and planning career choices, including Pre-ETS, that connect to a full range of postsecondary options for training, career development, independent living skills and employment;
2. Improve the number, quality, and rate of employment outcomes for students and youth participating in NYSED/ACCES-VR services;
3. Identify best practices and evidence-based approaches and tools for implementation by NYSED/ACCES-VR staff that will lead to increased vocational and independent living skills outcomes for students and youth;
4. Increase collaborations with multiple stakeholders, including other state agencies, Special Education Quality Assurance (SEQA), Client Assistance Program (CAP) and Regional Partnership Centers staff (Regional Partnership Centers replaced the previous Regional Special Education-Technical Assistance Support Centers);
5. Support the implementation of Pre-ETS by providing information and technical assistance to students, families, schools, and community agencies. Oversee the provision of Pre-ETS for potentially eligible students provided by approved vendors; and
6. Oversee the provision of Pre-ETS to potentially eligible students provided by approved vendors.

The NYSED/ACCES-VR TAYS team is knowledgeable in evidence-based practices for supporting students and youth with disabilities to achieve successful vocational and independent living outcomes and serves as a resource and support to NYSED/ACCES-

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VR staff, school districts, and community agencies. Since their inception the TAYS Team has:

- Developed a statewide transition and student referral system that streamlines the NYSED/ACCES-VR application process and reduces barriers to students' access to postsecondary services;
- Designed and implemented consistent NYSED/ACCES-VR orientation presentations for high-school students, out-of-school youth, and postsecondary students and youth;
- Identified and provided training to NYSED/ACCES-VR staff on best practices for working with students and youth; and
- Provided technical assistance to NYSED/ACCES-VR staff, schools and other community agencies serving students and youth.

In addition to the TAYS, all NYSED/ACCES-VR counselors provide information and support to students and youth with disabilities and their families.

Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, vendors were initially unable to serve students in-person. NYSED/ACCES-VR quickly modified in-person service delivery to virtual or remote delivery. The TAYS Team provided technical support related to COVID-19 pandemic guidance to staff, vendors, schools, families, and students.

B. Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR counselors work closely with school districts to assist a student in moving to post-school life by trying to prevent or minimize gaps between the educational and vocational rehabilitation systems. NYSED/ACCES-VR counselors:

- Coordinate and collaborate with school personnel to identify and foster the referral of students with disabilities for Pre-ETS and/or vocational rehabilitation services;
- Work collaboratively with school district special education staff about the development of both the IEP and IPE to best support a student's transition;
- Work with local Career Centers and businesses to develop work experiences for students;
- Share information with students, parents (when appropriate), and school staff about the current labor market, community resources, community-based services, adult service programs, and independent living centers; and
- Work in collaboration with contracted vendors, state agencies (i.e., OPWDD, OMH), and other community agencies to provide meaningful vocational experiences to students with disabilities to contribute to a positive employment outcome.

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- Due to school closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, NYSED/ACCES-VR, vendors, students, and families experienced interruption with the ability to attend and coordinate transition services. NYSED/ACCES-VR utilized virtual or remote platforms to attend IEP meetings with students. Online information sessions were developed and shared with school districts to assist students with disabilities and their families with applying for NYSED/ACCES-VR services. Additionally, NYSED/ACCES-VR updated its website to include an online application process to further support access to vocational rehabilitation services for students and individuals with disabilities.

C. Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;

Current Narrative:

- The NYSED Office of Special Education (OSE) and NYSED/ACCES-VR will work in collaboration with school districts and other state agencies on a coordinated approach to the provision of transition services (i.e., School districts have the primary planning and programmatic responsibilities for the provision of transition services for their students);
- School districts are responsible for the coordination of educational programs and services, including transition planning, that prepare students with disabilities for adult living, learning, and earning;
- School districts are financially responsible for transition services mandated by federal and state laws and regulations;
- NYSED/ACCES-VR is fiscally responsible for providing transition services, Pre-ETS and/or vocational rehabilitation services that are not otherwise mandated through special education requirements, in accordance with NYSED/ACCES-VR policies; and
- When coordinating services through the IEP and the IPE the student, and when appropriate the student's parents, are the primary source of information regarding the student's needs, goals, and services.

D. Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR's procedure for outreach, some previously mentioned include the following:

Every school district in NYS has an assigned NYSED/ACCES-VR liaison who utilizes outreach procedures that include:

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- Regular coordination and collaboration with school personnel to identify and foster the referral of students with disabilities as early as possible in the transition planning process for Pre-ETS and/or vocational rehabilitation services:
- Providing information describing the purpose of ACCES-VR, eligibility requirements, application process and the range of services provided through in person meetings, distribution of informational brochures and ACCES-VR applications, and presentations specifically designed for students with disabilities, and
- Utilizing a statewide transition and student referral system that streamlines the NYSED/ACCES-VR application process and reduces barriers to students' access to postsecondary services.
- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many school liaisons were unavailable to NYSED/ACCES-VR liaisons as school personnel adjusted to virtual or remote learning. The TAYS Team networked with NYSED Office of Special Education, Client Assistance Program (CAP), and local secondary education leadership to identify liaisons to provide IEP and other school records to avoid delays in student applications for NYSED/ACCES-VR services. Examples of strategies utilized by the TAYS team to transition to virtual or remote outreach include:
 - Utilizing virtual or remote platforms to attend IEP meetings with students;
 - Developing online information sessions that were shared with school districts to assist students with disabilities and their families with applying for NYSED/ACCES-VR services.
 - Coordinating with school personnel to identify potentially eligible students and connect those students with disabilities to vendors virtually or remotely.
 - Holding virtual statewide and regional vendor collaboration meetings to brainstorm efforts to reach unserved and underserved students in residential (i.e., foster care) and juvenile justice facilities.

Researching and distributing virtual resources for NYSED/ACCES-VR staff and vendors to deliver Pre-ETS remotely.

e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR collaborates with non-profit vocational rehabilitation service vendors statewide to increase access to competitive integrated employment opportunities. Currently, NYSED/ACCES-VR contracts with 355 Core Rehabilitation Service (CRS) vendors. The five-year contracts were executed on January 1, 2019 to expand NYSED/ACCES-VR's capacity and delivery of Pre-ETS, to improve the quality-of-service delivery, and to increase competitive integrated employment outcomes. The CRS contracts include specific vocational rehabilitation service deliverables, criteria for monitoring contract compliance and criteria to monitor the quality of services. Payment

rates were modified to be commensurate with similar service delivery systems that provide employment and pre-vocational services.

CRS offers participants a variety of employment supports, including vocational rehabilitation entry, assessment, assistive technology, rehabilitation technology, job preparation services, job placement, driver rehabilitation, adjunct services, and supported employment. Consistent with Federal regulations, supported employment intensive services are offered for up to 24 months and extended services are available to youth with most significant disabilities for a period not to exceed four years, or at such time that a youth reaches age 25 and no longer meets the definition of a youth with a disability, whichever occurs first. When vendors identify unmet business needs, they can develop customized employment opportunities to fill those needs that support the skills, talents, and interests of the participant.

NYSED/ACCES-VR also provides the five required Pre-ETS through the CRS contracts to students with disabilities who are eligible for NYSED/ACCES-VR services. In addition to CRS, NYSED/ACCES-VR has contracts with 20 vendors to provide Pre-ETS for students with disabilities who are potentially eligible.

f. Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

Current Narrative:

NYS continues to utilize the interagency MOU regarding Supported Employment as its framework for implementation and improvement to supported employment services. NYSED/ACCES-VR was designated as having the primary statewide responsibility for program development and administration of integrated employment, including intensive supported employment services. In addition to NYSED/ACCES-VR, OPWDD offers intensive supported employment services for individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in need of more staff-intensive supported employment services. OMH also offers intensive supported employment services to its participants and all individuals may apply to NYSED/ACCES-VR at any time.

NYSED/ACCES-VR engages supported employment vendors and business communities in identifying innovative approaches to increasing successful employment outcomes for people receiving intensive supported employment services. Supported employment services begin after job placement and may be provided to individuals with most significant disabilities for a period of time not to exceed 24 months, unless, under special circumstances, the eligible individual and the vocational rehabilitation counselor

jointly agree to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE.

With the onset and continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the provision of services needed to adapt to the ever-evolving public health measures put in place as a response to the pandemic. This included the ability for supported employment services to be provided virtually or remotely except when an individual requested an in-person service.

Additionally, dialogue continues to take place about strategies for:

- Increasing the use of assistive technology;
- Addressing concerns around liability as it relates to businesses' willingness to serve as mentors or to provide short-term volunteer opportunities; and
- Providing benefits advisement both early in the process and at the time of placement in a job.

OPWDD and OMH work collaboratively with NYSED/ACCES-VR to provide comprehensive supported employment services in NYS. All three agencies are responsible for the extended phases of supported employment. NYSED/ACCES-VR has extended services available to youth with most significant disabilities for a period not to exceed 4 years, or at such time that a youth reaches age 25 and no longer meets the definition of a youth with a disability, whichever occurs first when they are not eligible for extended supported employment services from either OPWDD or OMH. NYSED/ACCES-VR provides New York State funded extended services to adults.

NYSED/ACCES-VR provides oversight for vendors delivering supported employment services to its participants. Vendors are required to submit participant reporting to NYSED/ACCES-VR and District Office staff meet with vendors bi-annually. Additionally, NYSED/ACCES-VR conducts regular quality reviews of its vendors.

g. Coordination with Employers

1. VR Services; and

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR has a Business Relations team that includes a Statewide Coordinator and placement and marketing representatives, known as Integrated Employment Specialists (IES), in the 15 District Offices. In addition, there is an IES 2 for each of the five regions of the state. The IES team works with businesses to create possible job opportunities for NYSED/ACCES-VR participants.

NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to implement strategies with the other WIOA core partners for a collaborative approach to heightening the focus on business needs and to strengthen and streamline workforce system efforts (Additional detail can be found in

the Workforce Development Activities section of this Plan). NYSED/ACCES-VR developed partnerships to support these efforts including: statewide disability employment training initiative with Cornell University; local job placement; and marketing initiatives with the Society for Human Resource Management and the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) unions across the state. In addition, NYSED/ACCES-VR is a member of New York Association for Training and Employment Professionals (NYATEP). NYATEP serves a cross-section of the major titles of WIOA, including LWDBs, Career Centers, partner programs, and organizations that serve individuals with disabilities. NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to work closely with NYATEP under WIOA implementation to increase communication and common understanding of the law across the four titles. This work helps to support partners' understanding of vocational rehabilitation services and inclusion of it within their local System.

NYSED/ACCES-VR contracts with over 300 vendors across the state for the provision of a wide range of services, including opportunities for career exploration. Vendors partner and work closely with businesses and employers to provide career exploration, such as paid or unpaid internships, in competitive integrated employment settings. Some examples of career exploration services vendors provide include:

- Paid and unpaid work try-outs and community work experiences
- Community-based work assessments that allow for observation while the eligible individual/participant is engaged in exploring work in a competitively integrated business setting.

It should be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic challenges have been faced with these services as they are not always readily conducive to virtual or remote provision in addition to facing other new, unforeseen barriers (e.g., businesses unable to have non-employees onsite, lack of uniform business requirements for vaccines and participant choice on vaccination).

Each year NYSED/ACCES-VR recognizes outstanding businesses during NDEAM. This nationwide campaign raises awareness about disability employment issues and celebrates the contributions of workers with disabilities, past and present, and the businesses that hire them.

2. Transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.

Current Narrative:

As stated in g.1 NYSED/ACCES-VR contracts with over 300 vendors across the state for the provision of a wide range of services, including transition services and pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) for eligible students with disabilities. These vendors partner and work closely with business and employers to provide transition services and Pre-ETS. NYSED/ACCES-VR Integrated Employment Specialist (IES)

staff work directly with businesses across the state to identify work-based learning experiences and work readiness training opportunities for all of our participants including those receiving Pre-ETS. NYSED/ACCES-VR actively participants in NYATEP events that are specifically geared to youth and are inclusive of the WIOA required core partners as well as the LWDBs. The Transition and Youth Services (TAYS) staff, previously described in d.1 and d.2 work collaboratively with the NYSED/ACCES-VR IES staff, described in g.1, to support the collaboration with business for opportunities for students and youth in addition to the IES staff.

It should be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, required social distancing was in effect in the spring of 2020. New York State schools and non-essential businesses were closed under these requirements. This had immediate , and future impact to the in-person provision of these services and where possible services continue to be provided virtually or remotely. With the continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for schools to evaluate the need for virtual or remote education on an ongoing basis, NYSED/ACCES-VE established processes for the virtual delivery of services. For example, NYSED/ACCES-VR encourages virtual or remote employer interviews for students with disabilities as an approved activity for work-based learning experiences. Employer interviews provide valuable guidance to potentially eligible students and eligible students and NYSED/ACCES-VR wanted to provide other means for these important activities to be conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

h. Interagency Cooperation

1. The State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;

Current Narrative:

The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) is the agency solely responsible for the administration of the State Medicaid plan. NYSDOH and the other state agencies that utilize Medicaid funding, the Office for People With Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) and the Office for Mental Health (OMH), work directly with each other on the provision of Medicaid funded services. NYSED/ACCES-VR works collaboratively with NYSDOH, however NYSED/ACCES-VR has more direct interactions with OPWDD and OMH with regard to the people that they serve and vocational rehabilitation services that provide opportunities, to the greatest extend possible, for competitive integrated employment. Examples of partnerships between NYSED/ACCES-VR, OPWDD, and OMH that support opportunities for collaborations toward competitive integrated employment include:

- Many supported employment vendors provide services funded by all three agencies. The three agencies work closely as communication is important to ensure that to the extent possible vendor training requirement and performance expectations are compatible. Through training and accountability, the NYSED/ACCES-VR, OPWDD and OMH are working to ensure that quality services are delivered.

- Continued implementation of agreement to allow OPWDD eligible individuals participating in their pre-employment programs (Pathway to Employment and Employment Training Program) to participate in these integrated services without a formal denial of NYSED/ACCES-VR services. It is always made clear that the person may apply for NYSED/ACCES-VR services at any time. This process continues to allow the person to choose the program that is best fit for their needs at any given time to achieve competitive integrated employment.
- While opportunities have been drastically limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when available, NYSED/ACCES-VR, OPWDD, and OMH singularly and jointly present at New York Association for People Supporting Employment First (APSE) events that draw CRPs from around the state focused on competitive integrated employment best practices.
- NYSED/ACCES-VR participates with OPWDD, OMH and the NYSDOL on the employment subcommittee of the Most Integrated Settings Coordinating Council (MISCC). The focus of this subcommittee is to ensure individuals with disabilities are able to be employed in competitive, integrated settings and reduce barriers that may limit these opportunities.

2. The State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR has longstanding partnerships with OPWDD, OMH, and OCFS/NYSCB. Additionally, in 2014, NYS established an Employment First policy outlining strategies for the inclusion for people with disabilities in the workforce. Many of the policy's strategies build upon the existing interagency linkages and OPWDD, OMH, and NYSED/ACCES-VR continue to provide targeted, evidence-based employment services training to employment staff to support the goals of Employment First.

OPWDD provides person-centered services, supports, and advocacy to individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families. OPWDD works in partnership with NYSED/ACCES-VR to identify how the two systems can collaborate on employment for people with I/DD. OPWDD and NYSED/ACCES-VR have an agreement that OPWDD-eligible individuals receiving certain pre-employment programs, known as Pathway to Employment, Employment Training Program (ETP) or Prevocational Services, can participate in these services without a need for a formal determination of ineligibility for NYSED/ACCES-VR services. The justification for this process is an understanding that OPWDD individuals receiving Pathway to Employment, Employment Training Program or Prevocational Services will need significant levels of support to engage in work activity. This is typical due to very limited exposure to employment and vocational experiences for people participating in Pathway to Employment, Employment Training Program or Prevocational Services. The interagency agreement allows for the maximum amount of choice by the individual as to which vocational and/or pre-vocational service best fits their need at a point in

time. Throughout the process it is made clear that at any time, any person with a disability may apply for NYSED/ACCES-VR services.

3. The State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR has longstanding partnership with OMH and regularly discuss policies and procedures to best support clear communication and effective service provision. Additionally, in 2014, NYS established an Employment First policy outlining strategies for the inclusion for people with disabilities in the workforce, including people with behavioral health needs. Many of that policy's strategies built upon the existing interagency linkages and OMH, OPWWD, and NYSED/ACCES-VR.

OMH provides a range of vocational services to people with a behavioral health diagnosis including individual placement, supported employment and benefits counseling. NYSED/ACCES-VR and OMH work together to ensure that the transition from intensive supported employment services to extended supported employment services funded by OMH is smooth for the participant and vendor. Supported employment services are provided to individuals with most significant disabilities, after job placement and extended services may be provided to youth with most significant disabilities by NYSED/ACCES-VR for a period not to exceed four years, or at such time that a youth reaches age 25 and no longer meets the definition of a youth with a disability, whichever comes first.

While opportunities have been drastically limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when available, NYSED/ACCES-VR, in partnership with OMH, participates in the New York State Association for Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services (NYAPRS) events, including its annual conference where NYSED/ACCES-VR staff directly engage people with behavioral health diagnosis to learn more about their service needs and ways to continue to support them through NYSED/ACCES-VR services.

i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

1. System on Personnel and Personnel Development

A. Qualified Personnel Needs

i. The number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;

Current Narrative:

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NYSED/ACCES-VR is committed to establishing and maintaining adequate staffing of Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (VRCs) and relies on NYSED's Fiscal and Human Resources Information Management System and the VR Reporting System to assess its qualified personnel needs. NYSED/ACCES-VR collects data from these two systems to track information about its VRCs who meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) requirements and the number of participants served, and then uses this information to project staffing needs.

NYSED/ACCES-VR hires VRCs who meet CSPD requirements to provide vocational rehabilitation services. NYSED/ACCES-VR employs vocational rehabilitation counselor assistants (VRCAs) to perform a variety of paraprofessional tasks to support the VRCs in assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain or retain employment. The VRCAs interact with applicants, eligible individuals, and participants, and perform administrative tasks to facilitate service delivery. NYSED/ACCES-VR does not employ any other rehabilitation staff, such as mobility instructors or rehabilitation teachers. There are 247 full-time equivalent (FTE) VRC filled positions and 97FTE VRCA filled positions. Staff caseloads decreased to between 160-170 cases in size during PY 19 and PY 20 . NYSED/ACCES-VR served over 80,500 people in PY19 and in PY 20 served approximately 68,500 people. Please note, that the reduction on the number of people served each year, and thus the decrease in caseload size, was a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ii. The number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR personnel number reflected in 1.A.1.is 247 full-time equivalent (FTE) VRC s and 97 FTE VRCA.

iii. Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR identifies below the projected number of personnel, broken down into categories, needed in five (5) years based on:

- Projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, and
- The number of staff with 25 years of service who may be eligible for retirement within the next five years and others who may leave the agency.

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It should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic appears to have accelerated the retirement of staff. While not formally tracked as a reason for retirement, anecdotally, NYSED/ACCES-VR is aware that the COVID-19 pandemic was a factor in the decision to retire for some staff.

Staff Function	Current Number	Projected Need (Backfills)
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	247	165
Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Assistant	97	65
Senior Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor	41	60
Associate Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors	13	20
Quality Assurance Senior Vocational Counselor	4	7
Transition and Youth Services (TAYS) Counselor	13	7
Integrated Employment Specialist (IES) 1	12	7
Integrated Employment Specialist (IES) 2	4	6
Office Assistant 1	70	40
Office Assistant 2	23	30
Business Office Manager	15	7
Director of Counseling	9	7
District Office Manager	9	7
Assistant District Office Manager	2	2
Regional Coordinator	4	3
Central Office Administrative Staff	50	25

B. Personnel Development

[i. A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;](#)

Current Narrative:

Effective July 1, 2017 the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) assumed responsibility for continuing the mission and vision of CORE through its accreditation process. CACREP solely accredits counseling specializations at the masters and doctoral degree levels at institutions of higher education. CACREP-accredited counseling programs have met the highest-level national standards for counselor preparation in the United States.

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The CACREP-accredited programs that provide rehabilitation counseling programs in NYS are: University at Buffalo, Hofstra University, and Hunter College. NYSED/ACCES-VR provides internship opportunities and whenever appropriate and possible, hires interns. NYSED/ACCES-VR recruits students from these programs and provides them with information about the NYS Civil Service requirements that govern NYSED/ACCES-VR's hiring practices. Additional information is further outline below in i.2.

ii. The number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and

Current Narrative:

Institutions of Higher Education (CACREP) Student Total

Institutions	Students enrolled	Employees sponsored by agency and/or ED/OSERS/RSA	Graduates sponsored by agency and/or ED/OSERS/RSA	Graduates
University at Buffalo - SUNY	60	4	0	16
Hofstra University	32	0	0	9
Hunter College - CUNY	53	5	0	9

iii. The number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR maintains a contact at each of the referenced institutions of higher education and is a member of the programs' Rehabilitation Counseling Advisory Board. Below is the student enrollment and graduates of rehabilitation counseling for calendar year 2020 (January 1-December 31), as reported by the colleges:

- SUNY Buffalo offers a graduate program in rehabilitation counseling to students both on-campus and online. Student enrollment was 60 students. The number of graduates was 16.

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- Hofstra University student enrollment was 32 students. The number of graduates was 9.
- CUNY Hunter College student enrollment was 53 students. The number of graduates was 9.

2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel

Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR works with CACREP programs in New York and contiguous states to attract potential candidates from diverse backgrounds, including individuals with disabilities and individuals from minority backgrounds, for employment at NYSED/ACCES-VR. To maximize outreach efforts, NYSED/ACCES-VR increased its use of technology to share information and maintain contact with schools. The COVID-19 pandemic added additional challenges to outreach and recruitment as schools were focused on the transition to virtual education of students. Recruitment efforts, when feasible, focused on colleges and universities in and around NYS for qualified individuals, including individuals with disabilities and people from a minority background. Recruitment information shared with program directors and students in graduate rehabilitation counseling included the benefits and career opportunities for working for NYSED/ACCES-VR. They were also advised of internship opportunities, the NYS Governor's Program to Hire Individuals with Disabilities, and the application process for taking the NYS Civil Service exam for VRCs, which is required for employment. Additionally, in 2021, NYSED/ACCES-VR held a meeting with the program directors of graduate rehabilitation counseling programs in New York and New Jersey to discuss rehabilitation curriculum and the need for a focus on rehabilitation counseling in state vocational rehabilitation agencies and the importance of WIOA. These were suggested to assist in the continuous quality improvement of graduate rehabilitation counseling programs and the recruitment of qualified candidate for NYSED/ACCES-VR employment.

NYSED/ACCES-VR has an internship program to provide second-year graduate students with an opportunity to perform their internships in one of the NYSED/ACCES-VR District Offices. This joint initiative with the colleges allows for NYSED/ACCES-VR to recruit and prepare students to work at NYSED/ACCES-VR while they are completing their studies. The internship program is comprised of two components, a practicum and internship, and these are offered three times a year at NYSED/ACCES-VR in order to maximize recruitment and future retention of qualified staff. When resources allow, paid internships are made available to students.

More than 415 students participated in the internship program since 2006 with 99 VRCs hired, testament to NYSED/ACCES-VR's collaboration with colleges to recruit, prepare and retain qualified staff. In 2020, NYSED/ACCES-VR provided 20 internship opportunities. A partnership with NYSED/ACCES-VR and a NYS college receiving a Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) long-term training grant has resulted in NYSED/ACCES-VR staff completing their practicum and internship requirements for their master's degree in rehabilitation counseling while working at NYSED/ACCES-VR. This partnership provides an internal mechanism for promotion to a VRC, assists with the retention of staff, and supports NYSED/ACCES-VR in meeting its projected VRC staffing needs. It should be noted that due the continued impact of the COVID-19 pandemic colleges are regularly re-evaluating and updating their educational practices based on CDC and/or NYS guidance. These measures have an impact to the matriculation and graduation of students participating in rehabilitation counseling programs.

3. Personnel Standards

A. Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and

Current Narrative:

NYS does not have state certification or licensure for VR counselors. NYSED/ACCES-VR uses the national standard established by the CRCC for its VRCs. The participation of VRCs in an educational program to meet the standard is regularly monitored to evaluate compliance with NYSED personnel standards (cited below).

NYSED/ACCES-VR employs VRCs who have, or are eligible to obtain, qualification as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC). All VRCs are required to have:

- A Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling, including a supervised internship, from a CORE accredited program; or
- A Master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or Counseling and notice of eligibility to participate in the CRCC certificate examination.

VRCs considered for appointment to a Manual Communication or Spanish Language position are required to demonstrate proficiency in the manual language or in the Spanish language. Proficiency must be at a level that will permit them to perform the duties of the position satisfactorily.

Civil Service Qualifications for Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Assistant

NYSED/ACCES-VR employs VRCAs to assist VRCs in the administrative, paraprofessional, and routine communication tasks that enhance the vocational

rehabilitation process. The VRCAs do not determine eligibility, develop the vocational goal, write the IPE, or determine case closures. To be eligible for employment, VRCAs must meet the following qualifications:

- Bachelor's degree in vocational rehabilitation, social work, counseling, or psychology; or
- Bachelor's degree and one year of qualifying experience; or
- 60 semester college credit hours and two years of qualifying experience; or
- Four years of qualifying experience.

For the experience to be considered qualifying, the primary responsibilities of a position must have involved professional or paraprofessional duties in one of the following areas:

- Providing direct services beyond routine personal care or supervision to adults or adolescents with a disability in a rehabilitation program or facility; or
- Providing vocational or educational services to adults or adolescents with a disability in the areas of assessment, counseling, job coaching, guidance, placement, or job development.

B. The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Current Narrative:

The NYS Department of Civil Service establishes and maintains the education and experience requirements for VRCs and VRCAs as outlined previously in i.3.A and these qualifications have not changed. Information on the training that NYSED/ACCE-VR provides to staff to support the 21st understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities is identified in the next section, i.4.A.

4. Staff Development

A. A system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is committed to ensuring that personnel have current knowledge and continuous skill updates, including a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of students, youth, and adults with

disabilities. NYSED/ACCES-VR has several mechanisms to support the provision of staff training as it is critical to the development and retention of qualified staff and for the provision of quality services. Training may be provided by in-house staff; organizations contracted to train on a specific topic; NYSED/ACCES-VR sponsored staff attendance at conferences; federally-funded training resources specific to vocational rehabilitation; and other state-agency sponsored and WIOA core partner trainings.

NYSED/ACCES-VR assesses training needs on an ongoing basis with its staff. This includes review of satisfaction with, and effectiveness of, trainings provided in the prior year and identifying emerging training needs. These results, as well as consideration for the diversity of staff, skill levels, experiences and needs are used to identify and develop trainings. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, NYSED/ACCES-VR has incorporated trainings that focus on the impact of COVID-19 to both participants and staff, trauma-informed counseling techniques, and wellness. Some additional examples of training offerings to staff that include assessment, as appropriate, and applicable vocational counseling and job development skill building included ethics, partnering with families, adolescent development and its impact on vocational rehabilitation, generational differences and their impact on vocational rehabilitation, working with older adults, labor market information and use of The Career Index Plus, how to have difficult discussions (crucial conversations), and learning about various disabilities (i.e. autism spectrum disorders, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, chronic pain). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NYSED/ACCES-VR has been limited to trainings that are offered in a remote or virtual environment. At this time, it is unclear when it will be possible to return to in-person trainings. Staff and vendors have access to information and training related to assistive technology provided in collaboration with the NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs. The NYS Justice Center is the agency which administers the TRAIID programs and is responsible for carrying out section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998. The TRAIID programs provide, and will continue to provide, training on assistive technology to NYSED/ACCES-VR's district offices.

B. Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.

Current Narrative:

As noted above, NYSED/ACCES-VR provides multiple training paths for staff. Additionally, NYSED/ACCES-VR collaborates with other state and federal agencies and disability organizations to jointly develop or provide disability and/or systems trainings for staff. These partnerships provide trainings for VRCs to earn continuing education credits and to meet their certification requirements.

Key partnerships exist with the following state agencies and organizations that support the sharing of information, training, and knowledge: OASAS, OPWDD,OMH, Association for People Supporting Employment First(APSE), New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services, Inc. (NYAPRS), NYATEP NYS Independent Living

Council (NYSILC), and Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). As part of a continuous quality improvement process for staff training, NYSED/ACCES-VR is also engaging national partners for evidence-based training specific for VRCs. Examples of these new partnerships include NYSED/ACCES-VR working with the Mental Health Technology Transfer Center Network (MHTTC), VRTAC-QM, and attendance at CSAVR conferences.

Currently the WIOA Interagency Team has a workgroup charged to develop a Workforce System Training agenda. Along with WIOA partners, NYSED/ACCES-VR is engaged with TAG (see the Workforce Development Activities section of the Plan for additional detail), which includes linkage to local Career Centers. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to provide training remotely, NYSED/ACCES-VR began conducting bi-monthly virtual trainings for staff and individuals receiving services through the Career Center. In turn, NYSED/ACCES-VR staff have been able to access the virtual trainings offered through the Career Centers.

TAG is developing, and will maintain, a system inventory of training. Information will be shared and all staff within the System and will be provided with access to ongoing, collaborative training opportunities. NYSED/ACCES-VR disseminates both resources and trainings from TAG to staff via email.

5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR ensures adequate services to applicants, eligible individuals, and participants with limited English proficiency, or who use other modes of communication such as sign language, by employing staff able to communicate in more than one language, including sign language. When such staff is not available, NYSED/ACCES-VR obtains the services from contractors that are certified or state-approved interpreters to communicate with applicants, eligible individuals, or participants to support the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

6. Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Current Narrative:

Through its administration of vocational rehabilitation and independent living programs, NYSED/ACCES-VR coordinates policy and services for students with disabilities with the NYSED Office of Special Education (OSE). Joint meetings between the NYSED/ACCES-VR Transition and Youth Services (TAYS) unit and the NYSED OSE continue to take place to support collaboration, information sharing, and training on Pre-ETS and transition services. The TAYS staff share information from these meetings with the NYSED/ACCES-VR District Offices.

In 2019, NYSED OSE developed Family and Community Engagement Centers (FACE) which support families, children, and schools in improving educational outcomes for students with disabilities. In 2020, NYSED OSE and NYSED/ACCES-VR committed to ongoing joint presentations by NYSED/ACCES-VR staff on Pre-ETS, transition and vocational rehabilitation services supporting professional development for all involved staff .

The NYSED OSE funds Technical Assistance Partnership (TAP) which provides technical assistance to education professionals, students, and their families to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities. In 2021, TAP and NYSED/ACCES-VR committed to statewide and regional presentations about Pre-ETS and transition services to increase understanding and professional development opportunities for staff who support potentially eligible students. The TAYS Unit manager and TAP coordinator work collaboratively and provide resources to staff and stakeholders about Pre-ETS and transitions services to ensure consistent understanding and messaging. Training on the Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) continues, as it relates to NYSED/ACCES-VR's overall efforts in serving students and youth. The CDOS is a NYS educational credential that, when pursued, requires students to participate in a set of experiences related to preparing for employment. It is envisioned that this credential will provide more documentation about the accomplishments of students in the areas of academic instruction, career exploration and development, and provide potential businesses with a student's demonstrated knowledge and experience for entry-level employment.

j. Statewide Assessment

1. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:

A. With the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;

Current Narrative:

In 2017 NYSED/ACCES-VR commissioned a study to assess the extent to which the needs of individuals with disabilities in NYS were being addressed and to develop strategies to promote continuous quality improvement within the VR program. The results and recommendations of the 2017 Comprehensive Needs Assessment are

outlined in section j. Updates have been made where appropriate in response to recommendations.

Findings for the Comprehensive Statewide Assessment of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Workforce Development Needs of Individuals with Disabilities Residing in New York State:

1. Individuals with the most significant disabilities including their need for supported employment services

An “individual with the most significant disability” is defined as an individual who meets the criteria for having a significant disability and in addition, has serious limitations in two or more functional capacities in terms of an employment outcome, and requires multiple vocational rehabilitation services over an extend period of time (six months or more).

Employees receiving sub-minimum wage under section 14c of the Fair Labor Standards Act

As of November 1, 2017, NYS had 112 businesses operating under section 14(c) certificates under the Fair Labor Standards Act and approximately 9,200 individuals employed at sub-minimum wage. During 2016 and 2017, NYSED/ACCES-VR implemented a statewide intervention to fulfill shared responsibilities of NYSED/ACCES-VR and sub-minimum wage businesses under section 511 of WIOA. The purpose of the intervention was to educate and support sub-minimum wage employees to understand employment options available to them and make informed choices regarding competitive integrated employment. This was accomplished through: 1) large group presentations conducted at sub-minimum wage employment locations throughout the state on how NYSED/ACCES-VR can support competitive integrated employment; and 2) follow-up one-to-one counseling sessions with NYSED/ACCES-VR personnel to determine a sub-minimum wage employee’s interest in pursuing competitive integrated employment, obtain appropriate signatures to verify participation in the intervention, and provide NYSED/ACCES-VR applications to interested sub-minimum wage employees.

In order to explore the impact of these intervention activities, two follow-up focus groups with sub-minimum wage employees and one follow-up focus group with NYSED/ACCES-VR personnel who participated in the intervention were conducted, along with in-depth key informant interviews with sub-minimum wage business staff. This study provided initial insights into the overall utility of the section 511 intervention for workers with disabilities in sub-minimum wage work that was conducted by NYSED/ACCES-VR in 2016 and 2017. It is important to note that this work is limited by its sample size and that observations were conducted only in two local sub-minimum wage employment settings. Further, there was a substantial recall bias involved in the design, especially given the functional limitations of the sub-minimum wage informants.

One thing apparent from the observations was that it is necessary to have multiple touch-points with employees over time to help them successfully apply for NYSED/ACCES-VR services and achieve their goals of working in competitive integrated employment, and that information be presented in a format targeted to the specific needs of those individuals with the most significant disabilities being counseled.

In light of the fact that some centers, including one of the settings in this study, are looking to NOT renew their 14(c) certificates, a more comprehensive approach to help these sub-minimum wage employees make informed decisions regarding competitive integrated employment will be more important, as it is unlikely that these agencies will have resources to support this population in transitioning to competitive integrated employment. Both sub-minimum wage employees and business staff recognized and validated the importance of relationships in supporting making informed choices and the impact that third party influencers can have, both positive and negative, on making choices regarding work and earnings. Finally, key informants identified that often sub-minimum wage employees are on pathways to work under the sponsorship of other state disability agencies, and that a more comprehensive, cross-agency approach needs to be taken to support competitive integrated employment outcomes. Both staff of sub-minimum wage businesses and NYSED/ACCES-VR personnel suggested that a different approach be considered; one that utilizes outside contractors to deliver the required services and supports under section 511.

Need for supported employment

About 6-10% of NYSED/ACCES-VR participants received supported employment (SE) services. In multivariate analysis controlling for all observable factors such as demographics, disability classification, educational attainment, and receipt of public benefits, receipt of SE services contributed to 34% higher probability of successful outcome. Further, the extent of SE services received also positively impacted the probability of competitive integrated employment outcomes. Cost of services and duration of services generally can be used as surrogate markers in understanding the extent of SE services. Based on multivariate analysis, it was evident that every increase of one hundred dollars in spending on SE among SE participants increased the probability of competitive employment outcomes by 24% percent, after controlling for all background characteristics of VR participants. However, the relationship between SE service expenditure and probability of competitive integrated employment outcome remains curvilinear, with maximum impact achieved at \$4,250 for adults and \$5,500 for youth with disabilities – an amount slightly higher than the average cost for SE services (\$3,350). The service duration at which highest probability of outcomes were achieved with SE services ranged from 20 to 24 months. This data supports the value of SE services in contributing to successful employment outcomes. With the expansion of SE services to youth with the most significant disabilities and extension of time limits on intensive services under WIOA, further analysis is warranted to better understand the impact of SE services on youth and other underserved/unserved VR participants such as those with mental health disabilities; other vulnerable youth like those in foster care; juvenile justice involvement; immigrants; LGBTQ; and racial/ethnic/linguistic minorities.

Recommendations and action strategies

Individuals with the most significant disabilities continue to experience challenges on their path to competitive integrated employment. The following series of action strategies are proposed to support the movement of these individuals out of sub-minimum wage employment and expansion of SE services.

- ***Supporting the transition of sub-minimum wage employees to competitive integrated employment in NYS.***

NYSED/ACCES-VR should consider designing and employing an externally contracted approach to implement a statewide, high fidelity section 511 intervention. It is recommended that the external agency(ies) have experience working with individuals with the most significant disabilities, providing information and referral to other support programs, engaging in micro-counseling and motivational interviewing skills, and that the intervention provide multiple touch-points including both individual and small group sessions at various points during the year to help people with disabilities understand the NYSED/ACCES-VR process of application, service delivery, and how it can contribute to attainment of competitive integrated employment. A logic model should guide the fidelity, implementation, and evaluation of this priority.

In 2018, NYSED/ACCES-VR explored the option of contracting with an external entity to provide counseling and guidance about vocational rehabilitation services and competitive integrated employment to individuals working in 14(c) sites. Due to financial resources and constraints, NYSED/ACCES-VR chose to allocate funds to services for participants and completed the counseling and guidance activities with internal staff. As of July 1, 2019, the number of businesses operating under Section 14(c) certificates were 62 with approximately 3,500 individuals employed under sub-minimum wage, a decrease of an estimated 5,700 people since last reported on November 1, 2017.

- ***Expanding pathways to competitive integrated employment through supported employment.***

When working collaboratively with Combined State Plan partners and state agencies that work with people with developmental disabilities and mental health impairments, NYSED/ACCES-VR should consider development of a comprehensive plan to support increased access to supported employment across systems—including, as needed articulation agreements regarding how various pathways to employment can be achieved and work toward the common attainment of competitive integrated employment. This could include conducting a more robust cost/benefit assessment of expansion of seamless SE programming across state agencies offering these types of services.

NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to work closely with partners in OMH, OPWDD, OCFS/NYSOCB, Developmental Disability Planning Council, and the NYS Justice Center

to create multiple paths to employment for individuals with developmental disabilities and/or mental health needs.

B. Who are minorities:

Current Narrative:

Traditionally certain demographic groups have been underrepresented in the state VR program. This includes individuals belonging to racial/ethnic minorities, immigrants, those identifying as LGBTQ, individuals with mental health disabilities, other vulnerable youth such as the homeless, youth in foster care, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and those receiving public welfare such as Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI), TANF, SNAP, and HUD assistance.

Outputs from CaMS analysis

In 2017, 57% of NYSED/ACCES-VR participants were White, 25% were Black, 16% Hispanic, and about 3% were Asians and others. A higher proportion of youth were white compared to adults. In FFY 2017-18, NYSED/ACCES-VR caseloads reflected the following participant demographics: 51% White, 24% Black, 17% Hispanic and 8% Asian and other.

Racial and ethnic disparities were consistently evident for youth as well as adult VR participants with respect to competitive integrated employment outcomes. Compared to White participants, Black participants had 3 to 4% lower probability of competitive integrated outcomes, and Hispanic and Asian participants had 1 to 2% lower probability of competitive integrated outcomes. Further, minority populations were more likely to be working in less than minimum wage jobs. Receipt of public benefits reduces the probability of competitive integrated employment outcomes; every \$1000 increase in total public welfare amount received reduced the probability of competitive integrated employment outcome by 17% to 22%. Similarly, every \$1,000 increase in public welfare receipt increased the probability of working in less than minimum wage by 4% to 5%. NYSED/ACCES-VR participants with mental health disabilities had a consistently lower probability of competitive integrated employment and higher probability of working in less than minimum wage jobs. However, for youth who completed their education while engaged in NYSED/ACCES-VR, this difference in outcome was reduced substantially.

Cultural competence

A survey was administered to VR professionals and CRP personnel to understand their cultural awareness and existing practices for serving VR participants with diverse demographic backgrounds, specifically minority and unserved/underserved groups prioritized in WIOA. While this survey served multiple objectives of the CNA and collected data on other objectives (such as practices for business engagement and

using labor market data), this section describes survey findings related to the prevalence or lack of diversity and cultural awareness practices in serving the diverse VR participant groups.

Overall, VR professionals and CRP personnel reported high levels of confidence in providing services to participants belonging to racial/ethnic minority groups. The level of service confidence ranged from lowest to highest for the following groups: immigrants, other vulnerable youth, racial/ethnic/linguistic minorities, LGBTQ, in-school youth, out-of-school youth, and welfare recipients.

The level of confidence in providing services to diverse VR participants varied significantly by the frequency of contact, diversity, and cultural awareness practices in the VR district office (VR DO), open organizational climate of VR DO, and having received specific training in providing services to diverse VR participants. Longer tenure in VR predicted lower confidence, whereas a graduate degree in rehabilitation counseling predicted higher confidence in serving diverse participants. This also varied substantially by the VR professional's use of CaMS for case management, delivery, and planning of services. In addition, compared to upper-level personnel, direct-line VR professionals and CRP personnel had lower levels of understanding of the specific components of WIOA and how it impacts their work, considering their self-rated confidence in providing services to minority and unserved/underserved populations.

Recommendations and action strategies

Individuals from traditionally underrepresented groups in the VR program continue to experience disparity in access to and employment outcomes. The following series of action strategies are proposed to support improved access and closing of disparity gaps for this population:

- ***Identification of promising practices and scale-up.*** Research showed that NYSED/ACCES-VR has pockets of innovation in working with traditionally marginalized populations. Central Office and regional leadership should engage in a convening to identify innovations and develop strategies for taking some promising practices to scale in working with minorities and unserved/underserved populations.
- ***Organization development seminars/webinars with emphasis on open organization culture and data-driven approaches to service planning and delivery.*** NYSED/ACCES-VR should integrate this knowledge into existing training and professional development events across all levels of the organization, including WIOA core partners.
- ***Targeted training and professional development*** to specific groups of professionals regarding WIOA implementation and minority and unserved/underserved populations. NYSED/ACCES-VR should integrate this knowledge into existing training and professional development events across all levels of the organization, including WIOA core partners.

In 2018 NYSED/ACCES-VR reviewed the recommendations and began incorporating suggestions into staff training and will share training resources with the WIOA core partners as appropriate.

C. Who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;

Current Narrative:

This information is outlined previously in j.1.B and expanded upon in j.2.

D. Who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and

Current Narrative:

To understand barriers and challenges to implementation of WIOA and document progress to support the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities served by the statewide workforce investment system, a series of focus groups and key informant interviews were conducted during the fall of 2017. Three focus groups were conducted: one group of state-level partners and two groups of regional-level partners. Participants were asked about existing collaborations, perceived challenges in working with other state agencies, and their views on needs and strategies to enhance partnerships and service delivery collaboration. Further, they were asked to explain and examine the effectiveness of the Combined State Plan processes and the expected mutual agreements among agencies. Finally, the participants brainstormed strategies to address current implementation issues and partnership barriers.

Workforce development collaboration to support the employment outcomes of individuals with disabilities

Core WIOA partners participating in the state-level focus group emphasized the need to translate policy information to local-level staff, while regional partners in the regional level focus groups focused their discussion more towards collaboration with local-level partners. Additionally, there were several shared themes among both state and regional partners. Concerning ***models of collaboration***, both state and regional partners shared that the process of collaboration is determined locally. There are two primary models: co-location and referral. Co-location is not always feasible, especially for rural areas. Regardless of location, all participants reported challenges with making referrals, as there is not a shared referral process across agencies. Concerning ***engagement***, location and pre-existing relationships between agencies influenced the frequency with which organizations interacted (i.e., agencies meet more often when all were located in a city). This suggests that rural areas may experience a unique challenge in collaborating and providing services because of geographical barriers. Moreover, even though new partnerships are being formed, previous partnerships have more engagement than the new partnerships required by WIOA, which might be due to multiple reasons, such as shared expertise. For example, Title I and Title III agencies

continue to collaborate more frequently with each other than they do with Title II and Title IV agencies. This suggests the importance of targeted support for brokering new partnerships and collaborations to encourage innovation and synergy in the approach to service delivery across all four titles.

Participants reported several **challenges to collaboration**. A reported challenge is the *lack of a shared language*. One participant explained, “Vernacular within an agency is often exclusive ... and there may not be understanding from one agency to another.” Lack of a shared language also created problems when compiling reports, as various funding sources use different terminology. Creating a shared language is vital to helping partnering agencies communicate and collaborate more effectively. Many participants reported issues with *data collection, referral, and reporting* related to their WIOA efforts. Specifically, not all the data currently being collected are consistent with WIOA’s reporting requirements. This may add an additional burden when identifying and recording the required data points. It may also require an agency to modify services to their participants. Additionally, different reporting and data collection processes have resulted in problems when making referrals and measuring outcomes. Each agency has unique eligibility requirements, and an individual may be enrolled in different programs; in some cases, resources may not be utilized efficiently. Another challenge is *insufficient time* to complete all the required tasks, especially given the required multi-level agency collaborations. For example, a lot of time was spent on communication of different interpretations of WIOA requirements for MOUs, delaying obtainment of needed signatures.

When asked to brainstorm **strategies to improve collaboration**, a common theme was that there is a need for more training, technical assistance, human capital, and funding. Participants felt that training and technical assistance would help staff understand services provided by other agencies, as well as to understand the purpose of data collection and how they could use the information from data to inform practice. Participants suggested that funding for more human capital, specifically devoted to WIOA-related tasks, would be helpful as currently most are doing WIOA-related work in addition to many other responsibilities, and are not able to devote as much time to WIOA efforts as may be needed.

Data needs

The survey of VR professionals and CRP personnel captured respondent knowledge and use of various data sources in supporting employment goals for VR participants.

VR professionals who participated in the survey were more likely to use only CaMS data than other sources of labor market data in guiding their work to help participants develop career choices. Only 50% indicated using BLS or USDOL data to monitor labor market trends in employment opportunities. While three-quarters of the VR survey respondents indicated they have utilized the O*NET data for planning and delivery of services, less than half have used the USDOL data sources that are typically helpful in

understanding emerging labor market trends and identifying high growth sectors to benefit VR participants.

The VR professional and CRP personnel survey was complemented with a series of in-depth, one-on-one interviews with key VR informants to further understand data use practices and needs for developing quality improvement efforts for engendering data-driven approaches to VR practices. The questions posed to key informants asked about: (a) the current data available to inform NYSED/ACCES-VR practices and policies; (b) alignment of data collection and use with NYSED/ACCES-VR culture and the NYS System; (c) types and formats of data needed to inform NYSED/ACCES-VR stakeholders for continuous quality improvement; (d) ways the current System can be built out to support ongoing information needs; and (e) data needs and responsiveness to the Combined State Plan.

Interviewees emphasized internal (CaMS) and external data sources (special education, labor), data from service providers/vendors, and other miscellaneous sources (i.e., healthcare providers). The primary system discussed as it pertained to VR was CaMS, while federal RSA-911 data reporting was another major topic, and access to NYESS and OSOS were discussed by certain interviewees. Comfort with data was described as an important attribute across roles: *“The [CaMS] ORACLE database that all the counselors, counselor assistants, district office as well as central office folks use to track case information from application to closure... [CaMS data] really reflects on what is happening with our participants and that is helpful when you’re working on policy and procedure.”*

Confidence in supervisor and staff comfort levels varied, with interviewees indicating that although many staff are involved in the collection, entry, and use of data, the counselors tend to be focused more at the level of the individual and their caseload, while managers look at more high-level data. One interviewee rated staff as *“not very comfortable”* with data, especially with the new WIOA data collection. Others were more confident but stated that staff need better guidance in terms of planning, procedures, and practices. Interviewees agreed that there is a mix of competencies, with some staff having a *“data orientation”* and others struggling with this component of the job.

Staff report using data to assess and reflect on performance to a high degree, both in measuring performance, staying on task, and determining how best to assess services/delivery. The data unit accesses the databases that exist (primarily CaMS), develops reports for performance indicators, perform statistical analyses for performance tracking, and try to summarize it in an actionable and user-friendly way. Interviewees referenced uses such as developing timelines, IPE development, lapses in client contact, evaluating staff performance, successes and challenges, counselor caseloads, status tracking, training needs, and more.

For identifying areas of need, respondents said that data is useful for identifying gaps in services, evaluating particular vendors, types of services, and replicating best practices across school districts. *“The district offices or the manager [can] work with the vendor,*

plan of improvement, provide technical assistance. Would use it to determine whether to renew contract, increase, decrease or not provided at all.” “[T]he DOL statistics are very useful for assisting our participants, to have sense of what the market is like not only where they live but where they want to live.” For conducting strategic planning, “one area we look at is service delivery and staffing...working to be able to accurately reflect number of contacts a counselor has had to meaningfully engage a participant.”

In terms of additional state-level administrative data that may be useful in informing NYSED/ACCES-VR policies and practices, interviewees mentioned more access to school records and other P-12 data, SSA unemployment insurance data, USDOL employment records data, access to NYESS, and more. They noted that some of this will require data sharing agreements with the state. One interviewee noted that they need more data on out-of-school youth, whatever the source may be. *“Access [to] P12 data as far as services student receive for pre-employment transition...work readiness, work experience et cetera during high school.”* Still, certain respondents felt that they did not need more data, but rather help with coordinating the reporting of data so that these tasks do not take away from the delivery of services and learning how to analyze the high volume of data that already is accessible.

Recommendations and action strategies

Collaboration across core WIOA partners and other employment stakeholders is essential to the successful implementation of WIOA and accomplishing the specific objectives of the law. The following series of action strategies are proposed to support deepening of collaborative relationships across these critical partners in meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities.

- ***Providing training and technical assistance across core WIOA partners.*** NYSED/ACCES-VR has been exploring the development of a technical assistance plan across the various national technical assistance centers sponsored by ED/OSERS/RSA, specifically the Workforce Innovations National Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) and Y-TAC. These efforts will be focused on training delivery and organizational development support for improved collaborative efforts and knowledge translation across core WIOA partners and these efforts and assessment of impact will be guided by a logic model.

In 2019 ACCES-VR began working with Y-TAC to deliver training for its staff specific to working with students and youth. The benefits of Y-TAC and its training opportunities are shared with the WIOA partners via the Training Assistance Group (TAG) and partners have participated in several of the web-based trainings.

- ***Providing training on existing data sources and ways to incorporate information for planning and delivery of VR services.*** It is imperative that VR professionals are able to use aggregate-level CaMS data to understand the distribution of services for their diverse caseloads and work towards equitable

and appropriate distribution of different types of VR services. It is also important to build practitioner's capacity in utilizing labor market data and incorporate that information in planning and delivery of needed services for VR participants. NYSED/ACCES-VR has been working with existing training contractors to integrate this knowledge into existing training events across all levels of the organization.

As per this recommendation, NYSED/ACCES-VR has worked closely with its various training contractors for the additional education and training about the diversity of people served and the availability of tools and labor market information to improve the planning and delivery of services to participants.

E. Who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.

Current Narrative:

. To determine the projected fiscal forecast for Pre-ETS, NYSED/ACCES-VR reviewed the services currently available to students as documented on IEPs. The IEP is created through a team effort involving the student, parent, teacher, and others as appropriate, and is reviewed periodically. Students with IEPs receive transition services applicable and appropriate for their unique needs. As transition services provided through school districts are similar to (and some qualify) as the required Pre-ETS, it is determined that students' Pre-ETS are being primarily met.

In NYS it is expected that the IEP, which is legally required to address transition needs, will be in place for all appropriate students. It is recognized that students with disabilities, like students without disabilities, have a wide range of educational and career development needs. The five required Pre-ETS services might be a fit for some but not all students with disabilities. Like their non-disabled peers, work experiences and career development activities are not always the best or only path that will later impact a student's future work opportunities. It is estimated that there may be approximately 7-9% of students with IEP service gaps. Of those, it is estimated that 50% of the gap is related specifically to education needs and would not be relevant for calculation of Pre-ETS need.

The number of individuals with disabilities in higher education is estimated at 40,000. The higher education data available does not show an age breakout. However, it is known that the data includes those returning to higher education later in life. Thus, the number of individuals enrolled is not equated to student as defined by WIOA. It is estimated that 50% might meet the age range. Of the estimated 50%/20,000, not all are currently in need of Pre-ETS. It is estimated that 95% (19,000) of the those meeting the WIOA student definition do not need Pre-ETS. Most postsecondary students were provided with Pre-ETS while in high school, through IEP transition services; ;directly through NYSED/ACCES-VR (or have been assessed by NYSED/ACCES-VR as not

needing Pre-ETS); received similar services through the higher education institution; or attained those pre-employment transition skills through life experience. NYSED/ACCES-VR is currently providing regular VR services for over 7,000 students in postsecondary training.

It is estimated that roughly 1,000 students in postsecondary education/training may have some gap in the attainment of the information and skills intended to be achieved through the provision of Pre-ETS. In NYS, institutions of higher learning have disability service coordinators and/or mechanisms to identify needs for students with disabilities. It is expected that when need is identified the student is referred to NYSED/ACCES-VR. NYSED/ACCES-VR has staff going to colleges, universities, and other training locations to provide information about the services offered. There are efforts in place that have been expanded to include a focus on the availability of Pre-ETS to ensure that those individuals are identified. However, as it is mandated that students with disabilities have Education Programs during their secondary education that also includes an exit plan, NYSED/ACCES-VR believes that over the course of the individual's school program, transition services/Pre-ETS, when the need was identified, were provided by the school and/or the VR agency, or that at the time of exit, referrals are appropriately made.

*Calculations of student numbers receiving Pre-ETS through NYSED/ACCES-VR contracted services are not categorized into the type of education setting that defines them as student under WIOA.

NYSED/ACCES-VR expects to continue to expand both outreach and service. The projection for increase for 2017/2018 is to serve/determine service need for those 5,000 students that were identified above as potentially in need of the Pre-ETS. The number projected for 2017/2018 is 7,000. This reflects the 5,000 (4,000 secondary and 1,000 postsecondary) noted and permits additional Pre-ETS to 2,000 of those students who are currently receiving one or more Pre-ETS. NYSED/ACCES-VR expects the number projected to be served.

Please note, available data were used to complete this section when it was written for the 2017 Comprehensive Needs Assessment. Updated data that reflects increased enrollment in higher education for students with disabilities and projections for an increased number of students to receive Pre-ETS will be completed in a future comprehensive needs assessment.

2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and

Current Narrative:

The term 'community rehabilitation program' (CRP) means a program that provides directly, or facilitates, the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities, and that provides, singularly or in combination, for an individual with a

disability to enable the individual to maximize opportunities for employment, including career advancement.

Utilization of CRP services and supports

Based on the analysis of CaMS data, the most frequently utilized CRP services include (from highest to lowest): assessment, employment services, training, post-secondary education services, SE, and personal assistance services. The costs of each of these services varied from an average of \$4,816 for training services to \$608 for assessment services. Further, the types of services, costs and service duration predicted the probability of competitive integrated employment outcomes for youth and adult VR participants. The service cost and duration overall had a curvilinear relationship to the probabilities of competitive employment outcomes after controlling for individual-level characteristics of the participants. This latter finding indicates a need to optimize services not only based on different types, but also based on its overall duration and cost for it to be most effective. For example, for the observed levels of competitive integrated employment outcomes, the most optimal results with SE services for youth were observed when the cost of service ranged from \$4,500 to \$5,500 and the duration ranged from 19 to 24 months. These findings point to the need to not only expand in types of available services, but also consider expanding the amounts allocated as well as its duration to suit the employment needs of VR participants.

In 2019, NYSED/ACCES-VR executed new five-year contracts with over 300 CRP vendors. NYSED/ACCES-VR considered the recommendations from the 2017 Comprehensive Needs Assessment and increased rates were included in the updated contracts. NYSED/ACCES-VR will continue to monitor the capacity of CRPs.

CRP capacity to serve minority and unserved/underserved populations

As discussed earlier in this assessment, a survey of VR professional and CRP personnel was conducted to understand their cultural awareness and specific practices in assessing their needs for providing services under WIOA. Representative of 172 CRPs responded to the survey; most participating CRPs provide three or more employment-related services, and over 50% provide SE services. One-third of the responding agencies serve over 500 participants annually.

The survey documented that CRPs have lower levels of confidence in serving immigrants, other vulnerable youth, in-school youth, and those with mental health disorders, compared to VR participants who are welfare recipients. The frequency of contact with diverse VR participants, open organizational culture of agency offices, exposure to training for serving VR populations, and knowledge of WIOA significantly predicted CRP personnel's confidence in providing services. Diversity and cultural awareness practices varied significantly among CRP personnel and agency's structural support for advancing such practices, including availability of resources such as access other organizations serving minority populations, improved CRP's confidence in this

area. Similarly, engaging with businesses had a positive impact on diversity and cultural awareness practices among CRPs.

2. [Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)

Current Narrative:

To assess the readiness and capacity of NYS disability employment service providers to meet the needs of student and youth priorities under WIOA, the NYS PROMISE initiative conducted a mixed methods concept mapping study to identify the taxonomy of services and supports that providers thought were most important for students and youth with disabilities, including out-of-school youth. This work was prompted by the realization that some disability employment service providers under the NYS PROMISE intervention were having challenges meeting the needs of youth and some providers had actually terminated their contract under the demonstration. The study recruited 251 disability employment service providers for participation serving across the primary disability state agencies and Workforce Development System. They were asked to develop responses to the following focus prompt, *“To be effective in providing career development and employment services for students and youth with disabilities, as well as out-of-school youth, NYS employment services providers need to be aware of, know or be able to do...”*, generating 96 unique responses to the prompt. Respondents then sorted these unique items into a seven-item cluster map, representing their perceived taxonomy of critical services when working effectively with youth. This taxonomy included: positive relationships with business; schools and community collaboration; transition planning and services; assessment and work readiness; employment preparation; family supports; and essential staff knowledge.

To gain a better understanding of the degree of importance of each cluster and their feasibility to deliver these, respondents were then asked to rate each of the 96 unique elements on an ‘importance’ scale and ‘feasibility’ scale. Regarding the clusters that respondents felt were most ‘important’ to supporting successful youth employment outcomes, respondents rated positive relationships with business, assessment and work readiness, employment preparation, transition planning and services, and family supports most high. Interestingly, respondents felt that schools and community collaboration and essential staff knowledge were least important, with the latter cluster representing areas like youth labor laws, how to structure and staff youth services, and other structuring mechanisms. Respondents consistently rated their feasibility to demonstrate capacity across the positive relationships with business, assessment and work readiness, employment preparation, and family supports clusters high. However, respondents rated schools and community collaboration, transition planning and services, and essential staff knowledge low from a feasibility of capacity perspective.

Participants were also asked several questions to quantify their perceptions and knowledge in specific areas. Most interesting was that only slightly more than one-third of respondents rated their strength of knowledge regarding youth labor laws and regulations as 'strong' or 'very strong', with the remainder rating themselves as 'no knowledge', 'weak' or 'moderate'. When asked to rate their perception of their organization's effectiveness in serving students and youth with disabilities and out-of-school youth, slightly under two-thirds of respondents rated their organizations as 'very strong' or 'strong', with the remaining rating their organizations as 'weak', 'moderate', or 'I do not know'. While the majority of respondents stated they have relationships with local business and industry to support work-based learning, when asked to rate the strength of their relationship in regard to placing and supporting this population, only two-thirds of respondents felt the relationship was 'strong' or 'very strong'.

The importance and feasibility ratings, coupled with respondents' subjective perceptual responses to demographic questions, suggests an employment service provider network that recognizes the importance of having the capacity to build and maintain positive relationships with business, provide or access employment preparation services and supports, provide family supports, and deliver assessment and work readiness services. However, the respondent ratings of feasibility to demonstrate capacity seem to suggest that the network would benefit from capacity building focused on essential staff knowledge, school and community collaboration, and transition planning and services.

Recommendation and action strategies

CRPs are a critical stakeholder in the System. State agencies and other community stakeholders rely on these service providers to deliver high quality services to support competitive integrated employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The following series of strategies are proposed to support the deepening of the NYS employment provider network's capacity to innovate as they meet the employment support needs of individuals with disabilities.

Brokering and offering training to NYS CRPs on providing effective services to students and youth, including out-of-school youth with disabilities. NYSED/ACCES-VR currently provides SE training and organizational development support under a MOU with an external entity to their vendor partners. NYSED/ACCES-VR is currently exploring making this training available to all employment service providers and will include strategies for working effectively with students and youth with disabilities, as well as out-of-school youth with disabilities.

- ***Acquiring technical assistance to expand innovations like customized employment.*** As referenced earlier, NYSED/ACCES-VR is developing a technical assistance plan across the WINTAC and Y-TAC. These centers work collaboratively to provide training and technical assistance on innovations like customized employment and strategies for working effectively with youth.
- ***Training and technical assistance to CRP personnel on working with diverse VR participants.*** Based on the responses from CRP survey, it is

relevant to include capacity building for CRP agencies in providing services for diverse NYSED/ACCES-VR participants. NYSED/ACCES-VR will work with existing training contractors to integrate this knowledge into existing training events across all levels of the organization.

NYSED/ACCES-VR, through a contract with the NYS Consortium for Advancing and Supporting Employment (CASE), provides training and technical assistance to its CRPs. Staff at CRPs are required to complete core courses in employment services delivery, advanced employment services practice, employment services administration, student and youth transition, and business engagement.

Coordination of services under IDEA

To ascertain the coordination of services under title IV of WIOA and IDEA, a series of focus groups were conducted. VR professionals participated in three focus groups held in the Capital Region, Western NY (representing the Buffalo and Rochester DO), and the New York City Region (all five boroughs). These focus groups provided key data on barriers and facilitators for providing Pre-ETS, and collaboration with schools.

Several major themes emerged from these focus groups. Participants felt strongly that youth cases take a longer time to process and that, in many instances, youth are not well prepared to take advantage of and participate in VR services. Two primary obstacles identified were the lack of parental involvement and transportation issues when serving youth. Participants reported that school-based transition programs varied from being well-developed and resourced to less developed and under-resourced, which poses a challenge in developing a unified approach to support schools across the state. Further, CRPs do not have adequate capacity and lack quality in their approach to serve youth, especially those who are in school. Building on that, participants reported communication challenges with contracted and non-contracted providers for serving youth, who generally required more frequent follow-ups and check-ins. Participants also noted that there are specific strategies to promote collaboration with schools that have proven effective, such as school visits, providing training and technical assistance to school personnel on making quality VR referrals, and developing a process of ensuring employment-related goals are clearly identified in student IEPs.

VR professional and CRP personnel survey

Based on the VR professional and CRP personnel survey, the majority (90%) of CRP respondents reporting serving only 10 – 50 youth under the age of 18. Further, many CRP respondents reported being less confident in providing services to in-school and out-of-school youth. This indicates a substantial need to improve CRP ability in providing services for youth to fulfill the goals of Pre-ETS under WIOA. These findings are mirrored to some degree in the study conducted by NYS PROMISE gauging the importance and feasibility of the capacity of CRPs to provide effective services to students and youth with disabilities and out-of-school youth.

Recommendations and action strategies

Given the increased priority under WIOA to serve students and youth with disabilities and out-of-school youth, it is critical that a multi-faceted approach be in place to ensure the successful employment outcomes of youth served under IDEA, and titles I and IV of WIOA. This includes better integration and synergy between IDEA, Title I and Title IV services and supports; established bridges between local schools, Title I and Title IV programs; articulation of roles and responsibilities between NYSED P-12, NYSED/ACCES-VR and the System; a well-equipped CRP network to serve as an effective catalyst for services and supports; and data tracking to monitor progress and quality of outcomes. The following series of action strategies are proposed to support improved access and closing of disparity gaps for this population.

- ***Development and updating of MOUs*** between NYSED P-12, NYSED/ACCES-VR and other core WIOA partners to ensure effective implementation.

As referenced in the Coordination with Education Officials section, NYSED/ACCES-VR is currently in the final stages of finalizing an MOU with the NYSED Office of Special Education.

- ***Continuation of NYSED/ACCES-VR's Community Employment Specialist (CES) model to broker relations between NYSED/ACCES-VR and local schools.*** Since the inception of the CES model in 2013, student participation in NYSED/ACCES-VR increased over 15%. NYSED/ACCES-VR will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of this approach.

While the CES model was effective in providing school administration staff information and education about NYSED/ACCES-VR services, it did not allow for direct contact with students. With the implementation of Pre-ETS, NYSED/ACCES-VR chose to sunset the CES model with the expiration of contracts in June 2019. To effectively support students receipt of Pre-ETS and/or vocational rehabilitation services, a streamlined process is needed and NYSED/ACCES-VR staff and vendors providing Pre-ETS and/or vocational rehabilitation services can effectively support schools staff similar to the CES model and also work directly with students.

- ***Training and technical assistance to NYSED/ACCES-VR service providers*** to ensure the delivery of high-quality services and supports to students and youth with disabilities and out-of-school youth. NYSED/ACCES-VR will work with its existing SE/CRP training contractor to include strategies for working effectively with students and youth with disabilities, as well as out-of-school youth with disabilities.

As stated earlier in this section, NYSED/ACCES-VR contracts with NYS CASE to provide a series of trainings to its CRPs specific to working with students and youth. Examples of core courses include Working with Students and Youth: Authentic Engagement, and Creating a Framework of Services for Students and Youth.

- **Training and technical assistance to core WIOA partners** to ensure successful integration and synergy across IDEA, and WIOA Title I and Title IV programs. Please see previous information in this section and section j.1.e that addresses NYSED/ACCES-VR's use of Y-TAC for technical assistance and the sharing of this information with process of sharing information with WIOA partners.

Summary

NYSED/ACCES-VR and the workforce development system must recalibrate. WIOA has clearly realigned priorities to help job seekers access the educational, training, and support services necessary to be successful in the 21st century labor market, while matching businesses with skilled workers. The law enhances the focus of competitive integrated employment; places emphasis on the alignment of VR programs and other core partners of the System; emphasizes providing services to students with disabilities, while in-school, in coordination with their schools and encourages providing services for eligible youth who are out-of-school; defined a new set of Pre-ETS for students with the disabilities; established expectations that designated state vocational rehabilitation units will provide advanced training opportunities for youth, work-based learning, supported and customized employment programs; and increased the emphasis on business engagement and job matching.

NYSED/ACCES-VR has continued to expand its understanding and implementation of WIOA priorities both with its collaborations with other core state agency partners and directly with the individuals that it serves. Activities with the core partners include the sharing of training resources through the interagency TAG workgroup. Strategies for supporting people with disabilities have been shared via the interagency Business Engagement Work Group and their associated trainings. These opportunities to share learning and resources have helped to improve all the core partners' understanding of WIOA priorities and their services to individuals with disabilities.

The provision of quality vocational rehabilitation services to students and youth continues to be a priority for NYSED/ACCES-VR. Expansion of Pre-ETS for eligible students with disabilities began with the newest CRS contracts in January 2019 and are expected to further increase in 2020 with the contracts for the provision of Pre-ETS to potentially eligible students. Investments in training about strategies for working with students, youth and their families for both CRPs and NYSED/ACCES-VR staff have been, and continue to be, expanded upon.

NYS employment trends for people with disabilities show room for improvement. Literature showed that people with disabilities continue to struggle to find employment compared to peers without disabilities, both in NYS and nationally. While prevalence of disability increases based on age, data shows that major drop-offs in participation in work or school occur at young ages among

transitioning youth (18-24 group). Most recent data show both adults and youth with disabilities in NYS apply for VR services at higher levels than nationally, however, the rates of service delivery and successful closure (based on RSA-911 categories) are consistent with national averages.

Research consistently demonstrates the importance of participation in employment-directed VR activities as a predictor of employment and pay outcomes.

NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to monitor the rates of successful closures for both adults and youth to identify trends and strategies for improvement.

NYSED/ACCES-VR demonstrating positive participation and experiences in VR. With the expanded WIOA scope for serving younger individuals with disabilities, NYSED/ACCES-VR provides Pre-ETS for in-school students with disabilities in coordination with the students' school-based transition programs. Research has shown that involvement of VR and community rehabilitation programs and other agencies in the post-school planning process can minimize service disruptions by initiating transition and employment-related services. Further, career development and Pre-ETS built on strong interagency partnerships have demonstrated positive effects for transitioning students with disabilities. Participation in work-based experiences prior to entering the competitive labor market is one of the strongest predictors of job success for students with disabilities after graduation. Important elements in work preparation include career readiness skills, structured job matching opportunities, opportunities to establish work history and connections, career exploration, and on-the-job supports. Evidence also supports the efficacy of independent living, financial and benefits literacy, social skills, and self-determination related services in improving long-term outcomes. Further, online capabilities broaden the possible means of approaching career exploration. Finally, research demonstrates that services and supports which broker the gap between VR and secondary schools are important for improving family and students' access to transition services and improving the transition planning process at the school-level.

NYSED/ACCES-VR can deepen the efficacy of systems integration and interagency collaboration. NYSED/ACCES-VR can build on its existing agreements with core WIOA partners to further the objectives of service coordination and early intervention in post-school planning. Research has demonstrated that collaborations by VR, school personnel, and other partners in the System have significant benefits for transitioning youth. One of the most valuable partnerships is between VR counselors and local schools. Research shows that counselors are often not invited to participate in transition and post-school planning, despite evidence showing that VR can play an important role in guiding school policy and that their early involvement is associated with positive youth employment outcomes. Integrating community transition partners in the school setting is also important; these uniquely situated agencies can help students and families secure resources in the community, obtain work-based experiences and services, formulate transition plans, and improve the capacity of schools. Among VR counselors serving disadvantaged populations, cultural competency is a predictor of

positive employment outcomes. Further, employer engagement skills by VR staff are an evidence-based practice associated with improved service outcomes.

NYSED/ACCES-VR has leveraged the learning from the WIOA Interagency Youth Collaborative about working with youth and the various community-based services that support them. With the expansion of the provision of Pre-ETS by vendors in January 2019, NYSED/ACCES-VR was able to increase partnerships with schools and services to students. This collaboration will further increase in 2020 with the contracting for Pre-ETS to be provided to potentially eligible students.

k. Annual Estimates

1. The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR estimates the number of individuals with disabilities that will be determined eligible for VR services in FY 2021 to be approximately 17,400. The estimate for people to be determined eligible for FY 2022 is 20,000 and FY 2023 is 16,600. Estimated numbers are based on metrics collected throughout the COVID-19 pandemic which had a devastating effect on applications for vocational rehabilitation services nationwide. These estimates are likely to change with the continued evolution of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:

A. The VR Program;

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR forecasts the number of individuals to potentially be served in FY 2021 to be approximately 64,650. NYSED/ACCES-VR forecasts the number of individuals to potentially be served in FY 2022 to be 64,450 and in FY 2023 to be 52,600. Estimated numbers are based on metrics collected throughout the COVID-19 pandemic which had a devastating effect on applications for vocational rehabilitation services nationwide. These estimates are likely to change with the continued evolution of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

B. The Supported Employment Program; and

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR estimates that approximately 3,023 will receive supported employment services during FY 2021. NYSED/ACCES-VR estimates that in FFY 2022 approximately 2,028 individuals and in FFY 2203 approximately 1,087 individuals need supported employment services. Estimated numbers are based on metrics collected

throughout the COVID-19 pandemic which had a devastating effect on applications for vocational rehabilitation services nationwide. These estimates are likely to change with the continued evolution of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

C. Each priority category, if under an order of selection.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is not under an order of selection.

3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is not under an order of selection.

4. The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.

Current Narrative:

For FY 21 it is projected that there will be \$215 million in funding with the estimated number of people to be served to be 64,650. The average cost of services per person is estimated to be \$3,325. For FY 22 it is projected that there will be \$215 million in funding with the estimated number of people to be served to be 64,450. The average cost of services per person is estimated to be \$3,356. For Y 23 it is projected that there will be \$215 million in funding with the estimated number of people to be served to be 52,600. The average cost of services per person is estimated to be \$4,87. Estimated numbers are based on metrics collected throughout the COVID-19 pandemic which had a devastating effect on applications for vocational rehabilitation services nationwide. These estimates are likely to change with the continued evolution of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

I. State Goals and Priorities

1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions

Current Narrative:

The NYSED/ACCES-VR 2020 Combined State Plan priorities and goals are designed to reflect WIOA common performance measures. These priorities and goals remain the same for the 2022 Combined State Plan Modification.

The SRC is committed to incorporating the priorities within their committee work and advisement to NYSED/ACCES-VR and jointly developed and agreed to these priorities and goals.

2. Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs

Current Narrative:

The following NYSED/ACCES-VR 2020 Combined State Plan priorities and goals, which will continue in the 2022 Combined State Plan Modification, are designed to reflect WIOA common performance measures.

Priority 1: Increase the employment rate and earnings for individuals with disabilities served by NYSED/ACCES-VR.

- Goal 1.1: Evaluate employment rates for NYSED/ACCES-VR participants at 2nd quarter after exit.
- Goal 1.2: Evaluate employment rates for NYSED/ACCES-VR participants at 4th quarter after exit.
- Goal 1.3: Evaluate median earnings for NYSED/ACCES-VR participants after exit.

Priority 2: Increase services to target populations: students with disabilities, and unserved and underserved groups.

- Goal 2.1: The service rate for identified unserved and underserved populations will be commensurate with the NYS population rates for those populations based on race, ethnicity, and disability.
- Goal 2.2: Pre-ETS will be made available to students with disabilities to establish a solid foundation upon which to build their career path.

Priority 3: Improve the quality of NYSED/ACCES-VR vocational rehabilitation and supported employment services.

- Goal 3.1: Increase to 90% the number of respondents expressing satisfaction on key questions contained in NYSED/ACCES-VR's participant satisfaction surveys.
- Goal 3.2: Through use of established contract performance measures for vendors, 80% of vendors will meet or exceed the established benchmark for quality contract deliverables.

Priority 4: Increase the percentage of individuals who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential.

- Goal 4.1: Increase partnerships with postsecondary education institutions.
- Goal 4.2: Assess and track the percentage of participants who obtain skills gain.

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- Goal 4.3: Increase the percentage of participants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential.

Priority 5: Effectively serve businesses.

- Goal 5.1: Increase business penetration.
- Goal 5.2: Increase number of business customers with repeat service.

3. Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:

A. The most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;

Current Narrative:

The results of the Comprehensive Needs Assessment completed in 2017 still continue to be relevant and inform the priorities and goals that were outlined in I.2.

B. The State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR recognizes the importance of the WIOA performance accountability measures. NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to build upon its understanding and documentation of these measures, particularly measurable skills gain, to continue to improve performance on these priorities and goals.

C. Other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR's priorities and goals are reflective of information received in recommendations and monitoring activities and were approved by the SRC.

m. Order of Selection

1. Whether the designated State unit will implement and order of selection. If so, describe:

A. The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is not implementing an order of selection.

B. The justification for the order

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is not implementing an order of selection.

C. The service and outcome goals

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is not implementing an order of selection.

D. Time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order; and

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is not implementing an order of selection.

E. How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is not implementing an order of selection.

2. If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is not implementing an order of selection.

n. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds

1. Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services

Current Narrative:

Federal Title VI, Part B funds for SE services were initially used to develop model programs to identify effective SE services for diverse populations. In NYS these funds alone are not sufficient to meet the overall demand for SE services. NYSED/ACCES-VR's total funding level for SE contracts for FY 2020 was \$9 million and \$710 million for SE Youth extended. The Title VI, Part B funds to serve approximately 3,200 individuals accounted for \$851,960. NYSED/ACCES-VR will continue the operation of the SE services established under Title VI, Part B and use the funds to supplement, but not supplant, Title I funds.

NYSED/ACCES-VR combines Title VI, Part B and Section 110 funds to provide SE services to individuals with the most significant disabilities. NYSED/ACCES-VR maintains agreements (MOU and Integrated Employment Implementation Plan, Chapter 515 of the NYS Laws of 1992) with OMH, OPWDD, and OFCS/NYSCB, which define NYSED/ACCES-VR as the source for intensive funding; however, OPWDD and OMH can also provide intensive funding for SE.

Program evaluation of SE includes a review of data from interagency quarterly reports and reviews by NYSED/ACCES-VR. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, these reviews were conducted onsite, however, due to the pandemic, these reviews have been conducted offsite and with virtual or remote communication. Successful and exemplary practices have been disseminated to the staff of the state agencies involved.

Supported Employment Goals and Priorities

NYSED/ACCES-VR's Title VI, Part B program goals are to:

- Provide services to individuals, including youth, with the most significant disabilities who might not be traditionally considered appropriate for competitive integrated employment;
- Develop quality programs that could be used for replication purposes; and
- Establish successful SE programs that will provide technical assistance to other programs.

2. Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including:

A. The provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR, OPWDD, and OMH are responsible for the extended phases of SE. NYSED/ACCES-VR has extended services available to youth with most significant disabilities for a period not to exceed four years, or at such time that a youth reaches age 25 and no longer meets the definition of a "youth with a disability," whichever

occurs first. OPWDD and OMH work collaboratively with NYSED/ACCES-VR to provide comprehensive SE services in NYS NYSED/ACCES-VR utilizes only New York State appropriated funding to provide extended SE services to adults when they are not eligible for extended SE services from either OPWDD or OMH.

B. How the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.

Current Narrative:

Please see the response in n.2.A above which outlines how NYSED/ACCES-VR uses New York State appropriated monies used to support adult extended services. NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to explore opportunities with vendors for expanding the provision and funding of supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.

o. State's Strategies

1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities

Current Narrative:

The strategies below detail how NYSED/ACCES-VR will achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome barriers to accessing the VR and the SE programs. Many of the strategies will impact on more than one priority. To minimize repetition, the strategy is noted only once with alignment to those goals where the highest direct impact is expected.

Please note, that while the strategies outlined in the 2020 Combined State Plan continue to be utilized, in-person activities were limited and instead were provided virtually or remotely whenever possible due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Priority 1: Increase the employment rate and earnings for individuals with disabilities served by NYSED/ACCES-VR.

Goals for this priority include: Evaluate employment rates for NYSED/ACCES-VR participants at 2nd and 4th quarter after exit and median earnings after exit.

Strategies:

- Continue to access NYSED/ACCES-VR and NYSDOL wage data to evaluate median earnings after exit and establish any additional data needs to evaluate 2nd and 4th quarter employment rates after exit.

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- Collaborate with WIOA core partners and other state agencies that serve individuals with disabilities and utilize the jointly developed referral and release of information process. This agreed upon process streamlines access to services across the programs and better integrates VR services with the employment preparation resources of each of the WIOA core partners.
- Strengthen and enhance activities that promote OJT and WTO including remote, virtual opportunities.
- Continue to strengthen local partnerships with school districts and postsecondary institutions.
- Continue to provide experiential learning and work experiences (e.g., remote, virtual and/or in-person) through summer, part-time and temporary work experience.
- Collaborate with the OCFS/NYSCB, OPWDD, OMH and the NYSED Office for Special Education on implementing better methods for youth with disabilities to obtain and maintain employment.
- Provide referral and access for benefits counseling at key points in the VR process.
- Provide training to job placement vendors on employment trends and business needs, including what constitutes a good resume for a particular field.
- Continue to collaborate with the NYS Justice Center for the Protection of People with Special Needs' TRAIID program to develop innovative options for the purchase, use, and sharing of assistive technology to individuals receiving vocational rehabilitation services.

Priority 2: Increase services to target populations: students with disabilities, and unserved and underserved groups.

- Goals for this priority include: The service rate for identified unserved and underserved populations, including students' and youths' with disabilities, will be commensurate with the NYS population rates for those populations based on race, ethnicity, and disability; and Pre-ETS will be made available to students with disabilities to establish a solid foundation upon which to build their career path.

Strategies:

- Continue statewide distribution of NYSED/ACCES-VR brochures aimed at students, youth, families, parent involved school organizations (i.e., PTA and SEPTA) and professional staff that work with students and youth.
- Continue to increase awareness in the postsecondary community of vocational rehabilitation services. Collaborate with college offices that support students with disabilities, meet with parent/student groups during the colleges' summer orientations, and attend college career events.
- Continue to provide and encourage the display and/or electronic sharing of NYSED/ACCES-VR recruitment posters and information specific to student and

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youth in schools (both traditional and non-traditional) and in other settings that work with students and youth with disabilities.

- Work directly with schools, community agencies and other partners to ensure that Pre-ETS for students with disabilities are available to students who are eligible and potentially eligible for NYSED/ACCES-VR services as needed and appropriate.
- Engage the ILCs to support a coordinated effort between VR services and ILC services, such as peer mentoring, that support a student or youth to sustain their independent living and vocational rehabilitation efforts as identified on the IPE.
- Increase training opportunities specific to working with students and youth for NYSED/ACCES-VR staff.

Priority 3: Improve the quality of NYSED/ACCES-VR services.

Goals for this priority include: Increase to 90% the number of respondents expressing satisfaction on key questions contained in NYSED/ACCES-VR's participant satisfaction surveys; and through use of established contract performance measures for vendors, 80% of vendors will meet or exceed the established benchmark for quality contract deliverables.

Strategies:

- Continue to seek input from participants through an annual satisfaction survey and evaluate results for opportunities for improvement in the quality of services provided.
- Continue to conduct case record reviews both internally and externally to monitor service provision. The review results are assessed by Central Office Administration and District Offices. Training and technical assistance is then designed and provided to address any identified deficits.
- NYSED/ACCES-VR staff will continue to review and rate reports by vendors on their established contract deliverables.
- Maintain the provision of on-going remote and/or virtual training for supervisors. Trainings focus on the multiple roles of a supervisor and provide updates on policy, data collection, requirements for timeliness of eligibility and IPE development and to ensure consistent communication with all staff.
- Continue providing NYS CASE professional development training to supported employment, Pre-ETS and direct placement vendors, at no cost to the vendors, to ensure the integrity and effectiveness of the supported employment program.
- Maintain the identification of additional mechanisms that allow for continuous feedback from participants, business, and vendors.

Priority 4: Increase the percentage of individuals who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential.

Goals for this priority include: Increase partnerships with postsecondary education institutions; assess and track the percentage of individuals who obtain skills gain; and

increase the percentage of individuals who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential.

Strategies:

- Collaborate with Office of Special Education Technical Assistance Partnerships (TAPs), the Regional Partnership Centers, and the Early Childhood and School-Aged Family and Community Engagement FACE centers designed to provide support to schools, students, and families.
- Partner with all vendors to increase the collection of postsecondary credentials upon a participant's completion of an educational program.
- Develop a plan of action to implement recommendations resulting from the NYS Board of Regents Advisory Council on Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities.

Priority 5: Effectively serve businesses.

Goals for this priority include: Increase business penetration and increase business customers with repeat service.

Strategies:

- Utilize OSOS as the case management system for tracking NYSED/ACCES-VR's business engagement activities that relate to penetration and services provided to business.
- Continue to provide training to businesses on topics as requested, including accommodations and financial incentives.
- Actively participate on the LWDB(s) in each local region.

2. How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR provides assistive technology services and devices as needed by an individual in pursuit of IPE goals at each stage of the vocational rehabilitation process. Examples include, but are not limited, to providing an assessment for assistive technology as part of eligibility determination and/or IPE development, provision of assistive technology during educational and/or vocational training, and provision of assistive technology to assist a participant on a job and/or receiving supported employment. The New York State Justice Center for the Protection of People with

Special Needs administers the TRAIID program, whose mission is to coordinate statewide activities to increase access to, and acquisition of, assistive technology for people with disabilities. NYSED/ACCES-VR has a MOA with the Justice Center that supports the 12 TRAIID Centers across NYS.

3. The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to educate the public about vocational rehabilitation services for New Yorkers with disabilities. As can be expected, the groups of individuals identified in this section for outreach often are members of multiple groups and outreach efforts to organizations are beneficial to many or all groups of people referenced in this section. Where possible, these outreach efforts to specific groups of people have been outlined below. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, NYSED/ACCES-VR developed virtual and remote strategies such as including informational videos about services on its website.

NYSED/ACCES-VR's efforts include educating school personnel about NYSED/ACCES-VR services to provide outreach to people with most significant disabilities, individuals with disabilities who are minorities and students with disabilities who may be unserved or underserved; hosting or participating in virtual transition fairs to provide outreach to students with most significant disabilities, students with disabilities who are minorities and students with disabilities who may be unserved or underserved; facilitating round tables and information sessions with mental health associations to outreach to individuals with most significant disabilities and individuals with behavioral health diagnoses who are unserved or underserved, partnering on LWDBs; partnering with local educational agencies and municipal governments; conducting bi-monthly virtual trainings for Career Center recipients, and having a visible presence in local communities across NYS to outreach to individuals with disabilities who are minorities, have most significant disabilities, and who are unserved and underserved.

4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services)

Current Narrative:

As discussed in section d.1 and d.2, NYSED/ACCES-VR staff work collaboratively with local school districts to support a student's transition from school to postsecondary

options. Specifically, NYSED/ACCES-VR's TAYS team has been working to continue to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities by:

1. Engaging students, parents, high schools, transition specialists, and youth organizations in: exploring and planning career choices that connect to a full range of postsecondary options for training, career development, and employment, and engaging students with disabilities in access to, and the provision of, Pre-ETS;
2. Expanding NYSED/ACCES-VR's relationship with Tribal Nations in NYS to ensure Native American students with disabilities receive Pre-ETS as potentially eligible students and/or eligible students with disabilities to improve independent living and employment outcomes.
3. Working to improve the number, quality, and rate of employment outcomes for students and youth participating in NYSED/ACCES-VR services; and
4. Increasing collaborations with multiple stakeholders, including other state agencies, Special Education Quality Assurance (SEQA) and Regional Partnership Centers staff (Regional Partnership Centers replaced the previous Regional Special Education-Technical Assistance Support Centers).

5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR works closely with its community rehabilitation programs and networks. Through its contracting process, NYSED/ACCES-VR sets standardized expectations for the provision of services to participants, timeliness of meeting deliverables, and a process for continuous quality review. The newest five-year contracts started on January 1, 2019. NYSED/ACCES-VR supports vendors through a vendor engagement process that offers technical assistance to support the provision of quality services to participants. Please see sections j.1.2 and j.1.3. for additional details on training provided to community rehabilitation programs that additionally supports quality improvement of these programs.

6. Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR has sought to continue to align several of its 2022 Combined State Plan Modification priorities and goals with the WIOA accountability measures. Examples include increasing the employment rate and median earnings for individuals with disabilities upon exit from vocational rehabilitation services, increasing

the percentage of participants with a postsecondary credential, and effectively serving business.

7. Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR works closely with the WIOA core partners to fully implement the commitments as outlined in the 2022 Combined State Plan Modification. NYSED/ACCES-VR has provided strategies to the workforce development partners to assist individuals with disabilities by: Presenting on a bi-monthly basis at the Career Centers virtual trainings about NYSED/ACCES-VR services, requesting and accessing reasonable accommodations, disclosing a disability to an employer, and state and federal employment incentives for individuals with disabilities, providing training resources for core partners' front line staff specific to working with individuals with disabilities, and providing education to local partners about the services and supports that NYSED/ACCES-VR provides in their region. NYSED/ACCES-VR is committed to continuing these types of training efforts, including those with the NYS Commission for the Blind, to support the WIOA core partners in providing services to individuals with disabilities.

In addition to training efforts, NYSED/ACCES-VR worked closely with the core partners, including the New York Commission for the Blind, in the development and implementation of a standardized release of information form and referral process to be used by the WIOA partners. As part of a local workforce development board that piloted the use of this form, NYSED/ACCES-VR assisted in the development of best practices for the referral of individuals between core partners, including individuals with disabilities, to better support the coordination of the provision of services. As with the above cited training activities, NYSED/ACCES-VR will continue to work with the core partners on the use of the referral and release form.

8. How the agency's strategies will be used to:

A. Achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;

Current Narrative:

The earlier outlined strategies in section o.1 were designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities and to meet the WIOA performance

expectations. The priorities and goals are consistent with the needs identified in the 2017 Comprehensive Needs Assessment.

B. Support innovation and expansion activities; and

Current Narrative:

Innovation and expansion funds may be used to support programs such as the SILCs peer integration program to address barriers to employment (e.g., homelessness, domestic violence, child-care, and unexpected pregnancy). Funds may also support the agreements with the TRAIID Centers, as referenced in C.2 and i.4.A, that provide assistive technology and training, building employment opportunities with the NYC Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) and collaboration with CUNY Leads and academic and career program for students with disabilities. Innovation and expansion funds may also support projects and work of the SRC such as reimbursing members’ travel to quarterly meetings.

C. Overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is committed to equitable access and participation in vocational rehabilitation and supported employment services for all individuals with disabilities. Strategies to address barriers to equitable access to vocational rehabilitation services and supported employment services include:

- Provision of services and supports either virtually or in-person based on the choice of the individual, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Applying for services may be completed online, in-person or by mail.
- Utilization of the WIOA release and referral process to support the provision of services to individuals with disabilities, including individuals receiving supported employment services, working with more than one core partner. Please see further information as described in o.7.
- Supported employment vendors assist individuals with most significant disabilities to register and utilize the services available at the local One-Stop Career Centers.
- Coaching and communication supports to assist people with a disability that impacts communication skills, such as autism spectrum disorders, to better

understand social cues and unspoken communication so they can be competitively employed, including those with supported employment services, in integrated work environments.

- Providing college opportunities for students with most significant disabilities to better support their success in supported employment and in the workforce. Please see section p.2.A for additional details.

p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

1. An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals

Current Narrative:

Priority 1: Increase the employment rate and earnings for individuals with disabilities served by ACCES-VR.

The following pertains to all three goals in this priority. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in unprecedented levels of unemployment in NYS, including, but not limited to, unemployment for individuals with disabilities, as a result of mandatory social distancing, business closures, and individuals not returning to the workforce due to health concerns.

NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved its goals of monitoring employment rates, which were down during PY 20, and median earnings, which increased in PY 20, through its regular review of NYSDOL wage data.

Goal 1.1: Monitor employment rates at 2nd quarter to obtain baseline data for establishing an appropriate performance measure. The rate of employment at the second quarter after exit from NYSED/ACCES-VR services in PY 20 was 43.2%.

Goal 1.2: Monitor employment rates at 4th quarter to obtain baseline data for establishing an appropriate performance measure. The rate of employment at the fourth quarter after exit from NYSED/ACCES-VR services in PY 20 was 42.7%.

Goal 1.3: Monitor median earnings to obtain baseline data for establishing an appropriate performance measure. The median earnings at the fourth quarter after exit from NYSED/ACCES-VR services for PY 20 were \$4,646.

Priority 2: Increase services to target populations: students with disabilities; and, unserved and underserved groups.

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Goal 2.1: The service rate for identified unserved and underserved populations will be commensurate with the NYS population rates for those populations based on race, ethnicity, and disability. The minimum target rate for service provision for NYSED/ACCES-VR participants who are from a minority background versus those who are from a non-minority background is a .80 ratio. NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved this goal by exceeding the .80 ratio in PY 19 at .96 and PY 20 at .94. Outreach activities conducted by NYSED/ACCES-VR were strategies that contributed to the achievement of this goal and are further detailed earlier in section o.3.

Goal 2.2: Students with disabilities will receive pre-employment transition services to establish a solid foundation upon which to build their career path. NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved this goal as of February 2020 when Pre-ETS were implemented statewide for students with disabilities who are potentially eligible. NYSED/ACCES-VR has since provided Pre-ETS statewide to all populations of students with disabilities. In PY19 NYSED/ACCES-VR provided Pre-ETS to 2,337 students with disabilities and in PY20 increased that number to 3,164 students with disabilities receiving Pre-ETS.

Priority 3: Improve the quality of ACCES-VR services.

Goal 3.1: Increase to 90% the number of respondents expressing satisfaction on key questions contained in VR's participant satisfaction surveys. NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to strive for improvement in the area of participant satisfaction. In the 2019 survey 87% of respondents expressed an overall satisfaction with the quality of services received. Strategies that contributed to improvement included training for both NYSED/ACCES-VR staff and vendors that support the continuous quality improvement of services provided to participants.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing resources to complete the satisfaction surveys were limited and no vendors responded to an RFP to administer the satisfaction surveys. Therefore, NYSED/ACCES-VR prioritized the satisfaction survey targeted for eligible youth who had exited from NYSED/ACCES-VR services prior to completion of an IPE, per an RSA recommendation in its most recent monitoring report. The 2021 eligible youth satisfaction survey resulted in approximately 56% of eligible youth sharing that they would recommend NYSED/ACCES-VR to another person and approximately 59% would consider reapplying for services.

NYSED/ACCES-VR will complete another participant satisfaction survey 2022. .

Goal 3.2: Through use of established contract performance measures for service providers, 80% of providers will meet or exceed the standard. Satisfactory reviews of vendors' performance on contract measures were 96% for PY 19 and 95.4% for PY20 and this goal was achieved. A strategy for achieving this goal was the continuous quality review process with of vendors that supports success.

Priority 4: Increase the percentage of individuals who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential.

Goal 4.1: Increase partnerships with postsecondary education institutions. NYSED/ACCES-VR has achieved its goal of increased partnerships with postsecondary education institutions through a concerted effort by its Transition and Youth Services (TAYS) unit despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of strategies used by the TAYS to include working closely with specialized college programs, collaborations with college student disability services staff, and establishing relationships with local colleges, particularly community colleges, in their district office catchment area. Additionally, a meeting was held with program directors of rehabilitation counseling programs in NYS and New Jersey in 2021 to further support partnerships and collaborations.

Goal 4.2: Assess and track the percentage of individuals who obtain measurable skills gain. NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved this goal. In PY 19, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic particularly to NYS in the Spring of 2020, NYSED/ACCES-VR had 30.7% MSG rate for individuals who were capable of obtaining measurable skills gains (MSGs). In PY 20, NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved a 43.7% rate for MSG attainment. NYSED/ACCES-VR utilized strategies to improve the percentage of people with an MSG including evaluating data and identifying potential errors or missing data, rectifying errors that were noted, and taking steps to reduce future errors.

Goal 4.3: Increase the percentage of individuals who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential. NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved this goal despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. 13% of individuals eligible to receive a recognized postsecondary credential in PY 19 obtained those credentials and 16.2% of individuals eligible to obtain a recognized postsecondary credential obtained them in PY 20.

Priority 5: Effectively serve businesses.

The following pertains to both goals in this priority which NYSED/ACCES-VR improved upon. In 2019, NYSED/ACCES-VR began tracking efforts to work with businesses utilizing the NYSDOL OSOS case management system. The partnership with NYSDOL to track business engagement was essential as NYSED/ACCES-VR previously did not have a business case management system. Two data point of interest that demonstrate progress toward achieving this goal are as follows: By December 31, 2021, 1,317 business were served by the NYSED/ACCES-VR IES team with 1,213 unique businesses served. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, business engagement was limited, however NYSED/ACCES-VR was still able to make increases in businesses served during this timeframe.

Goal 5.1: Obtain baseline measure for business penetration.

Goal 5.2: Obtain baseline measure for numbers of business customers with repeat service.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities

Current Narrative:

Priority 1: Increase the employment rate and earnings for individuals with disabilities served by ACCES-VR.

The following pertains to all three goals in this priority. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in unprecedented levels of unemployment in NYS, including, but not limited to, unemployment for individuals with disabilities, business closures, and individuals not returning to the workforce due to health concerns. NYSED/ACCES-VR was able to achieve its goals of monitoring employment rates, which were down during PY 20, and median earnings, which increased in PY 20, through its regular review of NYSDOL wage data.

Goal 1.1: Monitor employment rates at 2nd quarter to obtain baseline data for establishing an appropriate performance measure. The rate of employment at the second quarter after exit from NYSED/ACCES-VR services in PY 20 was 43.2%. Please note, PY 20 includes the timeframe just after the initial peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in NYS.

Goal 1.2: Monitor employment rates at 4th quarter to obtain baseline data for establishing an appropriate performance measure. The rate of employment at the fourth quarter after exit from NYSED/ACCES-VR services in PY 20 was 42.7%. Please note, PY 20 includes the timeframe just after the initial peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in NYS.

Goal 1.3: Monitor median earnings to obtain baseline data for establishing an appropriate performance measure. The median earnings at the fourth quarter after exit from NYSED/ACCES-VR services for PY 20 were \$4,646. Please note, PY 20 includes the timeframe just after the initial peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in NYS.

Priority 2: Increase services to target populations: students with disabilities; and, unserved and underserved groups.

Goal 2.1: The service rate for identified unserved and underserved populations will be commensurate with the NYS population rates for those populations based on race, ethnicity and disability. The minimum target rate for service provision for NYSED/ACCES-VR participants who are from a minority background versus those who are from a non-minority background is a .80 ratio. NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved this goal by exceeding the .80 ratio in PY 19 at .96 and PY 20 at .94. Outreach activities conducted by NYSED/ACCES-VR were strategies that contributed to the achievement of this goal and are further detailed earlier in section o.3.

Goal 2.2: Students with disabilities will receive pre-employment transition services to establish a solid foundation upon which to build their career path. NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved this goal as of February 2020 when Pre-ETS were implemented statewide for students with disabilities who are potentially eligible. NYSED/ACCES-VR has since

provided Pre-ETS statewide to all populations of students with disabilities. In PY19 NYSED/ACCES-VR provided Pre-ETS to 2,337 students with disabilities and in PY20 increased that number to 3,164 students with disabilities receiving Pre-ETS. While NYSED/ACCES-VR did achieve this goal, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly its onset in NYS in March 2020, was a significant impediment to the provision of services. .

Priority 3: Improve the quality of ACCES-VR services.

Goal 3.1: Increase to 90% the number of respondents expressing satisfaction on key questions contained in VR's participant satisfaction surveys. NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to strive for improvement in the area of participant satisfaction. In the 2019 participant satisfaction survey 87% of respondents expressing an overall satisfaction with the quality of services received. Strategies that contributed to improvement included training for both NYSED/ACCES-VR staff and vendors that support the continuous quality improvement of services provided to participants.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, staffing resources to complete the satisfaction surveys were limited and no vendors responded to an RFP to administer the participant satisfaction survey. Therefore, NYSED/ACCES-VR prioritized the satisfaction survey targeted for eligible youth who had exited from NYSED/ACCES-VR services prior to completion of an IPE, per an RSA recommendation in its most recent monitoring report. The 2021 eligible youth satisfaction survey resulted in approximately 56% of eligible youth sharing that they would recommend NYSED/ACCES-VR to another person and approximately 59% would consider reapplying for services. Communication strategies were identified as a potential impediment with eligible youth. NYSED/ACCES-VR has taken steps to improve communication by using modalities that are utilized more frequently by youth such as text messaging. This was been accomplished through the purchase of software, YakChat, that allows NYSED/ACCES-VR staff to convert emails to texts.

NYSED/ACCES-VR will complete another participant satisfaction survey 2022.

Goal 3.2: Through use of established contract performance measures for service providers, 80% of providers will meet or exceed the standard. Satisfactory reviews of vendors' performance on contract measures were 96% for PY 19 and 95.4% for PY20 and this goal was achieved. A strategy for achieving this goal was the continuous quality review process with of vendors that supports success.

Priority 4: Increase the percentage of individuals who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential.

It should be noted that while NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved its goals for this priority, the COVID-19 pandemic posed a significant impediment due to its impact on secondary and postsecondary education programs.

Goal 4.1: Increase partnerships with postsecondary education institutions. NYSED/ACCES-VR has achieved its goal of increased partnerships with postsecondary education institutions through a concerted effort by its Transition and Youth Services (TAYS) unit despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples of strategies used by the TAYS include working closely with specialized college programs, collaborations with college student disability services staff, and establishing relationships with local colleges, particularly community colleges, in their district office catchment area. Additionally, a meeting held with NYS and New Jersey program directors of rehabilitation counseling programs in 2021 to further support partnerships and collaborations.

Goal 4.2: Assess and track the percentage of individuals who obtain measurable skills gain. NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved this goal. In PY 19, despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic particularly to NYS in the Spring of 2020, NYSED/ACCES-VR had 30.7% MSG rate for individuals who were capable of obtaining measurable skills gains (MSGs). In PY 20, NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved a 43.7% rate for MSG attainment. NYSED/ACCES-VR utilized strategies to improve the percentage of people with an MSG including evaluating data and identifying potential errors or missing data, rectifying errors that were noted, and taking steps to reduce future errors.

Goal 4.3: Increase the percentage of individuals who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential. NYSED/ACCES-VR achieved this goal despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. 13% of individuals eligible to receive a recognized postsecondary credential in PY 19 obtained those credentials and 16.2% of individuals eligible to obtain a recognized postsecondary credential obtain them in PY 20.

Priority 5: Effectively serve businesses.

The following pertains to both goals in this priority which NYSED/ACCES-VR improved upon. In 2019, NYSED/ACCES-VR began tracking efforts to work with businesses utilizing the NYSDOL OSOS case management system. The partnership with NYSDOL to track business engagement was essential as NYSED/ACCES-VR previously did not have a business case management system. Two data point of interest that demonstrate progress toward achieving this goal are as follows: By December 31, 2021, 1,317 business were served by the NYSED/ACCES-VR IES team with 1,213 unique businesses served. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, business engagement was limited, however NYSED/ACCES-VR was still able to make increases in businesses served during this timeframe.

Goal 5.1: Obtain baseline measure for business penetration.

Goal 5.2: Obtain baseline measure for numbers of business customers with repeat service.

2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR is committed to assisting participants to achieve supported employment, including youth with most significant disabilities. The supported employment goals are as follows:

Provide services to individuals, including youth, with the most significant disabilities who might not be traditionally considered appropriate for competitive integrated employment.

In PY 2019, the number of individuals with most significant disabilities to achieve supported employment was 4,796 and in PY 2020 it was 4,574 . The number of youth with most significant disabilities who achieved supported employment in PY 2019 was 1,626 and in PY 2020 was 1,645. The number of youth with most significant disabilities who achieved extended services in PY 2019 was 377 and in PY 2020 was 488.

While NYSED/ACCES-VR did not have an increase in individuals achieving supported employment to substantiate achievement of this goal it should be noted that the decrease in the number of individuals achieving supported employment between PY 19 and PY 20 was small and attributable to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., individuals with most significant disabilities may have been more vulnerable to health issues due to COVID-19 and elected to not enter the workforce and/or became ill and were unable to be employed, employers were unable to hire due to temporary and then subsequent permanent closures, employers unable/unwilling to have non-employees onsite). There was, however, an incremental increase in the number of youth achieving supported employment between PY 19 and PY 20.

NYSED/ACCES-VR provided multiple strategies to support people with the most significant disabilities to become competitively employed in an integrated setting Examples include:

- Providing vendors with the ability to deliver SE services remotely or virtually when agreed to by the participant.
- Providing college opportunities for students with most significant disabilities to better support their success in supported employment and in the workforce. NYSED/ACCES-VR supports students with most significant

disabilities to attend college programs such as Edinboro College, which is uniquely designed to meet both the physical and educational needs of students.

- NYSED/ACCES-VR continued to support college opportunities for students with most significant disabilities when educational programs were required to move to online curriculum due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Availability of the Peer Integration Program through the SILCs. Peer Integration programs provide support to individuals, including individuals with most significant disabilities, to reduce barriers to employment such as homelessness, a behavioral health episode, lack of childcare, or unexpected health emergency and improve success in supported employment and the workforce.
- Coaching and communication supports to assist people, including youth, with a disability that impact communication skills, such as autism spectrum disorders, to better understand social cues and unspoken communication so they can be competitively employed, including those with supported employment services, in integrated work environments.

Develop quality programs that could be used for replication purposes

Establish successful supported employment programs that will provide technical assistance to other programs

The strategies listed here pertain to the two supported employment goals outlined above. NYSED/ACCES-VR has established required training for supported employment vendors and makes these trainings available for free. NYSED/ACCES-VR, through a contract with NYS CASE, provides training and technical assistance to supported employment vendors who are required to complete core courses in employment services delivery, advanced employment services practice, employment services administration, student and youth transition, and business engagement. This is a strategy that is being used towards further development and replication of quality supported employment programs. Please note, in March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all in-person trainings were suspended and converted to a virtual format which allowed for the continued provision of technical assistance throughout the pandemic. It is anticipated that these trainings will continue to be virtual and/or remote for the foreseeable future.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities

Current Narrative:

- Provide services to individuals, including youth, with the most significant disabilities who might not be traditionally considered appropriate for competitive integrated employment. NYS experienced unprecedented rates of unemployment for people with and without disabilities, business closures, and individuals choosing not to return to work as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 related factors that impeded achieving the goals include, but are not limited to, employers unable to hire due to temporary and then subsequent permanent

closures, employers unable/unwilling to have non-employees onsite, employers with various policies on vaccination requirements and individuals' choice to be or not be vaccinated, individuals with most significant disabilities electing to not enter the workforce and/or becoming ill and unable to be employed. Factors that impede achieving the goals in addition to those presented by the COVID-19 pandemic include businesses' expectations for employees in all positions, including entry-level, focused on an individual's ability to complete many different tasks as well as being able to multi-task. As a result, businesses are less willing to customize employment or carve jobs to better meet the abilities of some people with most significant disabilities, thus impacting the obtainment, maintenance, and rate of employment.

- Develop quality programs that could be used for replication purposes
- Establish successful supported employment programs that will provide technical assistance to other programs

A factor that impacts the full achievement of the two above goals is the challenges that supported employment vendors have in maintaining staff and an inability to consistently participate in the longer-term process of replicating and providing technical assistance while still meeting the day-to-day needs of the participants. These challenges were exponentially exacerbated with the onset and continuation of the COVID-19 pandemic. Supported Employment vendors continue to struggle significantly with maintaining sufficient staffing levels to provide services and need to prioritize service delivery for the foreseeable future. .

3. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR continues to progress on its efforts to evaluate the primary indicators of performance as outlined under Section 116 of WIOA. Strategies and challenges, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, were outlined previously in p.1.B.

- Employment Rate-2nd Quarter After Exit: The rate of employment at the second quarter after exit from NYSED/ACCES-VR services in PY 20 was 43.2%.
- Employment Rate-4th Quarter After Exit: The rate of employment at the fourth quarter after exit from NYSED/ACCES-VR services in PY 20 was 42.7%.
- Median Earnings- 4th Quarter After Exit: The median earnings for PY 20 at the fourth quarter after exit from NYSED/ACCES-VR services were \$4,646.
- Credential Attainment: In PY 20 16.2% of individuals capable of receiving a recognized postsecondary credential received one.
- Measurable Skills Gain: In PY 20 NYSED/ACCES-VR had a 43.7% MSG rate
- Effectiveness of Serving Businesses: The following pertains to both goals in this priority. In 2019, NYSED/ACCES-VR began tracking efforts to work with businesses utilizing the NYSDOL OSOS case management system. The

partnership with NYSDOL to use their case management system to track business engagement was essential as NYSED/ACCES-VR did not have a case management system. Two data point of interest that demonstrate progress toward achieving this goal are as follows: By December 31, 2021, 1,317 businesses were served by the NYSED/ACCES-VR IES team with 1,213 unique businesses served. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, business engagement was limited, however, NYSED/ACCES_VR was still able to make increases in businesses served during this timeframe. [4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion \(I&E\) activities were utilized](#)

Current Narrative:

NYSED/ACCES-VR used innovation and expansion funds in PY 2020 to support activities including the SILC peer integration program, the TRAIID Centers for statewide training/education and access to assistive technology, and the partnership with the NYC Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities to build employment opportunities.

q. Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services

[1. The quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities](#)

Current Narrative:

Individuals with the most significant disabilities who participate in NYSED/ACCES-VR SE programs engage in assessment, job planning, counseling, job development, job placement, intensive job-site training, and extended job retention services. Supported employment services begin after job placement and may be provided to individuals with most significant disabilities for a period of time not to exceed 24 months, unless under special circumstances the eligible individual and the vocational rehabilitation counselor jointly agree to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE.

NYS’ Chapter 515 of the Laws of 1992 on integrated employment, including supported employment, is implemented through a collaborative interagency process in NYS with OPWDD and OMH working with NYSED/ACCES-VR to provide comprehensive supported employment services. NYSED/ACCES-VR is responsible for competitive integrated employment, including intensive supported employment services, except for those services provided directly by OPWDD and OMH. All three agencies are responsible for the extended phases of supported employment. NYSED/ACCES-VR has extended services available to youth with most significant disabilities for a period not to exceed 4 years, or at such time that a youth reaches age 25 and no longer meets the definition of a "youth with a disability", whichever occurs first when they are not eligible for extended supported employment services from either OPWDD or

OMH. Additionally, NYSED/ACCES-VR has adult extended services available through New York State funding.

Scope of Supported Employment Services

SE services are comprised of on-going services, including customized employment, needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability in SE that:

- Are provided singly or in combination to assist a participant to achieve competitive integrated employment;
- Are based on a determination of the needs of the participant and as specified in the IPE; and
- Are provided by NYSED/ACCES-VR for up to 24 months, unless an extension is necessary to achieve the employment outcome identified in the IPE.

SE services provide all the supports necessary to assist the participant with:

- Learning specific work duties and performance standards;
- Learning formal and informal site-related expectations (i.e., time and attendance, dress, communication protocol);
- Acquiring site-appropriate work-related behaviors when interacting with supervisors and co-workers;
- Acquiring the sense of belonging to the workforce;
- Understanding and using the benefits of employment (i.e., spending pay, using leave, participating in employee programs, working under direction from the supervisor, socializing with co-workers); and
- Developing a community support system that accommodates and positively reinforces the employee's role as a worker.

Strategies are customized to meet the needs of the participant and business and to assist the participant in meeting business expectations. Job coaches use available community resources in meeting participant needs and to assist them in maintaining employment. NYSED/ACCES-VR allowed the provision of SE services to happen remotely when agreed to by the participant as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in NYS in 2020, some businesses were closed and/or would not allow non-employees onsite due to required social distancing. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, businesses update their practices of allowing non-employees onsite as they see fit which may limit onsite coaching for periods of time. Additionally, businesses define their vaccination practices and these impact individuals and SE staff who may or may not choose to be vaccinated.

1/31/22 DRAFT ACCES-VR Section: 2022 NYS WIOA Combined State Plan Modification

Youth with significant disabilities are provided opportunities to receive the services necessary to support their achievement of competitive integrated employment. SE outcomes need to be in competitive integrated employment, or if the employment is in an integrated setting but not at a competitive wage, then the participant is working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment.

NYSED/ACCES-VR has a large supported employment program and provided SE services to approximately 4,600 in PY 20 . NYSED/ACCES-VR expects to continue to exceed the minimum 50% required allotment for the provision of supported employment, including the provision of extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities services for a period of up to four years. NYSED/ACCES-VR will also provide a non-federal share of at least 10% of the funds reserved for the provision of SE services to youth with the most significant disabilities.

NYSED/ACCES-VR contracts with vendors for the provision of SE services through CRS contracts. SE vendors, in cooperation with the state agencies, have the following responsibilities:

- Actively involve participants and families, when appropriate, in assessment, planning and decision making throughout the service delivery process;
- Consider the participant's and business' needs with the nature and frequency of vendor's services including job placement;
- Through a participant-centered decision-making process, pursue the goals detailed in the IPE by using SE resources to assist the participant;
- Report on programmatic and fiscal deliverables as outlined in the SE guidelines;
- Deliver SE services in accordance with federal and state standards and the contractual obligations for the service; and,
- Strive continuously to evaluate the efficacy of the services and make improvements as needed.

SE vendors' contracts are performance-based with vendors receiving payments once milestones and outcomes are attained. NYSED/ACCES-VR conducts case reviews of SE vendors to evaluate quality and identify areas for continuous quality improvement. NYSED/ACCES-VR monitors and evaluates all vendor-provided reports such as monthly progress reports, career development in extended services, participant satisfaction and quality outcomes.

NYSED/ACCES-VR is committed to maintaining a knowledgeable SE services workforce. NYSED/ACCES-VR requires professional development and employment services training for all vendor staff providing SE services. These trainings are offered at no cost to the vendor by NYS CASE, which receives its funds for these trainings from NYSED/ACCES-VR.

2. The timing of transition to extended services

Current Narrative:

1/31/22 DRAFT ACCES-VR Section: 2022 NYS WIOA Combined State Plan Modification

NYSED/ACCES-VR provides extended services to individuals with a most significant disability, including youth with a most significant disability, based on their needs as identified in the IPE to assist and maintain them in supported employment. NYSED/ACCES-VR has extended services available to youth with most significant disabilities for a period not to exceed 4 years, or at such time that a youth reaches age 25 and no longer meets the definition of a "youth with a disability", whichever occurs first when they are not eligible for extended supported employment services from either OPWDD or OMH. Additionally, NYSED/ACCES-VR has adult extended services available through New York State funding.