

Life After IDEA—Tips to Help Students Prepare for Postsecondary Activities

Students leaving high school are moving from an environment that is structured to “ensure student success” to one that is designed to “allow equal access.”

Unlike IDEA, postsecondary education students with disabilities are not entitled to services but can request reasonable accommodations. It becomes the responsibility of the students to:

- identify themselves as having a disability;
- provide documentation of their disability; and
- request accommodations and services supported by the documentation.

How DVR can Help

- DVR can build on the self-advocacy training provided by the school to ensure the student understands their disability enough to explain it to others in order to achieve success in the environment of postsecondary education and the “working world.”
- DVR can provide the documentation required by postsecondary education/training institutions and pay for assessments. An individualized education plan (IEP) or Section 504 accommodation plan may help identify services that have been effective in high school, but this is generally not sufficient documentation for postsecondary education.
- DVR can help identify reasonable accommodations such as academic adjustment and assistive technology the student will need to be successful in postsecondary education/training and/or employment.
- DVR can often provide students with items specific to their postsecondary needs, such as tutoring, assistive technology devices, and computers and related equipment.

How to Connect a Student to DVR

The “Transition Tools for Teachers” web page, www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/transition.htm contains specific referral guidance information and the Secondary Transition Referral Form.

The [Referral Guidance](#) is an easy to use tool that allows the IEP team, school nurse, shop teacher, or anyone involved with the student, to determine if a student might benefit from a referral for DVR services. If a youth has been identified as having a disability (e.g. special education, section 504 plan) or is suspected to have a disability and appears appropriate for our program, the [“Secondary Transition Referral Form”](#) can be filled out and sent to the DVR office serving your school. Contact information is available on the Transition Tools for Teachers web page.

Get More Tools

Sign up to receive a DVR transition tool each month from the DVR Transition Shop at www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/transition.htm

8 Misconceptions About DVR

2014

1. DVR only serves students with severe cognitive impairments.

The truth is, DVR serves anyone who has trouble getting or keeping a job because of a mental or physical condition, and needs DVR services to get or keep a job. Check out the referral guidance on the Transition Tools for Teachers web page at: <http://www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/transition.htm> .

An IEP or 504 plans are good indicators that a student who is interested in going to work should be referred to DVR. DVR services may also be needed for students without an IEP or 504 plan. A student may have a hidden condition or one that does not meet the level of severity required of an IEP or a 504 plan, but with the demands of work, be a barrier to employment.

If you have reason to believe a condition exists and will interfere with work, you should consider a referral to DVR. We can find someone to assess the disability, and pay for the assessment.

2. Parents make too much money for our students to qualify for DVR.

An individual's eligibility for VR services does not depend on the individual's financial status. There is **NO** financial means test for DVR eligibility. DVR offers many different services. Many, like those listed below, are free:

- Help choosing the job goal that's right for you.
- Tests and other tools to better understand your talents, etc.
- On-the-job training with a real employer while you work.
- Job search and placement services.

Other services, such as transportation, school, vocational training, and assistive technology; may have a cost to the participant. DVR collects financial information to determine if a person can pay, or what proportion they can pay, before using DVR funds.

Individuals who receive Social Security SSDI or SSI benefits and/or public assistance such as TANF, Food Stamps or Medicaid are not required to make a financial contribution toward the cost of services.

3. DVR takes so long to do anything.

A person needs to have the time and interest to work with DVR to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment. Selecting the employment goal requires a thorough understanding of the individual's preferences, needs, abilities, interests and strengths, and any resources needed to support their plan.

Participants can help the process move faster by showing up for appointments, returning documents and completing assessments.

4. DVR pays for college, like a scholarship for people with disabilities.

Training in institutions of post-secondary education can make a significant difference in achieving employment, independence and economic self-sufficiency. Post-secondary education expenses can

be considered for DVR funding if the person has the ability to benefit in terms of an employment outcome.

Eligible individuals requesting assistance from DVR to pay for post-secondary education are required to apply for financial aid annually (FAFSA) and provide the DVR counselor with the Student Aid Report (SAR). *See #2*

5. DVR closes cases in 90 days. My students can't even get a job in 90 days.

Each DVR case is individual. An IPE that includes postsecondary education could last for years. Individuals with significant cognitive disabilities may require additional time and supports to find and train for a job.

Once a person has a job the DVR counselor will follow the person's progress for at least 90 days to make sure employment is stabilized. If all is going well, DVR will close the case. If a person finds they need more help to keep the job, get the job back, or move up, that person can request "Post Employment Services."

6. I invite DVR to all the IEPs and they never show up.

The IEP is rarely productive for developing DVR services if the student has not applied for services yet. The IEP team should determine if the student should apply and if so, the teacher can make the referral. Both the [Referral Guidance](#) and "[Secondary Transition Referral Form](#)" can be found on the Transition Tools for Teachers web page at: <http://www.labor.state.ak.us/dvr/transition.htm>

The best transition happens when there is a relationship between the teacher and DVR counselor. This enables both to agree on how to best coordinate services.

7. DVR only gives you one chance to get a job.

We hope the time and effort a client puts into their vocational plan results in the supports they need to get and keep a job. Services like Job Readiness Training, On- the- Job Evaluation and Job Coaching give clients the opportunity to explore a job and learn the skills so they can be successful.

If a person finds they need more help to keep the job, get the job back, or move up they can request "Post Employment Services." In addition, a person can always re-apply for DVR services if their job doesn't work out.

8. DVR doesn't really help kids obtain the job they want.

A DVR client has the right to choose their job goal and the services needed to reach it. The DVR counselor helps a person develop this based on an assessment of the person's rehabilitation needs considering their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests and informed choice. The client and DVR counselor agree to the plan.

Very few people get their dream job right out of high school. Even if a person has the education and experience needed for a particular job, they may have to start at an entry level position, at lower pay, than they wanted. DVR services provide the opportunity to reach a career goal.

DVR Transition Services

2015 marked a major change in the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's (DVR) focus on serving youth. With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), DVR has increased its outreach efforts to connect with students with disabilities while they are "in school" to insure they have the pre-employment transition services they will need to be successful in employment or post-secondary education/training.

2015 Transition Facts

- 365 transition age youth have an Individualized Plan for Employment.
- 209 are currently in high school, representing a 41% increase over 2014.
- 14% increase in referrals from secondary school teachers.
- 157 are successfully working.
- 182 students were referred by secondary school teachers.
- \$11.62 average hourly wage.

Numbers Don't Tell the Whole Story

The following stories illustrate how youth can benefit from good transition planning. One particular story shows what can be accomplished when schools and DVR work together to coordinate services.

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AJ, Juneau

Can you imagine celebrating your college graduation by walking the 700 mile Camino de Santiago Trail from France to Spain alone? How about walking it blind? You might if you looked at life as a series of opportunities instead of barriers.

AJ was born with retinitis pigmentosa (RP), a rare, inherited disease in which the retina of the eye slowly degenerates.



AJ had to constantly find and adjust assistive technology to accommodate his degenerating retinas which made his entire time in school a struggle. By his senior year he was completely blind. His high school was supportive and provided accommodations in the classroom, but those school-focused supports were not going to continue after graduation.

According to AJ, "after graduation I got a lot of career advice. Most involved vending machines and telemarketing jobs." Not satisfied with those options, he sought out vocational rehabilitation services to pursue postsecondary education. His counselor paid for one year at a vocational center for the blind to gain skills he needed to be successful in college. Four years later he graduated from the University of San Francisco with a 3.67 GPA and took off down the Camino de Santiago Trail.

AJ initially pursued a career in social services. Unfortunately, after some volunteer and full time work, AJ realized that his blindness limited his effectiveness when working with consumers and he again sought vocational rehabilitation services. As he worked with VR counselor Vanessa Gabel, a new plan emerged for a completely different career that seemed a better fit for AJ: Law.

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AJ continued...

AJ just finished his first year of law school at the University of San Francisco School of Law on a scholarship, with additional support from DVR. He will complete an internship this summer with a legal aid group working with death-row inmates.

AJ's future plans? To continue following his grandmother's advice, "the world is full of opportunities, so take big bites!"

Collin, Fairbanks

Collin has not read through the decades of research showing work experience during secondary school leads to successful post-school employment for youth with disabilities, but he is on his way to proving it.



Collin was referred to DVR when he was a junior at Hutchison High School in Fairbanks. He was successful in school in part thanks to the accommodations identified in his IEP. His mother knew Collin could use supports for education and finding successful employment after high school so she was pleased to learn that DVR offers pre-employment transition services and supports to help students prepare for work.

Collin's DVR counselor, Char Weatherby, knew he wanted to work with animals, and so hired a job coach to help him find a work experience at the Loving Companions Animal Rescue. She also provided assistive technology to help Collin with scheduling and a bus pass to help with transportation.

Collin's supervisor at Loving Companions gave him a lead and a professional reference to get a summer job at ABC K9 & Equine. Collin worked 30 hours a week this summer, earning \$9.50 an hour. Even though the work isn't glamorous, according to Collin he picks up a lot of poop, he also says it's a great job when you love working with animals.

Collin will return to Hutchison High School for his senior year. He has given up a lot of electives to concentrate on his core subjects so he can go on to vocational school. Because of his time with DVR, Collin has a plan to follow for his future and a solid work history for his resume.

Anchorage Collaboration

"When we work smart we collaborate and build partnerships!" said Katy Boneta, Vocational Coordinator for Anchorage School Districts' ACE/ACT Program. That is exactly what they did this past summer during their seven-week summer work program.

ACE/ACT partnered with DVR and 11 local businesses to give 25 students with disabilities paid summer jobs. The results were more than just spending money for students.

Katy said doing a program like this during the summer allowed teachers and staff to provide a level of support that "challenged" students to be independent, something that didn't fit well during regular school year programming. For some students this involved an introduction to an employer and help navigating transportation. Students with more intensive needs participated on work crews with direct staff support. No matter what level of support, each position was created to be a realistic summer job experience.

Gina Bastion, DVR counselor, described the program as, "amazingly wonderful! Work experience is the most effective way for students to build essential work skills." Gina worked closely with ACE/ACT and provided student wages during the summer work program.

Katy attributes a lot of the success of the summer work program to the personal relationships built with employers. The business knew up front what the program was trying to accomplish, their role, and the support they could expect from program staff.

The ACE/ACT Summer Work program is a great example of how DVR and local school districts can collaborate to provide pre-employment services and help students with disabilities transition from school to work.

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