Analysis of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Transition-age Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Arizona

Prepared for

Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Hasazi et al. (1989) noted that, for people with disabilities, there is evidence that having a paid job in high school is associated with having a paid job after high school. Models for strengthening the transition from school to employment and adult life have long emphasized early collaboration between the school and adult service systems, and a direct focus on employment.

Data from the American Community Survey indicate that transition-age youth and young adults with disabilities, ages 14–24, are employed at lower rates than young adults with no disability. American Community Survey data show that in 2014, the employment rate for young adults without a disability ages 16–21 was 41%, compared to 20% for youth with a cognitive disability. According to program year 2020–2022 Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA-911) data, the percentage of transition-age youth with intellectual disability (ID) in the US who received Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services closed into employment was 36.6%. Arizona's rate was 28.3%

The Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC) contracted with the Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston (ICI) to conduct an evaluation of Arizona's VR program. The goal was to understand how well Arizona's VR program is performing in helping transition-age youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including those who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) youth, Hispanic and Latino youth, youth who are immigrants, and/or youth who live in more rural areas of Arizona.

Study Overview

This summary is part of the larger report *Analysis of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Transition-Age Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities in Arizona* that was written by the ICI. The authors of the report 1) reviewed Arizona policy documents that currently guide their VR services, 2) reviewed Arizona's data regarding employment outcomes for transition-age youth with disabilities and adults with IDD, and 3) conducted interviews and focus groups with individuals who were knowledgeable about Arizona VR, including VR staff at the state, regional, and local levels; staff from the Department of Education and Department of Developmental Disabilities (DDD); local school districts; VR vendors; advocates; and youth and their families with IDD who have received services from Arizona VR in the past three years. We will refer to these individuals as "partners" throughout this report. In this report, we share findings and recommendations for next steps for Arizona VR.

Finding 1: Transition-age youth with ID in Arizona are less likely to be closed into employment compared to the national average, but those youth who were closed into employment predominantly identified as white.

Arizona benefits from a diverse racial population, including one of the highest national percentages of Native Americans. Yet the data indicates individuals with ID in Arizona, including those from BIPOC populations are not exiting VR with a job at high levels. Multiple partners we interviewed for this report cited a need for increased cultural competency by Arizona VR staff. Staff ignored cultural communication preferences such as phone calls instead of emails, resulting in several students almost losing access to services. Additionally, language was another social characteristic that was a barrier to VR services. Arizona's VR website is not accessible in all the most prominent languages spoken in Arizona homes. Furthermore, there are not resources available to provide information to youth and families that are not literate. One partner shared that in their community, most youth for whom English is not their first language are not accessing VR services and fall through the cracks.

Finding 2: Rural communities in Arizona have lower employment rates and higher rates of poverty compared to its metropolitan areas.

Students in rural Arizona communities have poorer engagement with VR. In more rural areas of the state where there can be little physical VR or vendor presence due to staffing and travel distances, many people rely on information from their social networks who likely do not have awareness and knowledge of VR. VR counselors and vendors who work in these communities often live in metropolitan areas within commuting distance. This makes it hard for students to view VR counselors and vendors as members of the community, which then makes it harder for all partners to build the relationships necessary to reduce barriers to service and employment, such as awareness of VR, awareness of youth with IDD as capable of employment, awareness of the variety of businesses and job openings in the community, and awareness of the ways in which youths' social networks can support employment.

Recommendations:

- VR must increase opportunities for specific cultural competency training and practice guidance that reflects broad concepts of what it means to be culturally competent so that staff begin to build self-awareness of how their actions and behaviors impact the experience of VR clients who have different life experiences from their own.
- VR should use available demographic information about local schools and communities to build competencies directly related to the social characteristics of local communities.

Finding 3: There are three key periods in the transition process from school to adulthood during which youth with IDD begin to explore and formulate goals for employment and take a series of actions to achieve their goals.

Awareness building for employment and community living

Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) are the earliest opportunity (age 14+) that VR can engage with youth. Pre-ETS are intended to support awareness building in the domains of employment and community living and offer opportunities for early career exploration and goal formation. All youth with disabilities ages 14–22 are eligible for Pre-ETS regardless of the type of academic coursework they are pursuing, including youth who are enrolled in secondary, postsecondary, or another formal educational setting. Youth can receive Pre-ETS in a one on one or small group setting. Youth can access any of the five Pre-ETS curricula as many times as they need, if they are not accessed more than once annually. VR regulations allow youth to choose the pace of enrollment in each of the five Pre-ETS curricula.

However, many youth do not become aware of or get connected to Pre-ETS until age 16 or in their last year of school, despite VR Pre-ETS being available at age 14. Multiple partners also shared that the Pre-ETS request process is not well understood. There is no method for assessing the quality of implementation or impact of Pre-ETS on the long-term employment trajectory of youth with IDD at the state or vendor level.

Recommendations:

- VR should take a key role in the revision of the Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) to ensure that there is a statewide process for identifying youth enrolled in each AZ school district who are potentially eligible for VR services. This process should begin at age 14.
- VR should provide guidance to youth with IDD who have been approved for Pre-ETS on how to select a service vendor to meet their needs.
- VR should develop a method for assessing the impact of Pre-ETS on the long-term employment trajectory of youth with IDD at the state or vendor level.

Early career exploration, goal formation, formal career planning, job development, and postsecondary education planning

Almost universally, partners felt that youth with IDD need more opportunities for multiple paid work experiences and a longer period of time to use job development services to refine employment goals prior to exit from school. For youth with IDD, becoming a VR client helps to facilitate deeper engagement with formal career planning, job development, and postsecondary education planning. Youth who are enrolled in a Transition School to Work (TWS) program are VR clients and have access to the full array of VR services. Youth in AZ who are not enrolled in a TSW program can become VR clients by applying to VR, being determined eligible for services, and agreeing to have a case opened with VR.

VR TSW programs are known for facilitating a direct and strong connection to VR transition coordinators, local VR counselors, and resources for schools to establish best practices for providing transition services, including resources to hire staff. TSW contracts also support and encourage best practices in transition services by requiring youth to have direct access to curricula that focus on building employment skills and knowledge.

However, most school districts in the state do not have a VR TSW program. There are only 24 TSW programs in all of Arizona's 236 public school districts (this does not include the 432 charter school districts and 23 other educational organizations). Additionally, many VR counselors, school district staff, and VR vendors who work with youth with IDD were unfamiliar with the specifics of individual supported employment services. Many transition partners are unaware of how to use labor market data from VR or Arizona@Work to identify industries that are projected to have significant growth within their local economies or how to support youth with IDD to gain the skills required to work in these industries.

Recommendations:

- Arizona should develop and publish a list of VR TSW contracts, including school district location, number of youths participating, demographics of youth, and a description of each program's features. Arizona should use this data to target expansion of VR TSW contracts.
- If a youth with IDD applies to become a VR client, VR should assume that they want to work and that they can benefit from VR supported employment services.
- VR should develop and distribute a score card for youth and families to determine if they are receiving employment and independent living services that meet their goals and needs.

School exit to employment and/or postsecondary education

State education policy and practice guidelines require a post-school goal for each youth with a disability to be in place prior to graduation. Both DDD and VR staff noted that improvements are needed to ensure a seamless transition from school to the adult service system for youth with IDD who are DDD clients. The smooth handoff from school to employment and adult service systems is also crucial to ensure that youth with IDD can quickly capitalize on the education and training they received in school.

Many VR offices with consistent long-term staff reported they had good relationships with DDD and schools in their community. Through their Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA), VR and DDD have established quarterly meetings to focus on identifying barriers to employment outcomes for youth who are clients of both VR and DDD.

Yet partners felt that shallow interagency planning at the client level often becomes a barrier to the smooth handoff from school to employment and adulthood when the student is about to graduate from school. Many schools in Arizona lack full-time staff members solely dedicated to

coordinating the transition from school to adulthood and there is limited interagency collaboration at the client level when developing a post-school goal for integrated employment.

There is also no mechanism to ensure that meaningful information about the outcome of youth's participation in Pre-ETS, career exploration, work-based learning, and other job development services while in school become part of the DDD case file.

Recommendations:

- "Build a Better VR consumer." This suggestion stems directly from feedback from several different partners. Many felt that as part of efforts to build a better VR consumer, VR must develop mechanisms to inform youth and families about the wide variety of post-school outcomes and what VR's role can be in supporting the outcome, and then provide information for youth and families to advocate for the services that will help them meet their goals.
- VR and the Department of Education should develop an ad hoc committee under their existing IGA to assess how to improve collaboration at the client level between schools and VR.
- With partners revise guidelines, time frames, and expectations, and address roles and responsibilities for youth, families, schools, VR, DDD, and vendors regarding what should be happening from middle school through school exit to ensure youth obtain high quality employment outcomes.

Conclusion

This study found many strengths of Arizona's VR services for transition-age youth with IDD. However, there are multiple areas of improvement, including:

- expanding vocational experiences while in school
- improving interagency processes to support youth with IDD to transition directly to jobs in the community
- improving collaboration between the adult disability (VR and DDD) and education systems at the client level
- prioritizing integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD across all partners

While this report was focused on VR, it is important to emphasize that the successful transition from school to employment is an interagency activity and this report also recommended specific interagency actions. DDD and state education partners should consider conducting a similar analysis of their services for transition-age youth with IDD in Arizona to identify other systemic barriers to transitioning from school to employment.

INTRODUCTION

People with disabilities in Arizona (and across the US) are less likely to work and more likely to live in poverty than people without disabilities. Arizona's working-age population with any disability who are working hovers around the national average. Mirroring national trends, people with cognitive disabilities in Arizona are the least likely to be employed. Economic analysis conducted by Winsor et al. (2019) and funded by the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC) indicates that gains in employment for people with disabilities in Arizona benefit all citizens, not just those with disabilities. Increases in the state gross domestic product (GDP), job creation, and tax revenue will benefit every citizen in Arizona. If Arizona were to invest in changes to support an increase in people with disabilities in the labor force, the state could expect significant growth in its GDP and fewer people with disabilities living in poverty. Winsor et al. (2019) made a series of recommendations to strengthen the employment service system for people with disabilities in Arizona; this report builds on the economic analysis and includes a distinct focus on the services youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) receive from Arizona Department of Economic Security's Division of Employment and Rehabilitative Services Administration's state vocational rehabilitation (VR) program, and the actions that support youth with IDD to transition from school to community employment.

BACKGROUND

The ADDPC is 100% federally funded and charged with advocacy, capacity-building, and systemic change activities that promote inclusion of people with developmental disabilities across the lifespan. A key goal area for ADDPC is meaningful careers and an objective under that goal is to support career outcomes of transition-age youth ages 14–24 with IDD. This includes increasing youth's awareness of and access to the education and training (e.g., credentialing, professional development, life, job, and technical skills training) required for integrated, competitive, inclusive employment. To facilitate a widespread understanding of how to improve the transition experience for youth with IDD, the ADDPC contracted with the Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) at the University of Massachusetts Boston to conduct research into Arizona's VR program and how they are supporting transition-age youth with IDD. The next section describes the importance of the transition period for youth with IDD, the barriers youth with IDD face as they transition from school to employment, the role that VR plays in transition from school to employment, and Arizona's Employment First framework.

Transition as a Key Period in the Life of Youth with IDD

In the late 1980s, Hasazi et al. (1989) noted that, for people with disabilities, there is evidence that having a paid job in high school is associated with having a paid job after high school. Over time, other researchers expanded our knowledge base on the types of experiences that lead youth with IDD to employment after high school. Models for strengthening the transition from school to employment and adult life have long emphasized early collaboration between the school and adult service systems, and a direct focus on employment (Luecking & Certo 2019; Certo et al., 2003; Certo et al., 2008; Schall et al., 2015; Wheman, et al., 2020).

The evidence-based Transition Service Integration Model (TSIM) emphasizes collaboration between the education, rehabilitation, and developmental disability service systems, and partnership between school and community rehabilitation provider staff with a goal of establishing a paid integrated job and inclusive community activities during the last year of school services (Luecking & Certo 2002; Certo et al., 2003). The school and adult service systems share funding support for these services. The goal is a seamless transition where youth establish an adult life prior to completing school exit. Certo et al. (2003) report that 63% of young adults involved in the TSIM exited school with a paid community job, and 88% exited with a "seamless" transition,

defined as no break between services. In 2018, a study of a model transition program found that participants cost less to serve and achieved significantly higher employment rates at case closure, which only reinforced the value of work experience in high school, early VR case initiation, and outcome-oriented collaboration (Luecking et al., 2018).

Over time, elements that directly support this model have been codified in federal statute. In 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (WIOA) instituted the requirement that each state's public VR agency focus on transition services and Pre-ETS, coordinate with the state agency responsible for administering the state Medicaid plan, coordinate with state IDD agencies, and focus on the general workforce development system and One-Stop Career Centers (also called American Job Centers).

Rehabilitation Services Administration Requirements for Transition Services provided through state Vocational Rehabilitation Authorities

State VR programs and services, including transition services, are authorized by the federal Rehabilitation Act as amended in WIOA in 2014. Transition services are defined as:

> "a coordinated set of activities for a student or youth with a disability – (i) Designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, competitive integrated employment, supported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (ii) Based upon the individual student's or youth's needs, taking into account the student's or youth's preferences and interests; (iii) That includes instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation; (iv) That promotes or facilitates the achievement of the employment outcome identified in the student's or youth's individualized plan for employment; and (v) That includes outreach to and engagement of the parents, or, as appropriate, the representative of such a student or youth with a disability." (§361.5(c)(55))

Under WIOA, all states' public VR systems are expected to have formal cooperative agreements with the state agency responsible for administering the state Medicaid plan, and with state IDD agencies, with respect to the delivery of VR services, including extended services.

- WIOA requires VR offices to collaborate with local schools and workforce development systems to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to competitive integrated employment.
- WIOA requires states to spend 15% of public VR funds on Pre-ETS for students served by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.
- Section 511 of the Rehabilitation Act establishes guidelines that must be addressed before an individual can enter subminimum wage employment and requires annual career counseling for individuals working in subminimum wage employment.

WIOA also defines supported employment services as "competitive integrated employment … or employment in an integrated … setting in which individuals are working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment, that is individualized and customized consistent with the strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice of the individuals involved, for individuals with the most significant disabilities for whom competitive integrated employment has not historically occurred … or has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability; and who, because of the nature and severity of their disability, need intensive … services … in order to perform the work involved." This is important to note as individuals with IDD are a priority recipient of supported employment services due to the significance of their disability.

Barriers Youth with IDD Face During Transition

WIOA in combination with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) guidance to the field clarifying their commitment to individual integrated employment as an outcome of employment-related services under the home and community-based services waiver program (CMS, 2011), and the assessment of community-based employment settings (CMS, 2014) as well as the US Department of Justice extension of the Olmstead vs. L.C. decision related to the unnecessary segregation of people with disabilities to employment in several states are strong federal foundations for transition systems change. However, the promise of these changes has not yet been widely actualized in increased employment outcomes for transition-age youth.

Data from the American Community Survey (ACS) indicate that transition-age youth and young adults with disabilities, ages 14 to 24, are employed at lower rates than young adults with no disability. ACS data show that in 2014, the employment rate for young adults without a disability ages 16–21 was 41%, compared to 20% for youth with a cognitive disability. For young adults between the ages of 22 and 30, the employment gap widens, with 76% of youth without a disability employed compared to 41% of youth with a cognitive disability (Butterworth & Migliore, 2015). Moreover, younger adults (18–24) with IDD experience lower employment outcomes compared to their older counterparts (25–55) (Nord, 2020). Poor employment outcomes for youth with IDD are a result of a confluence of issues, including lack of emphasis on integrated employment outcomes within state IDD agencies (Butterworth et al., 2015); inadequate collaboration between the adult disability and education systems (Whelley et al., n.d.; Certo et al., 2008); limited vocational experiences while in school (Wehman, 2006; Carter et al., 2011); and limited efforts to support youth with IDD to transition directly to jobs in the community (Certo et al., 2003; Certo et al., 2008; Shogren &Plotner, 2012). According to program year (PY) 2020–2022 Rehabilitation Services Administration 911 dataset (RSA-911 data), the percentage of transition-age youth with ID in the US who received VR services closed into employment was 36.6%. Arizona's rate was 28.3% (Appendix C, Figure. 1).

Lack of collaboration between key players. Despite mandates for interagency collaboration in legislation such as the IDEA (2004) and the Rehabilitation Act, insufficient linkages between the education, rehabilitation, and adult IDD systems are a primary factor in the employment outcomes of youth with IDD (Certo et al., 2008; Martinez et al., 2012; NCD, 2008). In addition to the need for interagency collaboration, research also reveals a need for closer and more effective collaboration between education professionals and VR vendors (Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). Hart et al. (2002) identify five major barriers to increased coordination of services and supports including: ineffective partnerships both at the state and local levels, uncoordinated mechanisms for information-sharing and shared service delivery, lack of resource mapping at the state and local level, gaps in service delivery, and lack of student and family-professional partnerships.

Family factors. Family engagement is a key component in successful transition planning, with a particular focus on building relationships and information sharing between families and professionals. Researchers found that parent involvement in transition planning is associated with improved postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities (Mazzotti et al., 2015; Papay & Bambara, 2014), including competitive employment (Wehman et al., 2015). However, Hetherington et al. (2010) found that parents lacked adequate knowledge to support their children in the transition process. Family factors found to influence transition outcomes include parents' lack of information about work incentives and fear of losing benefits (Culnane et al., 2021;Winsor et al., 2010; Hall & Kramer, 2009; Luecking & Wittenburg, 2009; Shogren & Plotner, 2012) and expectations of parents about work in general (Timmons et al., 2011; Carter et al., 2010; Lindstrom et al., , 2011). While many parents do recognize integrated employment as a desirable outcome for their children (Henninger & Taylor, 2014) they may nonetheless view it as an unlikely outcome (Blustein, et al., 2016,

Schutz et al., 2022). Carter et al. (2011) found that the family factor most predictive of paid work experiences in school was parental expectations. Finally, families and individuals must understand the transition from entitlement services (education) to eligibility services (e.g., VR).

Education system factors. Confirming findings from previous research, Carter et al. (2011) found that many students with severe disabilities lack early vocational experiences. Other education system factors include teacher expectations of students working (Carter et al., 2010), unmet needs for professional development of special education teachers (Winsor et al., 2010), lack of long-term follow-up of graduates following transition to employment (Rusch & Braddock, 2004), and limited diffusion of best practices, such as person-centered planning in schools (Winsor et al., 2010).

Social characteristics and employment. Nationally, in an analysis of National Core Indicators project data, Houseworth et al. (2022) found that BIPOC populations and people who identified as female were less likely to participate in community-based work and more likely to participate in unpaid day activities and facility-based work. Similarly, compared with white workers with disabilities, average annual earnings, employment overall and in community jobs, and rehabilitation rates are all lower for Black workers with any disability and Black workers with an IDD, according to ACS, National Core Indicators, and RSA-911 data, and these patterns extend across racial and ethnic groups (Shepard et al., 2020).

Examining transition-age youth with disabilities using the National Health Interview Survey on Disability, Hasnain and Balcazar (2009) found that in addition to race, ethnicity, and gender, living above the poverty threshold, having more than a high school education, and having a higher per capita income all increased the likelihood of employment in a community-based work setting for young adults with disabilities.

There is emerging research around the transition from school to work that further illuminates the impact of social characteristics. For example, when researchers from the University of Kansas interviewed family members with diverse cultural and racial identities, including low-income and rural white family members, it was striking how infrequently people felt that the school played a significant role in preparing their kids for adulthood (Wilt et al., 2021). Low expectations, a well-known issue, was an even stronger concern for families who reside in under-resourced communities. Families reported having limited opportunities for career development and work-related experiences, often because engaging with the schools or the adult support system was extremely challenging, though some families were able to compensate using their power of personal capital and community relationships.

In a study exploring experiences of caregivers supporting family members with disabilities, Francis and colleagues talked to family members from Hispanic households about their experiences that led to their distrust of educators (Francis et al., 2018). They discussed poor transition planning overall, but there were other factors specifically related to families from underserved communities. The overwhelming nature of service systems and the discomfort people feel in trying to operate within them was significant. Language barriers and lack of federally mandated interpreters and translation supports, along with microaggressions experienced along the way, complicated everything. Families reported being questioned about citizenship and eligibility as something that pushed them away from potentially helpful services to which they were legally entitled. Families also reported a lack of respect for cultural differences. Families with a strong cultural focus on interdependence, for example, encountered conflicts with the education and service system's emphasis on independence. Families, particularly those in poverty or working in low-wage jobs, often also struggled to maintain regular communication with schools and attend individualized education plan meetings. In turn, this resulted in individuals and families having limited information about resources and support available to them.

State Agencies Responsible for the Transition from School to Adulthood

While there are multiple state level and local level entities that are engaged in the transition from school to adulthood, most of the responsibility for developing policy and practice occurs within the state's VR program, Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), and Arizona Department of Education, Exceptional Student Services (ESS). We describe each briefly for context.

The Department of Economic Security (DES) is the umbrella agency for the state's VR program and DDD. Further, the VR program, formally known as Arizona Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), operates under the Division of Employment and Rehabilitation Services (DERS). It is important to note that the state VR program does not have the final authority to institute changes due to its placement under the Department of Economic Security. In Arizona, divisions have increased the ability to provide direction over activities that affect their programs, which partners reported reduce VR's level of autonomy, input, and potentially impact.

Vocational Rehabilitation

As previously described, Arizona's VR program and services are authorized by the Rehabilitation Act as amended in WIOA in 2014. Prior to 2019, there had been a series of changes in senior VR leadership for many years. However, current VR program administration staff have been consistent for several years and have instituted significant improvements in policy and practice. Examples of VR's efforts include:

- VR is a member and provides substantial resources to support the Arizona Employment First Partnership.
- In October 2018, the VR vendor system was overhauled to ensure that new vendors can quickly become approved. The Department of Economic Security manages this process. Previously, vendors could only be added every five years and were unable to adjust payment rates for services during that time period.
- Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) is funded through VR. Originally developed through Arizona's Medicaid Infrastructure Grant (MIG), VR's support has ensured the long-term sustainability and improvements of this resource.

We highlight additional strengths of the VR program throughout this report.

Division of Developmental Disabilities

DDD is the state agency responsible for administering and monitoring services to individuals with IDD. In Arizona, funding for DDD services passes through the state's Medicaid authority, Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS). AHCCCS contracts with managed care organizations (MCOs), which in turn contract with a wide array of service vendors for employment services and supports. At the time of writing, DDD is the MCO for employment services for individuals with IDD.

Nationally, state IDD agencies are the primary source of long-term funding and service coordination for adults with IDD. They provide, fund, and monitor a wide range of day and employment services, including employment supports, facility-based options (prevocational services often based in sheltered workshops and non-workday habilitation programs), community integration services, and self-directed options. DDD supports eligible individuals with IDD to reach their full potential in all areas of life, including employment.

Arizona Department of Education

The Arizona Department of Education administers the state's public pre-K–12 education system. For youth with disabilities, services fall under Exceptional Student Services (ESS). ESS works to ensure that the federal IDEA requirements are met—for example, that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment consistent with their needs. Regarding employment, IDEA also requires schools to include employment-related transition services in the individualized education plans (IEPs) of all students who have reached the age of 16. IEPs are expected to include:

- Coordinated focus on improving students' academic and functional achievement.
- Services and supports to facilitate the movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education and integrated employment. Services include instruction, community experiences, and the development of employment and other post-school goals.
- Adherence to IDEA's least restrictive environment requirements, and to Section 511 of WIOA, which prohibits schools from contracting with programs to serve students when the programs pay student employees less than minimum wage.
- School IEP teams, charged with preparing for transition, consider when it is appropriate to invite representation from the VR program and IDD agency.

Arizona: An Employment First State

Arizona's Employment First Executive Order was signed by Governor Doug Ducey on November 16, 2017. With the executive order Arizona formally embraced the national Employment First movement. Employment First policies are nationally recognized as a path toward greater community employment for people with IDD. They anchor a service delivery system, focusing funding, resource allocation, training, daily assistance, and the provision of residential supports on the overall objective of employment (Hoff, 2023).

Prior to the Executive Order in April 2016, a memorandum of understanding (MOU) established a formal partnership between 15 entities, including state agencies, advocacy organizations, and service vendors. State agencies who have a key role in supporting the transition from school to work for youth with IDD who are members of the agreement include Arizona Department of Economic Security/Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) and Division of Employment and Rehabilitative Services/Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) as well as the Arizona Department of Education/Exceptional Student Services (ESS). Since the development of a strategic plan in June 2016, they and other relevant partner groups have worked together to prioritize employment for people with disabilities in the state (Arizona Employment First, 2016). Following the April MOU, they developed an Employment Strategic Plan in June 2016. The plan has six key areas of action that the partners agree to address:

1. Collaborate to increase the competitive employment of people who have disabilities.
2. Increase awareness and advocate for people with disabilities to work in the community.
3. Prepare youth for competitive employment.
4. Foster job creation, hiring, retention, promotion, and self-employment for people with disabilities.
5. Create and promote policies that lead to the successful employment of people who have disabilities.
6. Foster the development of employment-focused services and supports (Arizona Employment First, 2016).

While each of the elements in the Employment Strategic Plan are an important part of improving employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, two action areas are crucial to address for transition-age youth, Action Area 1: Collaboration and Action and Action Area 3: Preparation for Employment.

METHODOLOGY

To understand the status of Arizona VR's efforts to support youth with IDD to transition from school to employment, the ADDPC contracted with the ICI to conduct an evaluation of Arizona's VR program. The goals were to understand:

- Overall, how well is Arizona's VR program performing in helping transition-age youth (ages 14–24) with IDD obtain their employment goals? What are the key strengths and barriers to achieving successful outcomes for the VR program?
- Do disparities exist in employment outcomes by disability type, spoken language, and race/ethnicity? If so, what is the nature of the disparities and why do they exist?
- Are there specific services that move youth toward a path that led to successful outcomes? Are certain services more impactful than others? Are service trends emerging? Are there true success markers?
- What isn't working? Are there services that are not producing positive impacts?
- In reviewing VR's key performance indicators, what would be some measures to capture/demonstrate successful outcomes for transition-age youth with disabilities?

We collected findings from this report from three main sources:

1. Review of Arizona policy documents that currently guide their VR services, and similar documents related to transition from school to employment from DDD and ESS.
2. Review of Arizona's data regarding employment outcomes for transition-age youth with disabilities and adults with IDD.
3. Interviews and focus groups with those who were knowledgeable about Arizona VR, including VR staff at the state, regional, and local levels; staff from ESS and DDD and local school districts; VR vendors; advocates; and youth and their families with IDD who have received services from Arizona VR in the past three years.

We developed an initial list of contacts who currently work or recently retired from the transition system and we conducted outreach to inquire if they would like to share their experiences. We used a snowball sampling technique to identify additional potential experts. This effort resulted in 29 professionals being interviewed for this report. Respondents included state ESS staff, local level transition education staff, state VR administrators, local level VR transition counselors, Pre-ETS and VR employment vendors, and statewide advocates of employment and transition services.

To understand the perspective of youth with IDD and their families with VR, we made outreach efforts to self-advocate and parent advocacy networks in Arizona as well as vendors of VR transition services and schools. The ADDPC also assisted by distributing flyers through their networks seeking parents and individuals with IDD to interview. In total, we interviewed 18 family members and nine individuals with IDD for this report, including several who were part of a Spanish-language disability support group (Table 1).

Table 1: Summary of partner group interviews

Partner Group	N
Professionals	29
Individuals	9
Family members	18

We conducted all interviews and focus groups using University of Massachusetts Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved protocols. We conducted interviews both in-person and over Zoom from January 2023 through September 2023 in both one on one and in group settings. All interview participants were read and agreed to an IRB approved consent script (Appendix B), which acknowledged that participation in this study was voluntary and that their names and

identities would not be disclosed outside of project staff nor mentioned in this report or any subsequent publications. We used a consent script instead of a signed consent form to further protect the identities of those who were interviewed. Additionally, we offered individuals with IDD and families one $25 Amazon gift card per household for participation.

Data analysis of policy documents and interview and focus group data consisted of a thematic analysis of factors that shaped youth with IDD's experiences with Arizona's VR program. We used a constant comparative method of analyzing the data from within and across data types to identify themes (Charmaz, 2000; Degeneffe & Olney, 2010; Dellve et al., 2000; Kendall, 1999; Mactavish & Schleien, 2004). We assigned each document to at least one unit of analysis. Examples of units of analysis might include "high satisfaction" or "low satisfaction" with VR services for youth and family, promising practices, and particular demographic characteristics, including racial/ethnic group or other differences that emerged through the quantitative analysis and were further explored in qualitative interviews.

FINDINGS

The findings section contains both quantitative and qualitative findings. For the quantitative findings we created rolling averages to ensure an adequate sample size[1]. Findings from analysis of the ACS highlighted several contextual factors in Arizona:

- Arizona benefits from a diverse racial population, including one of the highest national percentages of Native Americans. Yet the highest poverty rates belonged to American Indian or Alaskan Native Arizonans and rates of poverty are higher for Hispanic as opposed to non-Hispanic individuals.
- White people have the highest rates of employment across each of Arizona's metropolitan statistical areas (MSAs). Please see the glossary for more information on MSAs.
- Appendix C, Figure 2. looks at Arizona employment rates by MSA as well as poverty rates by MSA. When comparing both,rural Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA's) with larger Hispanic and non-White populations of transition-age youth with cognitive disabilities such as Sierra Vista-Douglas and Lake Havasu City-Kingman, have lower employment rates and higher rates of poverty compared to less rural MSA's like Tuscon-Nogales.

Employment outcomes for youth with ID from the RSA-911 also provide context for the qualitative findings on Arizona's employment services and outcomes for transition-age youth.

- Transition-age youth with ID in Arizona were less likely to be closed into employment (12.7%) than the national average (15.5%).
- White VR clients with ID had the highest percentage of closures for transition-age youth (79.2%) compared to any other race.

See Appendix D for additional quantitative findings.

Qualitative findings are grounded in evidence-based and best practices for transition from school to adulthood for youth with IDD. For 20 years, the goal of a seamless transition from school to adulthood as described by Certo et al. (2003) has been the gold standard in transition services for youth with IDD. While laws, policy, and practice have evolved over this period, the primary public entities responsible for ensuring seamless transition have not changed: the state VR agency, state education agency and local schools, and the state IDD agency. Certo et al. (2003) note that obtaining a seamless transition relies on a unified effort by these partners to restructure services

[1] Findings from the ACS used a 5-year rolling average for calendar years 2017-2021. Findings for the RSA-911 used a 3-year rolling average for program years 2020-2022.

and share responsibility. While the focus of these findings is on AZ VR's actions to support a seamless transition from school to employment for youth with IDD, where appropriate, we will make additional recommendations for the IDD and education agencies, local schools, and other system partners regarding how they can support the efforts of Arizona's VR agency.

We have divided the findings into two sections:

1. Three key periods of transition
2. Overarching issues

The findings highlight strengths, weaknesses, and recommendations. This format allows for a thorough analysis that supports the identification of activities and actions to improve the transition to employment process for youth with IDD in Arizona.

Three Key Periods of Transition

There are three key periods in the transition process from school to adulthood during which youth with IDD begin to explore and formulate goals for employment and take a series of actions to achieve their goals. Broadly, these periods are:

1. awareness building for employment and community living
2. career exploration, goal formation, formal career planning, job development, and post-secondary education planning
3. school exit to employment and/or postsecondary education

For each period we describe how Arizona's policy and practice structure supports the services that are offered, how partners experience the services, and how VR can improve the experience.

It is important to note that there is some overlap of the periods in VR's current array of transition services. For example, Transition School to Work (TSW) programs are structured to provide services that overlap all these periods in the transition process and closely mirror best practices in the transition from school to work for youth with IDD. However, due to local control of the education system, many students do not have the opportunity to participate in a VR TSW program. Due to the limited reach of VR TSW programs, we will primarily discuss them within the second period of transition.

Awareness building for employment and community living

Pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) are the earliest opportunity (age 14+) that VR can engage with youth. Pre-ETS are intended to support awareness building in the domains of employment and community living and offer opportunities for early career exploration and goal formation. Findings come from a review of policy and practice documents and from key informant interviews with state agencies, schools, vendors, individuals with IDD, and families.

Strengths of VR's Pre-ETS model

Recent reviews of the literature indicate that Arizona's VR program demonstrates use of some evidence-based and best practices. For example, Whittenburg et al. (2023) reviewed the WIOA plans for 54 state/territory VR agencies and found that Arizona's contained 11 of 16 Research-Based Transition Recommendations, which was slightly more than the average. Additional strengths of the state's Pre-ETS model include:

VR has a tab on their website for Pre-ETS. When website users select this tab, they can read a description of Pre-ETS, a description of who can receive the services, and how to apply for services.

All youth with disabilities ages 14–22 are eligible for Pre-ETS regardless of the type of academic coursework they are pursuing. This includes youth who are enrolled in secondary, postsecondary, or another formal educational setting. A provider noted that the broad eligibility criteria is very

important for youth with IDD who are enrolled in life skills classes who are not yet a VR TSW client or who may never enroll in VR TSW. Lastly, youth who become VR clients can participate in all Pre-ETS curricula by completing one request form.

Another strength is that youth can access any of the five Pre-ETS curricula as many times as needed between the ages of 14 and 22 if they are not accessed more than once annually. This is particularly important for youth with IDD who may require multiple opportunities to deeply learn and practice using the information.

VR regulations allow youth to choose the pace of enrollment in each of the five Pre-ETS curricula. One provider noted that when individuals choose to participate in curricula one at a time, they have an opportunity to emphasize after each curricula that youth should plan to open a VR application and continue their employment journey. Another strength is that Pre-ETS vendors can provide services at any point of the year and during daytime and evening hours.

Pre-ETS are provided through contracts with vendors and through TSW contracted school to work programs. For youth who are not participating in a TSW contracted school to work program, they may learn about Pre-ETS vendors in each Arizona county through the VR website. Information includes vendor organization name, local vendor staff contact information, how to submit a Pre-ETS request, and a short description of the Pre-ETS curricula provided by each vendor. This information can help support the selection of a Pre-ETS provider.

VR staff have been marketing Pre-ETS through state and local transition fairs and conferences, letters sent out by the Arizona Department of Education to school district special education directors, sharing directly with local special educators, and other state and local opportunities since Pre-ETS were implemented in the state. An additional effort to expand awareness of the service is that vendors are encouraged to market their services as a part of the contract with VR. This additional marketing permission is specific to Pre-ETS, and no other VR state contract allows vendors to market their services.

Pre-ETS can be provided to individuals one on one or in a small group setting. One provider noted that the group setting enhances peer-to-peer learning and engagement. Vendors engaged in this study noted that they can tailor each of the five Pre-ETS curricula to the needs of individuals regardless of disability type or support need. They also noted that as they have become more skilled in implementing Pre-ETS over time, they have hired special education teachers to refine the curriculum and develop new modes of instruction, including using video, online learning modules, and field trips when possible. Other partners noted that while initially Pre-ETS was not well geared to youth with IDD, they have slowly seen improvements in some vendors implementation of the service to this population.

For youth enrolled in VR-contracted TSW programs, Pre-ETS is embedded in the curriculum. A further part of enrolling in a TSW program is becoming a client of VR and developing an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). TSW clients do not need to request Pre-ETS. Youth that participate in Pre-ETS as part of participation in a VR-funded TSW program have opportunities for strong overall engagement across school, family, and VR during this point in time. This is not a surprising finding due to the highly structured nature of the TSW contract and regular presence of VR counselors at TSW sites. TSW contracted schools that we spoke with noted that youth move through a series of VR services including Pre-ETS and have formal VR cases opened as part of their commitment to the program. School staff who were engaged in VR funded TSW programs noted that they offered support for youth and their families to select vendors in their community.

Weaknesses of VR's Pre-ETS model

Accessing Pre-ETS is one of the first times youth with IDD and their families may engage with VR. While we noted strengths, we found that partners had significant concerns with the implementation of Pre-ETS. One key concern partners expressed was that many individuals are not connected to Pre-ETS until age 16 and in many cases their last year of school, despite VR Pre-ETS being available at age 14. One provider noted that school guidance counselors vary in their knowledge and understanding of VR's Pre-ETS, how VR Pre-ETS differ from educational and vocational services offered by school districts, and how the services can provide complementary supports and information to youth and their families. This leads to either no request or a late request to VR. This is unfortunate because youth can access these services as young as 14 to support the development of their career interests and support planning for high school coursework or participation in a formal VR TSW program if one exists within their school. There was also confusion about how many times before an individual turned 22 that they could access Pre-ETS, what type of school setting the youth needed to be enrolled in to be eligible for Pre-ETS, and whether becoming a VR client eliminates the ability to participate in Pre-ETS.

The expectation for Pre-ETS vendors to take a lead role in marketing their organization's Pre-ETS classes to schools has had some unintended consequences. Pre-ETS vendors described a scenario where youth and families are informed by the school about a specific Pre-ETS vendor who is working with the school and then the vendor and the school partner to have the VR Pre-ETS request paperwork completed. While this is efficient for vendors and schools, it impacts other areas of the transition practice that VR has a responsibility to address under WIOA. We will discuss these areas throughout this section.

Another concern multiple partners expressed is that the Pre-ETS request process is not well understood. While the request form can partially be completed online, allowing for the size of the fields to be magnified on a computer screen, most noted that people complete a paper copy of the form. This is a challenge because the printed copy has small font and crowded text, which makes processing and completing the form hard for many families. Additionally, the form uses VR and education specific terms with no explanation of the terms, making it hard for families to understand what they are requesting. Other parts of the Pre-ETS request form, such as verification of guardianship status and the submittal of guardianship paperwork, often leads to incomplete paperwork and a slowdown in the Pre-ETS request process.

Lastly, the form has a section for Pre-ETS contractors to complete. While including vendors on the Pre-ETS request form is likely intended to reduce paperwork for service requests, it adds to the lack of understanding about the request process and implies that a vendor should be identified prior to the individual requesting Pre-ETS from VR.

Vendors noted challenges of being included as a section on the Pre-ETS request form as well. For example, the need to identify which of the five Pre-ETS sessions they would be providing and when they would be providing them. While it is important for VR to know what sessions an individual is being authorized for and ultimately completes, including it on the individual request form does not offer individuals and families a chance to learn about the range of Pre-ETS vendors in their community prior to requesting the service.

The provision of Pre-ETS can be limited by informal processes established between schools and vendors. Vendors shared that when they worked with schools, both they and the school preferred to provide all five Pre-ETS curricula as a block of classes over a multiweek period during the traditional academic year. The number of weeks estimated for the full block of classes varied across vendors, with estimates from 8–20 weeks (about four and a half months). Vendors also prefer the block group format because it maximizes their revenue, as the payment rate for each

Pre-ETS curricula is the same whether provided in a one-to-one or group setting. Interestingly, vendors noted that the block session format could be a disadvantage in recruiting youth for Pre-ETS. They noted that families often decline to complete the Pre-ETS request form when sessions are offered in this format because of concerns about interruptions in the school schedule. Schools and families worry Pre-ETS take away from academic time, and often these services are provided in study hall. For youth who use study hall to receive additional academic support, it is another scheduling barrier to Pre-ETS.

Vendors try to run multiple sessions of the five Pre-ETS curricula as a block during the school year during the school day but have found it makes it difficult to have a consistent volume of students to predictably allocate staff or hire new staff to provide the services in schools. The school calendar contains breaks in service due to holidays and required school activities and this reduces opportunities for the provision of Pre-ETS. One family shared that while their youth was participating in Pre-ETS during summer break, it wasn't clear that opportunities to participate in Pre-ETS outside of the school setting were well developed or well publicized. One school district that does not have a TSW contract noted that they would be open to becoming a VR vendor solely for Pre-ETS to expand access to this service during, before, and after school hours, but to date had been told this was not possible.

There is no method for assessing the quality of implementation or impact of Pre-ETS on the long-term employment trajectory of youth with IDD at the state or vendor level. One vendor shared that their metric is whether there is repeat business from a school and that the survey the vendor distributes about service satisfaction does not provide information to help them improve their services. It is also not clear what happens if youth who are authorized for all five Pre-ETS curricula do not complete participation in all the Pre-ETS sessions. Vendors noted that they reported to VR when a student did not complete all aspects of the course for billing purposes, and vendors assumed this meant that the individual was "closed from Pre-ETS". The term closure in VR services has a very specific meaning and suggests that the individual would need to complete the full Pre-ETS request process again. This is unfortunate because the Pre-ETS request form offers the option to note this is a "continuation of services" so that the entire form and documentation only needs to be completed once.

The connection to Pre-ETS through schools is limiting to individuals and families in other ways. Vendors shared that once a vendor begins working with a local school, that school typically does not want to work with other Pre-ETS vendors. This creates a service environment where vendors strive to be the sole source of Pre-ETS at a school but don't like it when they can't expand into additional schools. The consequence of this for individuals and families is lack of choice and opportunity to select a provider that best meets their unique needs. In other words, just because a vendor has an established relationship with a school does not mean that they are the best vendor to meet every youth at that school's needs.

One large vendor who contracts with both VR and DDD noted that they viewed providing Pre-ETS as a strategy to create a relationship with youth and their family in the hopes that this will lead the youth and their family to choose them as their long-term DDD provider post-school exit. A staff member at this vendor shared, "Pre-ETS isn't about VR but about connecting with schools. As a VR and DDD vendor, the goal of Pre-ETS is to get students to apply for VR and/or DDD adult services." This is an efficient method for the vendor, but it can lead to other unintended consequences for the individual and their family related to informed choice during the career exploration and job development phases and at post-school exit.

There is also a lack of understanding in the field about when an individual can request and participate in Pre-ETS. We heard from partners that they thought that youth could not participate

in each Pre-ETS curriculum more than once or use multiple Pre-ETS vendors for different services, and they were unclear about how school transition services and Pre-ETS curricula were different. There was also a lack of understanding among these groups regarding how Pre-ETS and TSW programs are structured and why youth who are clients of a VR TSW program do not need to request Pre-ETS as a separate service. Vendors, school staff, and families all expressed confusion.

Family engagement for youth with IDD was another significant weakness in Arizona's Pre-ETS model. There does not appear to be a process to support early engagement of families in Pre-ETS. For example, family engagement was focused on providing permission for youth to request Pre-ETS. The Pre-ETS request form section for vendors asks Pre-ETS vendors to check the box on the individual request for Pre-ETS that indicates information was provided about how to pursue VR services. However, there is not a clear pathway for families to engage in the process of selecting the Pre-ETS vendor or learn about the outcomes of the youth's participation in the service. One partner noted that VR reviews and approves each Pre-ETS vendor's curriculum to ensure that it meets their standards, but there is wide discretion on vendors instruction techniques, and often individuals and families are selecting a vendor without guidance on what might be best for them.

Vendors noted that they provided written summaries to VR about the youth's participation in each Pre-ETS but that there was no summary information provided directly to youth and their families. When youth receive Pre-ETS one on one, vendors often share this information verbally, but there is not a written record that points youth and their families toward a next step on their transition process or how to include the outcomes Pre-ETS participation in school or employment planning.

Additionally, because family members are not aware of the full range of how youth can benefit from Pre-ETS, they may decline the services while the youth is enrolled in school. One parent shared that during her son's last year of high school she received an email about Pre-ETS letting her know she could fill out a form for services. When she asked, "Do you (VR) help them get employment?" She was told, "No, we just prepare them to get ready for interviews." The mom felt that if that was all VR did, she could do that herself with her child. Her overall impression of VR was that it does not help people find jobs, it just gives them some preparation. An education staff member shared a similar perspective about how Pre-ETS isn't identified and marketed as an important step in preparing youth for adulthood, but that it is just another thing that needs to be considered prior to school exit.

Families also shared that they have declined Pre-ETS or stopped Pre-ETS because the content seemed too advanced for their transition-age youth with IDD. These families shared that they often didn't know why they should prioritize any type of engagement with VR until the year prior to school exit or after the youth has left school. This is particularly troubling because families were unaware that Pre-ETS are only available prior to age 22 and they should prioritize participation as young as 14 to enhance the student's ability to participate in planning for their final years of education and post-school activities.

Recommendations to strengthen VR's Pre-ETS model

Incomplete and incorrect information about Pre-ETS and disjointed processes for accessing Pre-ETS are barriers to youth with IDD. In this section, we share recommendations for Arizona's VR program to reduce these barriers.

The most recent publicly available Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) between Arizona Department of Economic Security and the Arizona Department of Education went into effect on July 1, 2022. The previous IGA had been established on July 25, 2013, prior to the WIOA and the establishment of Pre-ETS, and it is important to note that the most recent IGA had been in place for less than one year when we collected and analyzed data for this report.

To inform implementation of the new IGA, Arizona must consider developing statewide guidance on the process for the outreach, identification, and referral of students with disabilities across VR, DDD, and education. Section 5.9 of the 2022 IGA describes steps for how local coordination planning efforts should occur, with the intent that processes be individualized to each public education entity (i.e., school district, charter school, accommodation school, state-supported institution, or other political subdivision of the state with responsibility for providing education to children with disabilities).

As of July 2023, Arizona had 691 school districts including 236 traditional districts, 432 charter districts, and 23 other educational organizations (Arizona Department of Education, 2023). If just traditional school districts and their local VR and DDD offices were to develop these local processes, there is the potential for 236 different methods. As previously described, the localization of the referral leads to a lack of uniformity in the field and confusion in the field at the VR office, school, and vendor levels. This is not the intent of WIOA; rather the intent is for VR to establish an early and ongoing presence in the lives of youth. VR should take a key role with DDD and education in providing joint guidance to the field on the development of these local agreements by describing existing, high-quality processes already in place in Arizona that support the identification of youth who are potentially eligible for VR services, and that this process should begin at age 14.

An additional section of the 2022 IGA includes opportunities for VR staff to provide consultation, technical assistance, and training (Section 5.4) to determine if VR Pre-ETS are duplicative of school instructional content related to self-advocacy, work-based learning, job exploration, counseling on postsecondary and training opportunities, and work-readiness training. Many schools developed their array of transition services prior to the passage of WIOA and the establishment of VR funded Pre-ETS. Under the IGA in effect from 2013–2022 (post passage of WIOA), confusion occurred in the field regarding when, if, and how to determine a school is providing a service. Under the 2022 IGA, VR and education could, at minimum, develop a rubric to determine if Pre-ETS and school services are complementary or duplicative. This would aid in the confidence local transition teams have in supporting youth to request each of the VR Pre-ETS curricula.

We recommend Arizona provide plain language guidance to VR counselors, DDD case managers, vendors, schools, and families that youth who are not in a TSW program or a VR client should request Pre-ETS as early as possible, preferably at age 14. It should also be made clear that the individual does not need to have a Pre-ETS vendor identified prior to requesting the service and that they can participate in any or all the Pre-ETS that fit their needs and schedules. For some youth and families, that might mean receiving support from a VR counselor to better understand each of the Pre-ETS curricula either before or after they request participation, and that Pre-ETS includes education about employment and life skill development. Guidance should include real life examples of how participation in each of the Pre-ETS curricula benefited individuals with different types of disabilities, including IDD, and supported their long-term career planning. These examples should be told from the perspective of the individual and their support network, including their family and school staff.

We recommend Arizona amend the VR Pre-ETS request form so that any information related to contactor/vendor selection is a separate form from the individual request. This would ensure that youth and their family understand they have the right to make an informed choice related to Pre-ETS vendors, understand that they can select different vendors for each of the five services if they choose, and understand that approval of the individual's request is not dependent on a vendor.

We recommend that Arizona develop a method for assessing the impact of Pre-ETS on the long-term employment trajectory of youth with IDD at the state or vendor level. In 2020, the federal

RSA RehabData Workgroup identified existing metrics within the RSA-911 data set that could provide state VR programs with additional information on the quality of Pre-ETS (Rehabilitation Services Administration RehabData Workgroup, 2020). Arizona should consider, at a minimum, examining and reporting on metrics during each program year (PY), such as number of potentially eligible students with disabilities, number and percent of potentially eligible students with disabilities who received Pre-ETS, and number and percent of potentially eligible students with disabilities who applied to the VR Program. This data should be disaggregated by VR region, vendor, and disability type. For each of the five Pre-ETS curricula, Arizona should examine and report additional data, including number of potentially eligible students who received each service type, number of students who received each service type under an IPE, number of students who received each service type as both potentially eligible and under an IPE, number of students who received each service type and exited with employment during the PY, and the number of students who received each service type and exited without employment during the PY. If the PY number of individuals is large enough to protect individuals' anonymity, this data should be disaggregated by VR region, vendor, and disability type. We suggest a minimum size of 30 individuals for each characteristic; if there are not adequate numbers of individuals, we recommend to combine data for several PYs.

We recommend Arizona provide guidance to youth with IDD who have been approved for Pre-ETS on how to select a service vendor to meet their needs. For example, VR could offer a list of questions to use when accessing Pre-ETS vendors, such as:

- Does the vendor have experience working with people with my specific needs?
- How will I receive feedback from the vendor after I complete the curriculum?
- What methods (PowerPoint, workbooks, videos, field trips) will be used in instruction? Do those methods meet my learning needs?
- Will instruction be in person or over the internet?
- Will the instruction be in a group or one on one setting? If in a group, how large will the group be?

This is just a preliminary list of screening questions youth with IDD may find beneficial. VR should also consider how to engage youth with disabilities in the development of this type of guidance.

We recommend Arizona provide guidance to VR counselors and vendors about how often youth can access any one type of Pre-ETS. This will clear up misconceptions that a youth can only access each service once prior to age 22. Additional guidance could also include information about how to help a person who has engaged in any Pre-ETS to be aware of how opening a formal VR case will help them engage in more in-depth career development, obtainment, and stabilization services.

Pre-ETS participation is no guarantee that youth, families, and schools have the knowledge to move toward the next steps of formal career planning and engagement with VR. VR should require vendors to provide written summaries to each participant for each Pre-ETS curricula provided that describes the content the individual was exposed to and make formal recommendations for next steps on how to engage with VR to further the youths' goals.

Early Career Exploration, Goal Formation, Formal Career Planning, Job Development, and Postsecondary Education Planning

For youth with IDD, becoming a client of the VR program helps to facilitate deeper engagement with formal career planning, job development, and postsecondary education planning. Literature suggests that early case initiation by VR exerts a positive impact on service outcomes for youth transitioning to adulthood (Luecking et al., 2018). Youth who are enrolled in a TWS program are

clients of VR and have access to the full array of VR services. Youth in AZ who are not enrolled in a TSW program can become VR clients by applying to VR, being determined eligible for services, and agreeing to have a case opened with VR.

Strengths of VR's early career exploration, goal formation formal career planning, job development, and postsecondary education planning

VR has tracked and published service and outcome data related to transition-age youth having an open case with VR. This data was also translated into infographics and made available on Arizona VR's website. Data has also been published on youth who are dual eligible for VR and DDD services. Of this second group, 64%, or 219 applications were received in PY 2020.

Senior central office VR administration expressed that they want to develop better access to available VR services for youth with IDD and believe that youth with IDD can benefit from VR.

VR contracted TSW programs are an important established opportunity for youth with IDD. Established in the early 2000s, they represent the state's most significant and long-term effort to put best practices in place for the transition from school to adulthood. The contracts provide a structured set of vocational and independent living experiences for youth to become ready for careers and postsecondary education.

VR TSW programs are known for facilitating a direct and strong connection to VR transition coordinators, local VR counselors, and resources for schools to establish best practices in the provision of transition services, including resources to hire staff. For example, one recently retired school staff member who oversaw a VR TSW program noted that because of their school district's contract with VR and the matching TSW funds, the district had the financial resources to hire staff that was outside of the school district's traditional financial resources. At the time of his retirement, the program had four teacher coordinators, 13 support staff, and served 200 students across four high schools in the school district. Another partner noted that VR TSW contracts offer regularly scheduled opportunities for VR counselors to work with youth during the school day and establish one on one relationships with the youth.

In 2023, VR updated the TSW IGA structure. One particularly valuable update was the opportunity for schools to use TSW funds to pay youth for their work. This is important because a lead indicator of youth transitioning from school to a job in the community is working in paid employment prior to school exit (Carter et al., 2012; Mazzotti et al., 2021; Test et al., 2009). For the 2022–2023 school year, this was an optional activity in the TSW contract, however, in one district that piloted the payment, partners felt that paying for work helped the youth to have more control and autonomy over their money, provided an opportunity to implement the financial skills youth had learned in the program, and helped parents understand their child's ability to manage money.

TSW contracts also support and encourage best practice in transition services by requiring youth to have direct access to curricula to build employment skills and knowledge, including Pre-ETS; self-assessment activities to understand interests, strengths, barriers, and needs; disability awareness; skill building and career exploration; postsecondary education and training opportunities; application to postsecondary education; awareness of disability accommodations; ability to conduct job searches, participate in resume development, apply for employment, and engage in interviews; engage in formal Work-Based-Learning Experiences (WBLE); and develop a post-high school plan to identify community resources to support employment and independent living.

There are benefits for students with disabilities whose district has a TSW contract, even if the youth is not a TSW student. One VR counselor noted that the relationships that are developed

between school and VR staff because of the contract support a deeper understanding of each entity's services and resources and often lead to a more streamlined application process. For example, in those schools, the district staff were able to confidently explain to families why they should provide permission for the school to provide VR a copy of the students IEP.

TSW supports flexibility in how services are provided at the local level, and schools can contract with vendors in their community or develop in-house services and support as needed. In the next section, we describe examples of how this flexibility results in different types of supports being available through descriptions of three different TSW programs:

Descriptions of Three TSW Programs

Description of District A, a TSW located in Pima County

District A is in Pima County. Much of the community is Hispanic or Latino, 33% of households are headed by a woman, and the percentage of households living below the poverty line is about twice the state average (National Center for Education and Statistics, 2023a).

There are two primary sets of TSW services in the school Practical Assessment Evaluation Simulation (PAES) and Adult Transition Center. TSW participants in PAES are described as having mild to moderate ID. PAES involves simulated work environments that focus on customer service, food preparation, industrial services, business and technology, and computer data entry. Youth benefit from the realistic aspects of these evaluations and often pursue more advanced programs after exiting high school, while others can transition directly to a job in the community.

The district's Adult Transition Center is for students who have completed all academic requirements. It supports a range of support needs, including students with mild to moderate ID and students who require more intense supports and have behavioral health needs. The Adult Transition Center focuses on independent living (e.g., how to read food labels, take coffee orders), pre-employment skills, and independent living.

Description of District B, a TSW located in Maricopa County

District B is in Maricopa County in an exurb of the Phoenix area. Slightly less than half of the district is white, and a similar percentage are Hispanic or Latino. About 15% of households are headed by a woman, and the percentage of households living below the poverty line is slightly less than the state average (National Center for Education and Statistics, 2023b).

Students enrolled in District B's TSW program learn about work through both classroom and community experiences across four program tiers. Typically, each tier occurs over the course of one school year with community experiences built in each year and not just in the final years.

District B's TSW has both internship and externship opportunities. Internship opportunities in the school operate as businesses through a school store, catering, coffee shop, screen printing, and car detailing. The youth experience real work expectations, such as following timelines, requesting time off, and getting pay stubs. Opportunities for externships and permanent job placements are made available to youth through in-house career fairs. Youth in this program also participate in the local vocational school. Students who need more support can participate in Project Search, although the site is not in their immediate community.

The school invites staff from Ability360 to provide Disability Benefits 101(DB101) training to youth and to participate in parent nights to help educate both youth and parents about benefits management. While in school, the TSW program provides transportation for students, but the program also teaches youth how to navigate the available public transit, including the bus and light rail system that can take youth all the way into Phoenix, which is more than 20 miles away.

The TSW communication specialist works with the teachers and youth on social media development to support youth advocacy skills and promote the program. For example, youth create videos and other social media marketing tools that highlight the experiences and outcomes of TSW participants; this information is available on Facebook Live, X, and Instagram. Youth are supported to use tools like Canvas and develop digital story telling skills. While this work evolved organically based on the interests of students and skills of staff, it is a set of employment and life skills that youth graduating high school in the 2020s need for employment and community engagement.

Description of District C, a TSW located in Maricopa County

District C is in Maricopa County, in suburban and exurban areas of Phoenix. Most of the district is white, and a quarter are Hispanic or Latino. About 20% of households are headed by a woman, and the percentage of households living below the poverty line is slightly less than the state average (National Center for Education and Statistics, 2023c).

District C's TSW program is available for youth in their first year of high school or at age 16, whichever occurs first. Staff value that they were able to tailor their program to their local community, though they noted this could make some things more challenging for TSWs in lower resourced areas of the state. District C refers all youth with IDD to VR by the end of their sophomore year and would like to see them enrolled as VR clients during their junior year of high school. During their senior year, students can engage in career planning or work orientation curriculum. Staff noted that most youth with IDD participate in the work orientation curriculum where there are classroom and paid internship opportunities. Previously, the program was focused on the 18–22 age range, but staff felt this did not provide enough of a transition period for youth to identify and accomplish their goals.

Description of One Program not Funded by VR

Some school districts that do not have a VR TSW contract have established their own transition programs. Partners described District D as one of the most highly regarded examples of a school program that is not funded by VR.

Description of District D, a Maricopa County school district with no TSW contract

District D is in Maricopa County in an urban area. About a quarter of households are white, and more than 50% are Hispanic or Latino. About 30% of households are headed by a woman, and about 25% of households live below the poverty line (National Center for Education and Statistics, 2023d).

This district has chosen not to establish a VR TSW program and does not have an IGA or MOU with VR. Using a combination of state and federal funding sources and grants, the school developed a program that is focused on competency-based learning and meets the needs of their students. A school staff member described the program as focused on, "Putting the student first." By focusing on providing a person-centered education and transition plan, they work to build IEPs that connect directly to the goal of transition to employment and community living.

The district begins encouraging youth to request Pre-ETS and making formal referrals for youth with IDD to VR several years prior to the anticipated date of school exit. Most youth with IDD spend five years in high school prior to exit to extend their time building skills in school. Families are supported to understand the multi-year process of transition through a Parent Council. This provides families with the information they need to support youth to become more independent and autonomous.

Weaknesses of VR's early career exploration, goal formation formal career planning, job development, and postsecondary education planning

TSW is not described in a prominent place on the VR website and there is no listing of school districts on the VR website that have TSW contracts with VR.

The is no common set of publicly available metrics about the outcomes of TSW programs and the outcomes of TSW programs are also not highlighted on the VR website. One partner noted that skills are measured pre and post program participation, but they do not believe that programs review individual records to guide the need for program improvement. Another partner shared that not all youth with IDD who participate in VR TSW exit school with a job, however, not publishing this data makes it difficult to set district-specific goals or suggest efforts to improve outcomes. As described in the previous section, Arizona should consider how the outcome metrics identified by the RSA RehabData Works workgroup could be applied to the TSW program.

The quality of activities and outcomes from VR TSW contracts with schools can vary based upon the knowledge and skills of the school staff. One VR counselor noted that a local school in their region used to have a VR TSW program, but it wasn't implemented well, which resulted in the school and VR deciding not to renew the contract. The transition program staff at the school have since changed, but the school district and VR do not have a strong working relationship. The unintended consequence of previous poor implementation has resulted in several classes of exiting students not having access to VR TSW or a strong school-to-VR connection.

The overwhelming majority of school districts in the state do not have a VR TSW program. In state fiscal year 2024, there are only 24 TSW programs (K. Mackey, personal communication, September 28, 2023) in all of Arizona's in all of Arizona's 236 public school districts (this does not include the 432 charter school districts and 23 other educational organizations). Several partners noted that school districts that do not have VR TSW contracts may be reluctant to establish a contract because they represent a 5-year financial commitment for school districts, however there was widespread concern that youth who are enrolled in a school without a VR funded TSW program miss out on vital opportunities to pursue employment. Areas of concern include:

- While there are some schools that have transition programs independent of VR TSW, we cannot assume that each is offering the array of best practices that are available through TSW, leaving youth across the state reliant on applying to VR to access VR employment and independent living services.
- Schools without VR TSW have overall limited engagement with VR. One partner noted that it is rare for VR to attend transition IEP meetings when there is no TSW program. Another shared, "VR is focused on schools they have contracts with, but other schools don't get the touch they deserve."
- Lack of connection between schools and VR can make it difficult to ensure VR applications have been received and that VR has all the necessary information from the school.
- There is often no direct connection to youth who attend private school or who are home-schooled regardless of whether they reside in a district that has a VR TSW program.

Without a direct connection between the school and VR through TSW, there appears to be an even greater likelihood of parents having poor information about VR. One example shared was that schools often tell parents not to apply for VR too early because the youth will be denied VR services because they do not have employment skills. Another shared that schools in many areas of the state continue to tell youth and families that they should not apply for VR until the last semester of the last year of high school, and that many youth leave school immediately after they complete their credits, which doesn't leave adequate time for youth to participate in formal career planning, work-based learning, or postsecondary education planning. Further adding confusion for youth and families is that there is no common understanding as to how to know a youth with IDD is prepared to become a VR client. For example, most families are not aware of and do not understand how VR services can support employment and independent living goals that are not provided by the school or DDD.

Despite the desire of central VR office administration, partners perceived that VR counselors at the local level typically refer youth with IDD to DDD for all employment services. Multiple partners also shared that there appears to be no standardization of who is accepted as a VR client, but that youth with IDD are overall less likely to have a case opened. Many felt that the assigned VR counselor was really the determining factor and not the client's characteristics. Others expressed that it was based on the school district staff's vocational assessment tools and knowledge of employment for youth with IDD, and that even when youth are referred to VR, the information schools provide regularly does not support the need to open a VR case.

Many VR counselors, school district staff, and VR vendors who are working with youth with IDD have limited experiences implementing individual supported employment services. There is no universal training or ongoing technical assistance to ensure these individuals have the skills required to serve youth with IDD, including those with the most significant disabilities. The lack of knowledge results in youth not having access to the types of real-world experiential assessments that are essential for youth with IDD to demonstrate that they are prepared to work in the community. Others described that there is an abundance of focus on what and how many VR services individuals have received without having an opportunity to explain to the individual the goal of each service and provide information on why someone may choose to receive a service or decline to receive a service. One VR expert noted that this focus causes the clinical component of VR service provision to be lost.

Almost universally, partners felt that youth with IDD need more opportunities for multiple paid work experiences and a longer period of time to use job development services to refine employment goals prior to exit from school. Additionally, partners felt that youth with IDD require opportunities to have their own checking account, make their own purchases with the money they earn from work, and develop an understanding about what adulthood is going to look like. Advocates and families shared that VR does not explicitly fund Project Search as a service for youth with IDD, which makes it harder to have access and expand these types of intense services.

No partners identified that they use or have awareness of how to use labor market data from VR or Arizona@Work to identify industries that are projected to have significant growth within their local economies or how to support youth to gain the skills required to work in these industries. This leads to a narrow understanding of the types of industries and jobs that youth could pursue. Many partners were critical of the focus on customer service jobs for youth with IDD despite Arizona's robust and diverse economy.

Lack of awareness of the labor market and emerging industries also made it difficult for youth with IDD to justify the need for VR to pay for postsecondary education or career and technical training. Partners felt that VR counselors were reluctant to pay for additional education and training and

were not aware of the ways in which the training would improve employment opportunities for youth. Additionally, partners felt that families wanted VR to pay for their child's postsecondary education, but that they did not understand that in making the request, the postsecondary education needed to support a career goal.

When asked about Section 511 training for youth who may be contemplating 14c subminimum wage employment, partners responded that they had no experience with this type of training. This could be because the respondents for this study represented expertise on VR services that support the transition from school to integrated employment, and not sheltered work.

Recommendations for VR's early career exploration, goal formation formal career planning, job development, and postsecondary education planning

We recommend the following to Arizona:

- Resume publishing data on VR services and outcomes for transition age youth and continue making the data available in plain language and infographics.
- Develop and publish a list of VR TSW contracts, including school district location, number of youths participating, demographics of youth, and a description of each program's features. Use this data to encourage the expansion of schools with VR TSW contracts and ensure that growth is distributed across the state.
- Track and publish employment results that compare participants in VR TSW employment outcomes to non-TSW clients to document the importance of the program. Also track and publish this data and share it with school districts that do not have a VR TSW contract to ensure that they regularly consider the impact that implementing a contract with VR could have on their students. Provide this information in infographic and plain language form and update the data at least annually on the VR website.
- Support VR transition staff and local level VR supervisors to strengthen connections with local schools, especially school administrators and school boards, to ensure they have the knowledge needed to consider establishing a VR TSW contract or expanding an existing contract. Partners noted that these administrators and board members were often hesitant to establish the IGA for a TSW with VR because they did not fully understand the benefits of TSW for youth. Including information about existing TSW service methodologies and outcomes is an important step to ensure schools can make a fully informed choice about VR TSW.
- Every five years, evaluate a sample of existing TSW contracts to determine the use of best and innovative practices and identify the actions VR can take to scale up the practices across the state. Include a focus on continuous quality improvement so that all TSW programs across the state can receive descriptions of the identified practices, amend VR contracts based on the findings to encourage the scaling up of practices, and share the findings directly with school staff so they have the information and tools to improve their services for youth.
- TSW Coordinators in each school district have opportunities to network, and these efforts should be expanded and structured so that direct support staff and instructional assistants also have an opportunity to learn from one another. For example, consider an annual summary of individual employment success stories that describes the actions direct support staff took to assist youth, a quarterly online community of practice meeting, or a repository of best practices in direct support.
- Scale up VR TSW's pilot payment to youth who are employed under TSW contracts. Ensure that as part of this scaling up, schools include access to Arizona's DB101 curriculum and benefits counseling for youth and families.

- Consider the importance of letting school districts who have TSW contracts know that if the TSW staff who have completed either the APSE Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP) credential or advanced employment training through the College of Employment Services, Griffin-Hammis Associates, and/or Marc Gold and Associates, they could request a higher line item budget for staff wages in the TSW contract if the staff with these credentials were paid higher wages.
- If a youth with IDD applies to become a VR client, assume that they want to work and that they can benefit from VR supported employment services. This is particularly important if the youth has participated in any Pre-ETS prior to applying to VR. If they have participated in Pre-ETS, they are displaying that they have already benefited from VR and have a desire to work.
- For youth with IDD who have applied to VR but have not previously requested Pre-ETS, provide guidance to VR counselors regarding the importance of opening a VR case and identifying Pre-ETS in the service plan. If the youth is within 12 months of school exit, help the youth and their family prioritize VR services that will most quickly result in employment in the community.
- Develop and distribute a score card for youth and families to determine if they are receiving employment and independent living services that meet their goals and needs. Provide a link to this score card directly on the VR website. Provide this information in infographic and plain language form. Here is an example to consider from Florida.
- Review guidance from VRTAC-QM (Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management) regarding how to develop an IPE that ensures youth have access to VR services to develop and pursue career interests through postsecondary education, vocational training, job search, job placement, job retention, job follow-up, and job follow-along services prior to the development of a specific employment goal. Provide guidance to VR counselors in the field to ensure that they are not determining youth ineligible for VR if they would benefit from these services.
- Industry and labor market data from Arizona@Work needs to become part of the package of information that VR counselors use when working with youth with IDD, their families, and schools to support access to the diversity of industries and career types in Arizona.
- Track youth who are receiving Section 511 training to determine if they are choosing to request Pre-ETS and/or being referred to VR. Based on the outcomes of the data, develop opportunities for intervention to support access to Pre-ETS and becoming a VR client for supported employment.

School Exit to Employment and/or Postsecondary Education

The last 12 months of youth's enrollment in secondary school is a time of excitement and change. At school exit, the predictability of the school day and year abruptly changes, the smooth handoff from school to employment and adult service systems is crucial to ensure that youth with IDD can quickly capitalize on the education and training they received in school and enter adulthood.

Strengths of school exit to employment and/or post-secondary education

Many VR offices with consistent long-term staff reported they had good relationships with DDD and schools in their community. When these long-term relationships exist, there is smoother and quicker sharing of information between VR, DDD, and schools. Additionally, VR TSW contracts support referral to DDD for youth with IDD.

VR has a senior level staff member whose primary responsibility is to support state and local level collaboration between VR and DDD. While this staff member supports collaboration for all

age groups, the relationship further bolsters the work of VR's statewide and regional transition coordinators. Specifically, the staff member has been instrumental in connecting VR staff to DDD staff in regions and offices where staff have a shorter tenure. This VR staff member also engages in opportunities for technical assistance provided through DDD's membership in the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN) and is a respected voice within the SELN network.

Through their MOU, VR and DDD have established quarterly meetings to focus on identifying barriers to employment outcomes for people who are clients of both VR and DDD.

During the transition period between exiting school and receiving long-term adult supports from DDD, several vendors reported that VR worked with them to negotiate additional service hours for youth with IDD when they needed extra support. A transition coordinator at a local school noted that DDD offers transition to employment program modules, but this was the only mention of this from any partner interview, suggesting that this is not widely known across Arizona.

State education policy and practice guidelines require a post-school goal for each youth with a disability to be in place prior to graduation. Goals can include employment and postsecondary education.

Partners felt that youth with disabilities who enroll in college or postsecondary training maintain a strong relationship with their VR counselor post-school exit.

Weaknesses of school exit to employment and/or post-secondary education

Partners felt that shallow interagency planning at the individual level often becomes a barrier to the smooth handoff from school to employment and adulthood when the student is about to graduate from school. One partner noted, "there is a major breakdown between the entities of the schools, DDD, VR, etc. If there was clear communication between all parties, that would greatly improve the passing of the torch from one service to the next." Others shared that many youth with IDD do not have a VR counselor participating in IEP meetings until the last six months of high school. This leaves limited time for true coordination and collaboration around a youth's transition to employment and VR's ability to provide expertise regarding employment, community living, postsecondary education, and/or career and technical education.

A contributing factor to the shallow interagency planning at the individual level is that many schools in Arizona lack a full-time staff member solely dedicated to coordinating the transition from school to adulthood. This often leaves students and their families to learn about VR through other entities besides their school and self-refer to VR. Partners shared that it is more typical than not for there to be breakdown in the communication process between the school, VR, and youth and their family as to the status of the VR referral. The issue becomes more acute if the school is not actively engaged with a local VR office or if the student exits school at 18 years of age without a plan to focus on postsecondary employment goals.

While state education policy and practice guidelines require a post-school goal for each youth with a disability be in place prior to graduation, there is limited interagency collaboration and knowledge sharing about how to develop a goal for integrated employment for youth with IDD. Youth with IDD are particularly vulnerable to being determined to have "needs that are too high and are not appropriate for competitive integrated employment". It was noted that while there have been recent improvements, too often transition goals are for youth to enter day habilitation or sheltered work. Partners also shared that because of the lack of guidance on how to develop and implement integrated employment goals for youth with more significant support needs, there was no ability to intervene with special education staff to ensure that youth with IDD were presumed able to work in the community.

Youth with IDD in schools may or may not be receiving services from DDD. When youth are receiving services, many families expect that the DDD case manager or family support coordinator will know how to support the handoff from school to all adult services. However, typically case managers and support coordinators who focus on school-age clients do not have this level of knowledge or experience.

Both DDD and VR staff noted that improvements are needed to ensure a seamless transition for youth with IDD who are DDD clients. Both agencies identified issues, including the need to track what happens to VR clients on an individual case level as they enter DDD adult long-term services and supports, the need to ensure that youth who have received VR services continue to pursue integrated employment through DDD as opposed to entering a day habilitation program, the need to support better case coordination between VR counselors and DDD case managers, and the need to ensure staff at each agency are aware of how their array of employment services and supports can work together to support youth with IDD during the handoff from school to adult services.

There is not a mechanism to ensure that meaningful information about the outcome of youth's participation in Pre-ETS, career exploration, WBLE, and other job development services while in school become part of the DDD case file. While there is typically less information lost when the youth is engaged with a vendor that provides services through both VR and DDD, there is not a standardized process or data sharing agreement to ensure this happens within or between vendors, schools, and state agencies.

Partners we interviewed did not talk about employment outcomes for youth with IDD who choose not to engage with DDD's long term services and supports system. There does not appear to be a formal count of how many youth exit school each year who would qualify for DDD but choose not to apply, what their employment status is at school exit, and if they are working, whether they access resources such as DB101, or open Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS) or Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE), which could be used to pay for long-term employment supports.

Most partners we interviewed did not talk about employment outcomes for youth with IDD who are enrolled in Arizona's private school system or who are homeschooled when they exit school. There does not appear to be a formal count of how many youth in private schools with IDD may exit school each year, whether they have applied for VR services, and what their employment status is at school exit. We did find that some private school enrollees had accessed Pre-ETS through vendors' relationships with their private school, but partners overall had limited experience with this population. Similarly, Department of Education staff noted that they have tried to make connections with the homeschool community through their statewide conference but as of spring 2023 had not been successful. Some families who participated in this study and homeschooled their youth with IDD noted their awareness of VR came from personal connections with other families, parental advocacy groups such as Raising Special Kids, and/or from their role as a professional in the disability system.

Below are two stories about students who became VR clients during the period of time immediately after exiting school.

Story about a home-schooled student engaging with VR

> One mother shared that her child had been homeschooled. After school exit, they applied to VR. The youth had not participated in Pre-ETS prior to school exit. The VR counselor they were paired with shared demographic characteristics with the youth, which the mom appreciated, but struggled to engage directly with the youth who has autism and does not use verbal communication. The VR counselor opened a VR case and shared a list of potential vendors but did not provide substantial guidance on how to select a vendor that was skilled in meeting the youth's needs. The mom completed

online research on the vendors in their area and this led the family to select a vendor that offered a wide array of VR services and was in their community.

Despite the youth having expressed an interest in exploring employment in the music industry, the vendor and VR counselor encouraged the development of an employment goal in customer service. Ultimately the vendor felt that the VR contracted services that they offered weren't enough to help the youth find employment and suggested that they would be better served through DDD funded services. This left the family confused and discouraged because they felt that the VR vendor was supposed to be able to benefit everyone. The family shared that the youth's VR case was opened in April and closed by July. At the time of the interview, the youth was participating in a DDD life skills program.

Story about a student who engaged with VR after an extra year of high school

A parent shared that their child stayed in school an additional year after they had earned enough credits to graduate and participated in a vocational and technical program where they had learned wiring and woodworking. The family was initially hesitant to have a case opened with VR because earlier in the youth's high school career, they were told that VR just provided training for job interviews. However, they did apply to VR and had a case opened during their final year of school. The family felt the vendor did a good job building a relationship with the youth and they supported the youth in VR-funded work adjustment training in food services. While this did not lead to the individual being hired in food service, it was a step in building the youth's resume. The family had hoped that the VR counselor and vendor would integrate services and supports that could help bring together the skills the youth learned through vocational and technical education and their employment experiences in food services to identify and obtain a job. They were disappointed when this did not happen, and the youth exited VR without employment.

Recommendations to improve school exit to employment and/or postsecondary education

Improving the process of exiting school and entering employment and or postsecondary education needs to begin as early as practical. We recommend the following to Arizona:

- "Build a Better VR consumer." This suggestion stems directly from feedback from several different partners. Many felt that as part of efforts to Build a Better VR Consumer, VR must develop mechanisms for youth and families to be better informed about the wide variety of post-school outcomes and VR's role in supporting the outcome. Partners also felt that youth and families need more information to advocate for the services that will help them meet their goals, and that it was important for youth and families to know what VR is not able to support and what the appropriate alternative resources. The hope is that this would reduce frustration amongst all partners and make the employment process more efficient and effective.
- Consider developing an ad hoc committee under the existing IGA between VR and the Department of Education to assess how to improve collaboration between schools and VR. The committee should be made up of state and local VR and education staff, school district staff at TSW and non-TSW schools, families, and youth with IDD and other significant disabilities to ensure the development of a timely referral processes for youth that begins at age 14. The group should also consider how to address myths about VR services for transition-age youth with IDD (using fact sheets, presentations, and training and consultation to school staff), streamline the application and referral process, standardize the vocational assessment practice to ensure best practices, and expand the knowledge of VR services to youth and families in private schools and who are homeschooled.

The outcome of the group should be a plan with concrete action steps for VR and the Department of Education that fall within their allowable statutes.

- Revise guidelines, time frames, and expectations, and address roles and responsibilities for youth, families, schools, VR, DDD, and vendors regarding what should be happening from middle school through school exit to ensure youth obtain high quality employment outcomes. The Arizona Community of Practice on Transition developed a framework that is available on the Arizona Employment First Resource section. However, it was last revised in 2017 and when asked, partners expressed little knowledge of its existence or use in the field. A transition coordinator in a VR TSW program described that they have already created their own fact sheets regarding what should be done to support transition at each grade level, which include information about what youth ages 18–21 can be doing while they are still enrolled in school. Another special education teacher mentioned the need for widespread dissemination of transition guides that, "start with the end in mind", regarding what the exit from school should look like and then work backwards to identify the actions that should occur to support the outcome. When vendors were asked what would improve their ability to serve transition-age youth, they described this type of guidance in particular. Partners, potentially through Arizona Employment First or another statewide organization, should convene an ad hoc committee to address this issue, gather existing best practices in local schools, develop a revised guide, and determine what training and technical assistance is required to implement this type of plan at each public school in Arizona.
- Mandate that interagency planning begin at age 14 for all transition-age youth with disabilities, including IDD enrolled in Arizona's public school system. This will likely require a change in state law, as under current law, the Department of Education and schools do not have to participate until students are 16 years of age. For youth with IDD, this discrepancy makes it highly unlikely they will receive information through their school encouraging them to request Pre-ETS at age 14. It also makes it unlikely that local schools will share potentially eligible youth with IDD to VR so that VR could conduct outreach to youth and their families. They should engage with relevant groups, including the ADDPC, Raising Special Kids, Arizona Employment First, and other statewide organizations, to solicit feedback and support to address this issue and build public awareness for this change. As public entities, VR, the Department of Education, and DDD cannot engage in political activities, but they can provide information to partners to inform their efforts.
- VR, the Department of Education, and DDD, through their existing IGAs and MOUs, should consider a long-range goal to share information through a common management information system for youth with IDD at the age of 14. The system should become a singular location to track and document referrals for service, share relevant information (including IEP transition goals and IPE development and goals), track outcomes of participation in Pre-ETS, track outcomes of participation in formal VR TSW or informal school district funded TSW programs, and share and track other relevant documentation that supports the seamless transition from school to adulthood. Youth and their families should be able to log into the system and view all materials related to their case, request corrections to inaccurate information, and track what is happening with their case regarding referrals and requests for services. As this is a long-range goal and will require significant fiscal and staff resources to implement, a first step will be identifying the last time each entity revised their case management information systems, and if and how data is currently shared electronically between each individual system.
- Youth with IDD who are enrolled in private schools, homeschooled, and/or who do not want to receive services and support from VR and DDD represent a unique challenge during the transition period. Building relationships with youth and their families who are parts of these groups will need to be intentional and coordinated across multiple state agencies

and partners. A first step would be to offer listening sessions across the state with a focus on areas that have a high proportion of individuals who are enrolled in private schools or who are homeschooled, and in areas where there are fewer referrals to VR and DDD to understand the current breadth and depth of individuals and their families' knowledge about the possibilities for adulthood and employment.

Overarching Issues in Current Practice

Interviews with professional partners (VR, DDD, Department of Education) as well as with local schools, vendors, advocates, and VR-involved families and individuals revealed several areas for targeted improvement. These include limited awareness of the purpose of VR's engagement in transition, VR staff turnover and its impact on VR capacity, capacity-building for VR vendors and VR counselors, awareness of AZ DB101, limited awareness about how to engage with youth with intersectional social characteristics, and low expectations for people with IDD.

Limited awareness of the purpose of VR's engagement in transition

A VR staff member noted, "I continue to believe that VR is a best kept secret despite our outreach efforts. Many job seekers aren't aware of the services that we can provide." Our findings reflect this statement. While advocates and professionals were readily able to describe strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in the transition from school to work, youth and families struggled to connect with the study and provide input. One reason shared for hesitating to participate in the study was that even if they had received a transition service from VR, their connection with the VR counselor and/or VR program was so limited that they did not feel they could comment on VR in a meaningful way. Others we spoke with who received Pre-ETS were unaware that these were VR contracted services, or in the case of one parent, "I had no idea that (my child) got Pre-ETS in the high school."

Families who participated in the study shared that they tried to go online for information. Families in particular expressed confusion regarding Arizona VR's web presence, often being met by a limited listing of available services and service descriptions, no explanation of VR terminology, and a search feature that provides information that is intended for state program and provider staff, not VR clients and their families. For example, on the homepage, the section "additional resources for information on VR" currently consists of only two, 1-page articles (one for navigating VR and one about VR and students), which are six and four years old respectively. The website stub for understanding VR's "collaboration with DDD" links to an hour-long video as well as the MOU, indicating this page is more for VR staff and management than it is for individuals and families. While the list of county VR offices is comprehensive, it is unclear whether someone should first call the toll-free number or their specific county's office. Further, the "Documents Center" search feature is not functional when compared to how individuals and families want to use the website. The information is broken down to short searchable pdfs on VR policy and practice guidance, but the structure of the search terms and filters leads to an incomplete and very disjointed understanding of the VR system.

The VR homepage connected to the Department of Economic Security (DES) provides a Spanish translation option, other language options appear available on the bottom of the website but do not lead anywhere, nor do they translate the VR page. An examination of Arizona's census data indicates that most DES websites should also make Mandarin and Cantonese (0.5%), Tagalog and Filipino (0.4%), Arabic (0.4%), and Navajo (1.3%) translation available (Statistical Atlas, n.d.). Also, VR should offer a plain language version of their website so youth with IDD and individuals with limited literacy skills can understand what services are offered, what their rights are, and who they can contact.

Similarly, Google searches for VR resources in Arizona at times lead to dead ends; for example, early in the writing of this report the authors identified that when they Googled "Arizona youth disability employment" the first link was to the DES website for "Employment Resources for People with Developmental Disabilities" where VR is the first link. But when they clicked on the link to VR's website, they were met with an error stating that page does not exist. It is important to note that when the authors notified VR administrators, they requested that DES immediately correct the link. While DES does have a place on their website to report website feedback it is difficult to find from the dropdown menu and places the responsibility on the user. DES should ensure that they have a process for auditing their website and identifying and correcting broken links outside of user notification.

Another factor impacting VR's communication with partners is the lack of a distinct social media presence. While DES, VR's umbrella agency, does have a Facebook page, its purpose is broad and does not offer exclusive content about the VR program. The Division of Employment and Rehabilitation Services (DERS) can share information about VR and request that it be posted to DES social media accounts. The fact that Arizona VR does not have a unique Facebook page or other social media accounts to disseminate information about VR resources, success stories, or statewide or regional VR events limits the impact of this communication method. This limits VR's opportunities to link to positive stories that other entities are creating about VR on social media. For example, District B's TSW program described how the program's youth use social media to disseminate information about the program and their success stories. Without a unique social media presence, VR is missing the opportunity to highlight the impact of these VR funded success stories.

Recommendations to address limited awareness of the purpose of VR's engagement in transition:

VR staff at the regional and state office levels described the impact of operating as an administration within the DERS, within DES and how it limited their opportunities to control their own online messaging. We recommend that VR and DERS public information office review their current web presence to document why and what changes are needed. At minimum, DERS and DES should conduct a general review of the VR website for comprehension and readability. State level VR staff expressed a commitment to facilitating increased coordination with DERS' public information office to share successes, a commitment to posting on social media, and a commitment to facilitating relationships with local VR offices to ensure multiple opportunities for DERS to identify and disseminate the impact of VR services.

VR staff turnover and the impact on VR capacity

The VR workforce in Arizona experiences high staff turnover. While many VR supervisors and managers spoke highly of their staff's passion, their lack of experience and limited access to high quality mentoring can result in poor transition outcomes for youth with IDD. One local transition coordinator noted that they have seen great successes with VR in the past but more recently have struggled with staff who have limited experience. In describing this impact on a local VR office, one supervisor shared that not only are there multiple VR counselor job openings, but those currently employed are all new to the job.

Others noted how low staffing levels in local VR offices impacted the clinical components of VR service provision. One counselor described the discrepancy between best practice and real-world practice, "So I know it's you're supposed to meet them, in their element. You're supposed to do a lot of the meetings at home, and, you know, get feedback from the family. We just don't have enough time to do that. We don't get enough time. We're doing a lot of paperwork, so we don't have all that time for the Discovery process, nor do we have the opportunities for multiple work

experiences." Another noted, "...people get really focused on a checklist or get focused on, we've got to do this, this, this and this, and once we've done it, it's done. We've taken away some of the clinical components and we haven't given them the space to practice that."

Other partners noted that turnover is also an issue at the VR program management and supervisor levels, and this leaves less experienced staff without internal support networks to facilitate problem solving and on-the-job learning. Staff wanted mentorship and the opportunity for long-term learning, and many felt that by addressing competency building there would be less staff turnover. Several senior staff noted how they had benefited earlier in their career from VR's previous new counselor training and that they were sad that the duration of the training had been reduced from six to three weeks. Senior VR administrators acknowledged this concern and described that the training had been shortened and revised based upon feedback from local VR offices. They also noted that they made additional ongoing on demand training available to supplement the new counselor training. VR subscribes to the YesLMS learning platform, and currently offers 15 on-demand courses with plans to expand the number in state fiscal year 2024, however VR staff members who participated in this study did not identify it as a training resource.

Recommendations to address VR staff turnover and the impact on VR capacity:

Arizona VR's passionate staff want to build their capacity to provide high quality services. More than that, many of them wanted to use their clinical skills to work with youth with IDD to uncover their strengths and goals. VR should consider the following recommendations.

- Provide additional guidance and support to local VR offices to ensure that VR counselor staff access the YesLMS learning platform. This will improve VR counselors' skills related to understanding how employment relates to each client's goals; how to use the available flexibilities in VR policy to provide personalized help to youth with IDD reach their vocational goals; how to support individuals access other VR resources such as labor market information, assistive technology, and benefits management to facilitate better planning and informed decision making; and how to develop and implement IEPs that lead to interagency collaboration. To provide technical assistance and mentorship after completion of the YesLMS modules at the state level, VR could facilitate quarterly communities of practice for staff who complete the online trainings. This would provide an opportunity for deeper learning and mentorship.
- VR counselors may also benefit from an evaluation of their time, prioritization, and/or skills in completing a comprehensive assessment of rehabilitation needs for each client they are assigned. This type of feedback has been found to be meaningful in helping rehabilitation professionals understand how they spend their time and help them align their actions to best practices and improve counselor tenure (Gibbs et.al., 2021).
- There are many low-cost and remote professional development options available for VR staff. Arizona has an existing relationship with ExploreVR based out of the ICI. The ExploreVR website contains numerous educational resources for VR staff, and project leads Russ Thelin and Julisa Cully are available to discuss additional resources and potential training opportunities, such as their Progressive Employment collaborative.
- Another opportunity is Arizona DDD's membership in the State Employment Leadership Network (SELN). Through the membership, Arizona DDD has access to the SELN case management curriculum that is specifically focused on employment for people with IDD. The SELN allows DDD to share access to the SELN case management series with state partners, including VR. We recommend that the VR liaison to DDD ask about how VR counselors can participate in the SELN case management series to specifically build competencies related to working with individuals with IDD, including youth.

Capacity-building for VR vendors and VR counselors

As mentioned in the section *VR staff turnover and the impact on VR capacity*, VR staff and partners would like to see more professional development become available for VR counselors on current practice in rehabilitation counseling. However, there is also a need to expand understanding of supported employment through training and technical assistance to both VR vendors and VR counselors. For the purposes of this report, supported employment includes Customized Employment and Discovery, Progressive Employment, systematic instruction, and the Individual Placement and Support model. While VR began an initiative to expand knowledge of Customized Employment and Discovery prior to the COVID-19 public health emergency in 2020, this study found a need not only for training on Customized Employment and Discovery but on the continuum of supported employment services and supports.

Need for capacity-building for VR vendors

Multiple partners, including VR staff and administrators expressed the need for capacity-building for vendors. One VR administrator noted that there is confusion about employment terms at the vendor level. Many employment vendors believe that VR only funds competitive employment, and not initial supported employment services for people who may require a longer period of employment support or more intensive support. This is a misunderstanding related to how VR and other state agencies such as DDD can work together to facilitate supported employment services. In other words, many people do not understand that VR can fund initial supported employment development and placement and DDD can fund long-term support and fading.

Others noted that many vendors do not want to take on individuals with IDD under their VR contract because of the vendors' perceptions of the employment potential for people with IDD. A parent shared that their transition-age youth discontinued VR services after their VR vendor told them they were unable to accommodate their needs. The parent quoted the vendor as saying they "don't do hand holding." Another partner shared, "Well, this trial work vendor just flat out told me on the spot that this person can't work because they're a DDD client." Lastly, partners felt that overall, there was only a passing knowledge of how to provide supported employment services and that most vendors and job developers did not understand how to implement the technique with fidelity.

Partners, however, felt positively about the opportunity for capacity-building at the VR vendor level to improve the services provided to individuals with IDD, including youth, noting that currently there is no universal set of expectations for VR vendors related to the continuum of supported employment supports. Specifically, they mentioned the potential for CESP and other credentialing certifications to build the foundation for improving access to and the quality of supported employment services in Arizona. Lastly, one TSW program noted that their program includes frequent evaluations and feedback loops between students and staff which has resulted in staff actively requesting guidance and resources to support the youth they serve.

Need for capacity-building for VR counselors

As described in the section *VR staff turnover and the impact on VR capacity*, partners viewed building VR counselors' understanding and skills around supported employment as a highly valued action that VR could implement. Partners also shared additional reasons that VR counselors need specific capacity-building efforts about supported employment.

High quality supported employment services for youth with IDD can be time intensive, and some VR counselors may be reluctant to authorize the service because they anticipate a longer than average case opening to case closure timeframe. This is a valid concern given the widespread perception that VR vendors do not have the skills necessary to provide high quality supported employment.

There is a prevalent myth that VR policy and practice guidance is limited regarding supported employment services. One partner described its brevity as, "Policy is one line.", however that is incorrect, and this myth undermines VR's efforts to increase the use of supported employment. Section 4.4: Supported Employment IPE Development of VR Policy Number: VR-4.4-v2, last revised December 2022 provides guidelines regarding the development of a supported employment IPE and outlines the provision of supported employment services and extended services that are necessary for clients with the most significant disabilities for the purposes of job stability and maintaining employment. The 6-page policy provides details on the development and monitoring of supported employment IPEs; however, VR counselors and vendors could benefit from additional training and technical assistance about the content of this policy and how to implement it in the field.

Another barrier to more youth with IDD receiving supported employment services is that strategies such as Customized Employment, Discovery, Progressive Employment, and career exploration are not articulated within policy and practice guidelines for VR counselors. For example, partners noted that the use of career exploration and Discovery techniques are not often implemented during the VR process because counselors do not know that these strategies are part of the array of supported employment activities VR funds. This has led to a focus on placing the individual in a job before they have had an opportunity to engage in experience-based career planning.

Recommendations to address capacity-building for VR vendors and VR counselors:

We recommend Arizona develop an ad hoc committee to assess how best to improve the knowledge and skills of VR counselors, TSW staff, and VR vendors related to individual supported employment services. For the purposes of this report, supported employment includes Customized Employment and Discovery, Progressive Employment, systematic instruction, and the Individual Placement and Support model. The committee should address current knowledge gaps of best practice, barriers to training and staff development, and a plan to ensure that there is a basic understanding of the range of individual supported employment services and ways to tailor the services to the needs of youth with IDD. Next, we share some immediate options for this group to consider.

Arizona APSE offers CESP credentialing and ACRE certification can be obtained online. ICI also created the online College of Employment Services curriculum through Direct Course Online. These classes align with ACRE competencies and Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) credits are available to those who have their CRC Certification. The CES online classes include instruction on competitive, supported, and Customized Employment and ancillary topics, such as funding and employment policy. The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has several free resources about Customized Employment available on their website. Marc Gold and Associates and Griffin-Hammis Associates also offer training in Customized Employment as well as online resources and, recently, Arizona Technology Access Program (AzTAP) has hosted an introductory webinar on Customized Employment featuring Marc Gold and Associates.

Specific training for VR counselors to build their capacity to authorize and monitor supported employment should include the importance of career exploration and Discovery strategies for all youth with IDD as part of their initial VR authorization prior to finalizing their IPE goal. Additionally, VR counselors need to expand their capacity to monitor how VR vendors provide use of supported employment services to support fidelity to the model and provide guidance to vendors about how to improve everyone's employment process.

Awareness of DB101

Families are an important partner in the transition from school to work. One significant issue multiple partners shared is that families often choose to not pursue employment because they fear

the loss of social security benefits and in many cases, this leads them to decline Pre-ETS or to not apply to VR. Other partners shared that even youth who participate in Project Search often see these experiences as an end point and choose to decline pursuing employment post-school exit because of fear of benefits loss. This was a surprising finding given the 2019 report by Winsor et al. identified Arizona's DB101 curriculum as a highly valued resource.

In recent years, DB101 has expanded and has an online, self-directed component and includes a specific section for youth. DB1010 is an important tool in supporting youth and their families to make an informed choice to engage with any VR services. VR has a role in supporting awareness and use of the resource, but it is listed on the VR website under the headers: Working with a Disability; Additional resources, which makes it difficult to find.

Recommendations to address Awareness of DB101:

Arizona's DB101 has been a positive catalyst for changing individuals' understanding of the role that employment has in the lives of people with disabilities, including individuals with IDD. There is no reason that it cannot attain its previous level of awareness and impact. Partners through Arizona Employment First or other relevant groups should reflect on previous campaigns to raise awareness of the DB101 curriculum in Arizona and resume and increase those awareness efforts. The group should also consider ways to conduct outreach to individuals and families younger than 14 years of age so that they know about the resource, support all transition-age youth and families to access the curriculum as part of IEP planning, and other opportunities to build use of the curriculum.

VR staff noted that VR Policy section 2.12 is dedicated to DB101, which requires staff to refer to and explore DB101 throughout the VR process. They also noted that they plan to work with the DES web team to ensure it has a more prominent section of the website and that they will evaluate efforts to ensure that every Pre-ETS recipient has easy access to DB101.

VR staff noted that they hope to enhance efforts to ensure that all schools with TSW contracts have the information they need to educate all youth and their families who are potentially eligible for VR services about DB101. VR should consider partnering with schools to offer opportunities for VR and/or Ability 360 to provide instruction explicitly on benefits management during special education events for parents and through Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) sponsored events.

Limited awareness on how to engage with youth with intersectional social characteristics

As described in the literature review social characteristics such as race, age, gender, ethnicity, preferred language, socio-economic status, country of origin, and living in an unserved, underserved, or under-resourced community impact employment outcomes. Partners shared information about how these social characteristics impact youth with IDD in Arizona.

Several partners shared that some VR counselors are very candid about not wanting to work with transition-age youth and their families. This is in part because adolescents often don't have legal authority to make their own decisions, and navigating the VR youth client and guardian relationship can be challenging. Additionally, adolescents are typically still enrolled in school and may have limited time and availability to meet with VR counselors, requiring engagement outside of the typical 9-to-5 workdays. Conversely, some VR counselors reported that they prefer working with the transition-age population. From an administrative perspective, VR leaders note that they do their best to match staff to disability and age group populations that they excel in working with, however this is not always practical.

Multiple interviews cited the lack of cultural competency in BIPOC, Hispanic, and immigrant

communities. One transition coordinator shared that VR cases are often closed because a youth or their family is not responding to VR counselors phone calls, voice messages, or emails when engaging with people in these ways is not the custom of their community. They further noted, "So if our counselors were better trained to be culturally responsive, or if they worked with the schools, to say, 'I've tried to call a student's parents 3 different times, they're not calling back. Can school staff make a call?' But to close a case, to say the parents are not responsive...if you understood the culture that's why they don't call back." A parent shared a similar story, "I've had them cut services for my other child because somebody left a message and I didn't get back to them and then nobody tried a second time like no letter in the mail or nothing, and then they cut his services."

Language was another social characteristic that was a barrier to VR services. As previously noted, the VR website is not accessible in all the most prominent languages spoken in Arizona homes. Further, there are not resources available to provide information to youth and families that are not literate. One partner shared that in their community, most youth who speak languages other than English are not accessing VR services and fall through the cracks.

Students in rural communities were also noted as having poorer engagement with VR. In more rural areas of the state where there can be little physical VR presence due to staffing and travel distances, many people rely on information from their social networks who likely do not have awareness and knowledge of VR. While it was noted that VR has offices in rural communities, VR counselors who are assigned to those offices and VR vendors who provide services in those communities often live in metropolitan areas within commuting distance. This makes it hard for students to view VR counselors and VR vendors as members of the community, which then makes it harder for the partners to build the relationships necessary to reduce barriers to service and employment, such as awareness of VR, awareness of youth with IDD as capable of employment, awareness of the variety of businesses and job openings in the community, and awareness of the ways in which youths' social networks can support employment.

Family socio-economic status also is thought to be a social characteristic that impacts VR services. Partners in Arizona described wealthy parents as having the resources to hire advocates to help them navigate the transition process, while less affluent families were left to navigate the complex system without access to similar resources. Others noted that VR counselors wanted youth and families to come in person to their offices as opposed to meeting the youth and their family at a location and time that is convenient for them. This can be a particularly challenging barrier for families with lower incomes who do not have direct access to transportation, or who have primary caregivers who work more than one job, who are employed outside of the 9-to-5 workday, who may lack access to paid time off from work, or who lack access to child or elder care to attend meetings.

Recommendations to address limited awareness on how to engage with youth with intersectional social characteristics:

Arizona is noted for having a significant proportion of its population who are members of Native American tribes. Native American youth may live on tribal lands or in non-tribal areas and may receive services from the state VR program and/or Tribal VR agencies. Partners who worked in communities with a high proportion of Native American students noted that the in-person and in-school connections that Tribal VR staff establish with youth and their families were an important part in supporting a high-quality transition service for these youth. This is an important factor for state VR counselors to be aware of and apply to their practice— not just with Native American youth, but all youth.

Partners would like to see VR increase opportunities for specific cultural competency training and practice guidance that reflects broad concepts of what it means to be culturally competent so that staff begin to build self-awareness of how their actions and behaviors impact the experience of

VR clients who have different life experiences from their own. VR leadership also noted a desire to support access to cultural competency training.

Additionally, VR should use available demographic information about local schools and communities to build competencies directly related to the social characteristics of local communities. For example, VR offices located in rural areas and/or areas of the state that have very small populations (Greenlee County for example, population 9,302) (United States Census Bureau, 2023) can offer training and resources to VR staff and VR vendors to help them gain expertise in working with clients who reside in these types of communities.

Arizona must continue to acknowledge and expand the number of VR counselors who use their skills and experiences as members of their communities. For example, partners noted the importance of having VR counselors that represent the communities they serve, particularly around characteristics regarding language, race, ethnicity, and immigration status. One way to do this is to ensure that VR counselors are not only engaged with youth and families who may benefit from VR services, but also that VR counselors have opportunities to build awareness of VR as a career in their communities. For example, VR counselors can participate in high school and college career fairs, speak at youth groups, and use VR's social media.

Low expectations for people with IDD

Partners consistently noted that low expectations for people with IDD are a consistent barrier to youth transitioning to integrated employment. A staff member at a large vendor of VR and DDD services expressed from their perspective, "Pre-ETS participants with IDD will likely be more of a candidate for DDD day habilitation." Other partners noted that there are limited examples of people with IDD working in the community in Arizona and that makes it difficult to envision the possibility of others obtaining jobs.

One parent shared how these low expectations impacted their child. This parent described that they were notified over email that their child may be dropped from a Pre-ETS class scheduled during the school day because the student had issues remembering when to attend. The parent questioned why it was just assumed the student should be dropped from the class instead of developing supports to help the student remember to attend the sessions. For example, at home, the family had found it was helpful for the youth to set reminders for themselves and to think about other ways to help them remember when to complete tasks. It left the parent asking why this strategy hadn't been tried by the school and Pre-ETS vendor and why expectations for their child were so low.

Another issue impacting low expectations for youth with IDD was specific to Arizona's culture of IDD services. For example, complete guardianship for individuals with IDD is common and often leads to a protective attitude when working with individuals with IDD as opposed to allowing the individuals themselves to make experience-based and self-determined choices. This attitude also likely makes it more difficult for youth with IDD who participate in the Pre-ETS self-advocacy curriculum to have opportunities to practice these skills in real world situations.

Recommendations to address low expectations for people with IDD:

In June 2023, Arizona passed SB129,1 which included Article Nine to Title 14, entitled "Supported Decision-Making Agreements". This is an important new law that can help to improve individuals' ability to express and make decisions about their employment goals. Another important development in 2023 was that Diverse Ability Incorporated in Arizona was selected to receive training and technical assistance from the ICI's national Center on Youth Voice, Youth Choice (CYVYC). CYVYC works with youth with IDD, families, supporters, and researchers to learn and share information about alternatives to guardianship. These two recent developments are important, and

partners such as VR, DDD, the Department of Education, ADDPC, and Arizona Employment First should work to ensure that when their organization is engaged in conversations around supported decision-making and alternatives to guardianship, they are addressing how employment is impacted when youth and adults with IDD are not supported to make their own decisions.

One transition coordinator shared their strategy of developing a Parent Council to help parents understand what will be expected of youth in adulthood and how parents can support their youth with disabilities, including IDD, mature and gain autonomy and independence. Parents feel more confident and encouraged about their youth's capabilities, which allows students to benefit from their transition experience more deeply. Another transition coordinator noted that they engage youth to share their own success stories, develop videos to educate parents about the possibilities that are available, and help set positive expectations for all youth with IDD. In schools with TSW programs, replicating these types of opportunities can become another venue for VR and the Department of Education to work together to build expectations for employment for youth with IDD.

Resources to support systems change

The federal RSA has offered and is anticipated to continue offering the Disability Innovation Fund (DIF) program. The DIF program is intended to support innovative activities aimed at increasing competitive integrated employment as defined in Section 7 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act) (29 U.S.C. 705(5)), for youth and other individuals with disabilities Since 2021, 35 states[2] have applied for and been awarded multiyear multimillion dollar grants to improve VR services and supports, and six of those states have been awarded more than one grant.

Recommendations to support systems change:

Arizona's VR program, with the support of its umbrella agencies, DERS and DES, should begin preparing to apply for the next round of DIF awards. Previous DIF funding opportunity announcements have been published in the spring season providing ample time for Arizona to review the currently funded DIFs, develop potential systems changes that could be prioritized under the DIF program authority, and speak with VR programs in states about their experiences applying for and administrating a DIF grant.

Reinvigorating partner engagement

Arizona Employment First and its partners as well as others have an important role in facilitating improvements within the transition system for youth with IDD. The VR program has been a key supporter of Arizona Employment First and has a proven track record of investing in its efforts (Winsor et al., 2019).

Recommendations to address reinvigorating partner engagement:

Arizona Employment First and its partners should review this report and identify recommendations that they can work with VR to facilitate. For example, several VR vendors are Employment First partners. They could support improvements by working together under Employment First to develop and pilot a feedback form for youth and families who participate in Pre-ETS that describes the content the individual was exposed to and make formal recommendations for next steps on how to engage with VR to further the youths' goals. This is only one example of how Employment First partners could serve as a learning laboratory to improve practice in the transition system.

[2] Alaska, Arkansas, California (2), Colorado, Connecticut (2), Georgia(2), Florida, Idaho, Illinois (2), Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania(2), South Carolina, Texas, Virginia(2), Vermont (2), Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

CONCLUSION

This study represents a point in time window to services that support the transition from school to employment for youth with IDD. The study found that Arizona's VR services for transition-age youth with IDD reflected the major barriers to transition outlined in the literature review, including limited vocational experiences while in school (Wehman, 2006; Carter et al., 2011), limited efforts to support youth with IDD to transition directly to jobs in the community (Certo et al., 2003; Certo et al., 2008; Shogren & Plotner, 2012), inadequate collaboration between the adult disability (VR and IDD) and education systems (Whelley et al., n.d.; Certo et al., 2008), and lack of emphasis on integrated employment outcomes within state IDD agencies (Butterworth et al., 2015).

Many of these barriers are interagency in nature, however WIOA provides direction for how state VR entities should be addressing these barriers. Through the examination of the three primary stages of transition from school to work, this report has provided evidence that Arizona VR can and must take steps to reduce barriers to employment for youth with IDD. Through their charge under WIOA to address transition services for this population, the VR program should continue and expand existing actions to improve the employment outcomes for all youth, but especially for youth with IDD.

This study also identified many positive things that Arizona's VR program is doing to support youth with IDD, and throughout the period of this study, the VR program has continued long-term efforts to improve the service system. As was noted throughout this report, VR has dedicated and active leaders at both the state and local levels who are working to improve employment services and outcomes daily. Recommendations in this report are intended to provide additional context for VR's existing efforts and suggest additional next steps to improve the system.

While this report was focused on VR, it is important to emphasize that the successful transition from school to employment is an interagency activity and this report recommended specific interagency actions. Following through on these actions will require that VR, DDD, and education reflect on their contributions to foster this collaborative relationship. DDD and state education partners should consider conducting a similar analysis of their services for transition-age youth with IDD in Arizona to identify other systemic barriers to transitioning from school to employment. Find recommendations for priority actions and timelines for VR and at the interagency level in Appendix E.

The VR program is one important part of helping youth with IDD to obtain successful employment outcomes. Collectively, state agencies and other partners must work together to address barriers youth face. To not act or to accept that the status quo is enough cheats the state of a group of capable and qualified workers who will help Arizona's economy grow and strengthen during the second quarter of the twenty-first century.

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APPENDIX A—GLOSSARY

ACRE: The Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators (ACRE) is a national membership organization and Community of Practice for trainers in the field of employment services for people with disabilities.

American Community Survey: The American Community Survey (ACS) in administered by the United States Census Bureau and helps local officials, community leaders, and businesses understand the changes taking place in their communities. The ACS collects information annually from a sample of about three million people randomly selected from the 50 states and District of Columbia. Cognitive disability in the ACS is the category that most closely approximates the category of intellectual disabilities, identified when a person responds "yes" to the following question: "Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?"

APSE: The Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) is the only national organization focused exclusively on Employment First to facilitate the full inclusion of people with disabilities in the workplace and community.

BIPOC: An abbreviation to describe people who identify as Black, Indigenous, and/or People of Color.

Career Exploration: A process that assists individuals with disabilities in identifying, evaluating, and selecting suitable career options based on their abilities, interests, and goals.

CESP: The Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP) credential recognizes individuals who have demonstrated a sufficient level of knowledge and skill to provide integrated employment services to a variety of populations.

CSAVR: The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) is composed of the chief administrators of the public rehabilitation agencies serving individuals with physical and mental disabilities in the states, District of Columbia, and the territories. These agencies constitute the state partners in the State-Federal program of rehabilitation services provided under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. The Council's members supervise the rehabilitation of some 1.2 million persons with disabilities.

Customized Employment: Customized employment is a process for achieving an integrated employment outcome. It is a job development strategy that can help people with disabilities who might not have found success through other employment strategies. In 2014, customized employment was formally included in Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) as a strategy.

Ethnicity: Based upon the United States Census Bureau there are two minimum categories for ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino and Not Hispanic or Latino. This report considers race and ethnicity to be two separate and distinct concepts.

DB101: Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) provides tools and information on employment, health coverage, and benefits. It provides an opportunity to plan ahead and learn how work and benefits go together.

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): Economists use the term gross domestic product (GDP) to measure how an economy is doing. GDP measures the value of all goods and services produced in an economy in a given period of time, usually a quarter or a year.

Guardianship: Guardianship is a legal term. Guardianship is when a court decides that a person cannot make their own decisions. The court then gives someone else (a guardian) the power to make decisions for the person.

Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE): Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE) are costs for items or services that you need to work because of your disability. Social Security can deduct the costs of an IRWE from your countable income when determining your eligibility for Social Security disability benefits.

Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDDs): Intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs) are disorders that are usually present at birth and that negatively affect the trajectory of the individual's physical, intellectual, and/or emotional development. Many of these conditions affect multiple body parts or systems. See https://ici.umn.edu/welcome/definition.

Intellectual Disabilities: The Rehabilitation Services Administration 911 data set (RSA-911) collects data on individuals who have an intellectual disability. In this report, intellectual disability refers to a person for whom code 25 ("intellectual disability" in the RSA-911 dataset) was reported as the cause of either a primary or secondary impairment to employment.

Individual Education Plan (IEP): An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) helps children with disabilities receive personalized and specific assistance. This written plan allows them to receive special education or other resources needed to be more successful in school.

Individual Plan for Employment (IPE): The Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is a written plan that identifies the employment outcome, also referred to as the employment goal, the services that will be provided to achieve the employment goal, the time frames for those services, and the steps that will measure progress toward the employment goal.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): IDEA is federal special education legislation requiring that participating state and local education agencies identify all eligible students with disabilities and develop individual education plans (IEPs) for them that provide free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment consistent with their needs. IDEA also requires schools to include employment-related transition services in the IEPs of all students who have reached the age of 16. It defines transition services as having a coordinated focus on improving students' academic and functional achievement.

Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA): An IGA is defined as a contract between two or more public agencies or public procurement units for services or for the joint exercise of any powers common to the agencies.

Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs). A geographic entity developed by the Office of Management and Budget for use by federal statistical agencies. Metropolitan statistical areas consist of the county or counties (or equivalent entities) associated with at least one urban area of at least 50,000 population, plus adjacent counties having a high degree of social and economic integration with the core as measured through commuting ties. For more information, please see the Census Bureau description.

Program Year (PY): The Rehabilitation Services Administration collects data based upon a program year. Beginning in 2017 the program year represents the period of time from July 1 to June 30.

Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS): PASS plans helps Supplemental Security Income recipients and Social Security disability beneficiaries return to work. It lets people with disabilities set aside money and things they own to pay for items or services they need to reach a specific work goal.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): Pre-ETS provide workplace readiness training, work-based learning, self-advocacy, and paid internships to a group of students with disabilities.

Progressive Employment: Progressive Employment is a dual-customer, team approach that uses work-based learning strategies to meet the needs of businesses and job seekers with barriers to employment. It is targeted at job seekers with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, and other barriers to employment, including limited to no work history, corrections involvement, substance abuse issues, and other qualities that may signal risk to a business.

Race: The United States Census Bureau collects data on race in the American Community Survey. To gather information on race, the survey asks the individual being surveyed to mark their race (e.g., "White", "Black or African American", "American Indian or Alaskan Native", etc.).

Rehabilitation Act: The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as Amended (Rehab Act) prohibits discrimination because of disability in programs conducted by federal agencies, in programs receiving federal financial assistance, in federal employment, and in the employment practices of federal contractors. It also authorizes state vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs, client assistance programs, and independent living centers.

Rehabilitation Services Administration 911 dataset (RSA-911): The RSA-911 is a public access dataset that captures individual characteristics, services provided, and employment outcomes at the point of closure from vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. Data in the RSA-911 are collected by state VR programs and submitted to the dataset.

Social Characteristics: The social characteristics of a person are the characteristics that they exhibit in their community or with people to whom they belong. Examples of social characteristics are race/ethnicity, social class/socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, (dis)abilities, and religion/religious beliefs.

Supported Decision-Making: An instrument that allows an adult to formally recognize the ways in which the adult wishes to be assisted in making certain decisions by others. Unlike an advance health care directive or power of attorney, a supported decision-making agreement generally does not transfer decision-making rights from one person to another. Few states have statutes recognizing supported decision-making agreements.

Supported Employment: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) describes "supported employment" as competitive integrated employment, including customized employment, or employment in an integrated work setting in which an individual with a most significant disability, including a youth with a most significant disability, is working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment; and that is individualized and customized, consistent with the individual's unique strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice, including with ongoing support services for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Transition: Transition is the period of a person's life when they move from school and home life to more independent adult life, usually by attending post-secondary education or finding employment.

Transition Service Integration Model (TSIM): This model describes how three primary systems (special education, vocational rehabilitation, and developmental disability) contribute to the process and outcome of transition to adulthood for youth with moderate to profound intellectual disabilities.

Transition School to Work (TSW) programs: The Transition School to Work (TSW) program focuses on the provision of VR services to eligible and potentially eligible high school students with disabilities who are interested in employment after leaving high school in Arizona. The goal is a smooth, seamless transition from high school to post-high school career development and/or employment.

Tribal VR: Tribal VR programs provide VR services to American Indians and Alaska Natives with disabilities that seek employment services and live in a tribal service area. There are 22 federally recognized tribes in Arizona.

Vendor: A vendor typically refers to an organization, business, or service provider that offers specific goods or services that are contracted or authorized by the VR agency to assist individuals with disabilities in achieving their vocational goals and objectives.

VRTAC-QM: The Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center for Quality Management (VRTAC-QM) is housed at the Interwork Institute at the San Diego State University Research Foundation. The purpose of the VRTAC-QM is to provide training and technical assistance in VR program and performance quality management, fiscal and resource quality management of the VR program and general quality management of organizations.

WINTAC: The Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC) provides training and technical assistance (TA) to state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies (SVRAs) and related agencies, rehabilitation professionals, and service vendors to help them develop the skills and processes needed to meet the requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Work-Based-Learning Experiences (WBLE): Work-based learning experiences (WBLEs) are recognized as a highly promising strategy to prepare secondary students with disabilities for post-school employment. The strategy uses the workplace or real work to provide youth with the knowledge and skills that will help them connect school experiences to real-life work activities and future career opportunities.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA): WIOA is federal legislation signed into law in 2014 to reauthorize the Workforce Investment Act. Broadly, it directs the workforce system to develop regional plans in conjunction with Adult Education and Vocational Rehabilitation. By verbally agreeing to participate you will be agreeing to participate in the research. Please keep a copy of this form for your records or if you need to contact me.

APPENDIX B—IRB DOCUMENTS

Consent Form for Research on Vocational Rehabilitation Policies and Programs-family members

Background on the project:

In April 2022 the Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (ADDPC) issued a request for proposal to identify barriers to integrated employment for transition age youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) in Arizona who receive services from the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency. The Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston responded to and was awarded this project in October 2022.

To explore this topic, we are interviewing people who are knowledgeable about the Arizona VR agencies services and supports for transition age youth with IDD, including: including current and former VR clients and their families; VR staff; VR contracted provider staff; school staff; and staff other state agencies/programs including Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System (AHCCCS), and the Arizona Department of Education (ADE).

What you can expect:

If you choose to participate, we will ask you questions about your family members experience with Arizona's vocational rehabilitation program and how the program supports transition age youth with IDD. Participation is voluntary and your participation in this study will take about 1 hour. We will record interviews for transcription in preparation for analysis.

Voluntary and Confidential:

Your participation is voluntary. You can decide not to participate at any moment before, during or even after the interview. You can skip any questions that you do not want to answer. There are no penalties for refusing to participate or withdrawing from participation.

Your part in this research is confidential. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be stored, published, or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Information gathered for this project will be password protected and only the research team will have access to the data. The University of Massachusetts Boston Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human research and other representatives of this organization may inspect and copy your information.

All identifiable information that could directly identify you (e.g., your name) will be removed from the information collected in this study. After we remove all identifiers, the information may also be used for future research or shared with other researchers without additional consent.

Benefits of the project:

There is no direct benefit to you from participating in this study. Your participation may help us learn more about what works well in Arizona with regards to successful employment outcomes for youth; what are some areas of Arizona's VR system that could be improved regarding the successful employment of youth; and how well does Arizona's VR system serves its diverse racial/ethnic/geographic population?

Risks or discomforts:

A risk of participation is a loss of confidentiality. We will do everything we can to protect your information. You may skip any questions or stop participating at any time.

Questions:

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you agree to be in this study and at any time during the study. Please contact Jean Winsor at UMass Boston: (617) 287-4300 or Jean.winsor@umb.edu

You may also contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. You may reach the Institutional Review Board by telephone at (617) 287-5374 or by email at human.subjects@umb.edu

Consent:

By verbally agreeing to participate you will be agreeing to participate in the research. Please keep a copy of this form for your records or if you need to contact me.

Consent/Assent Form for Research on Vocational Rehabilitation Policies and Programs- Individuals with IDD and guardians

You (or your ward) have been asked to be part of a research project. Participation is voluntary. You have the choice to say yes or no to being part of this project. We would like you to help us find out how individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities use technology to find and keep jobs in their community. Anyone who agrees to take part in this project has special rights.

What the study is trying to find out: What works well in Arizona with regards to successful employment outcomes for youth? What are some areas of Arizona's VR system that could be improved regarding the successful employment of youth?

What you (or your ward) will be asked to do if you participate? Participate in one interview lasting about 30 minutes. We will ask about: How Arizona's vocational rehabilitation agency helped you (or your ward) transition from school to work What you (or your ward) liked our disliked about working with vocational rehabilitation What could Arizona vocational rehabilitation do better

What are possible risks in this study? Risk means a chance of something bothering you during the study. Not knowing how to answer questions we ask you. Losing privacy when other people hear what you think about having a job or experience in your community. Not feeling comfortable sharing your thoughts about jobs or community engagement. You can choose not to answer any question but still be part of the study. If you feel uncomfortable talk to the interviewer about your concerns!

What are the good things about this study? Helping to make Arizona vocational rehabilitation better at helping people with IDD transition from school to work. Helping others to find out what works best.

What kind of choices do you have to be part of the study? You can say no to participating in the interview. You can say yes to participate, but only answer part of the questions. You can wait and be in another study later. Whatever you decide there are no penalties or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled

You can ask any questions about the study anytime. Some questions you might ask are: How long will this take? Do I have to do this? How will you keep my opinions private?

Who do I talk to if I have questions? Jean Winsor will answer any questions you may have. You can also call her or email her (617-287-4300, jean.winsor@umb.edu)

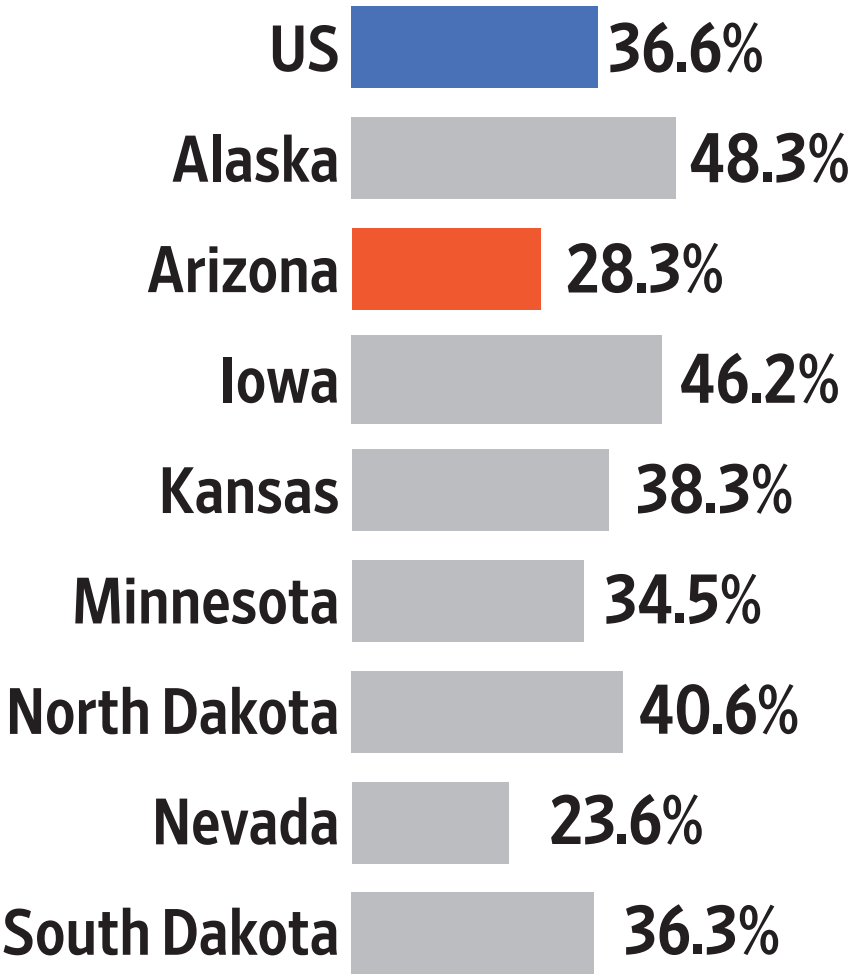
What if I want to talk to someone else? You can call the University of Massachusetts Boston Institutional Review Board. They make sure research is done correctly. You can call them at (617) 287-5374 or email them at human.subjects@umb.edu

You can say YES or NO to participating. You can say "no" right away or after the study has started. Examples of ways that other people have said no: I don't want to do this. No thank you Sorry, I'm busy with other things You have a right to decide YES OR NO.

APPENDIX C—INFOGRAPHICS

Figure 1. Percent of transition-age youth with ID who closed into employment

According to 2020-2022 RSA-911 data, on average across the US the percentage of transition age youth with ID closed into employment was 36.6%. Arizona's rate was 28.3% For context, we compared Arizona's closures to both the national average as well as states with similar demographics in population as well as structural characteristics (Right to Work state, Decentralized Public K-12 School System, etc.)



Data Source: RSA 911 FY 2020-2022

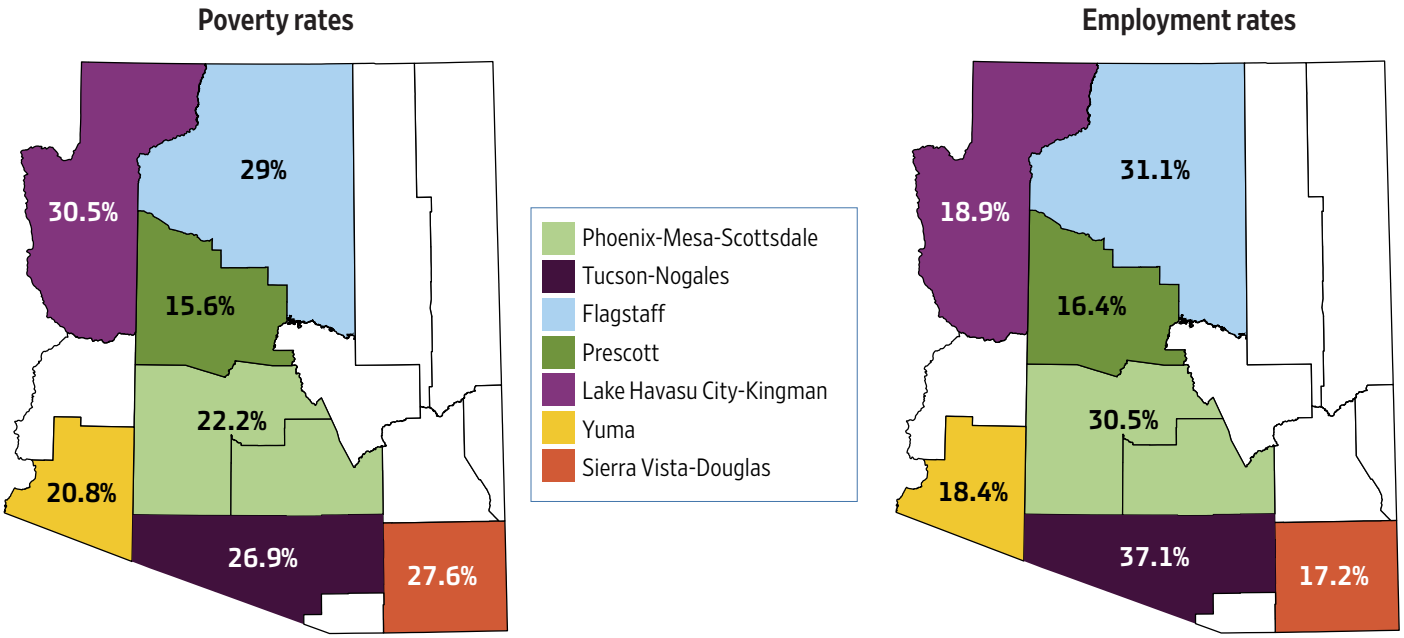
ICI ThinkWork! StateData.info
INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION, UMASS BOSTON

Arizona Developmental Disabilities Planning Council℠

This contract is supported by the Administration for Community Living (ACL) of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of an award totaling $1,500,930, with 0% from non-governmental sources. Services provided under this contract, including the views expressed in written materials or publications and by any speakers do not necessarily reflect the official policies of the ADDPC, ACL or HHS.

Figure 2. Employment and poverty rates in Arizona Metropolitan Statistical Areas

Rural Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA's) with larger Hispanic and non-White populations of transition-age youth with cognitive disabilities such as Sierra Vista-Douglas and Lake Havasu City-Kingman, have lower employment rates and higher rates of poverty compared to less rural MSA's like Tuscon-Nogales.



Data Source: American Community Survey 2017-2021

ICI ThinkWork! StateData.info
INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION, UMASS BOSTON

ARIZONA DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES PLANNING COUNCIL℠

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APPENDIX D—
ADDITIONAL QUANTITATIVE DATA FINDINGS

Data from this summary comes from two sources. The American Community Survey (ACS) and the Rehabilitation Services Administration-911 (RSA-911) database. Data are presented for Arizona and for select comparison states.

About the data sources

The ACS collects information annually from a sample of about three million people randomly selected from the 50 states and District of Columbia. Cognitive disability in the ACS is the category that most closely approximates the category of intellectual disabilities, identified when a person responds "yes" to the following question: "Because of a physical, mental, or emotional condition, does this person have serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or making decisions?" To gather information on race, the Census Bureau asks the individual being surveyed to mark their race (e.g., "White", "Black or African American", "American Indian or Alaskan Native", etc.) and ethnicity (e.g. Hispanic or not Hispanic). For this summary, data from the ACS represent a 5-year rolling average from calendar years 2017-2021.

The RSA-911 is a public access database that captures individual characteristics, services provided, and employment outcomes at the point of closure from vocational rehabilitation (VR) services. In this report, "intellectual disability" refers to a person for whom code 25 ("intellectual disability" in the RSA-911 dataset) was reported as the cause of either a primary or secondary impairment to employment. The total number of closures represents the number of people who exited the VR program in any given year. To ensure a robust population size and minimize variations across service years and individual state policies related to the COVID-19 public health emergency, we used a rolling average of data from the RSA-911, for the PY (Program Year) 2020-2022.

Criteria for selection of comparison states

For context, we compared Arizona's outcomes to similar states. Table 1 describes the structural characteristics of each state in the comparison group. Table 2 displays each state's demographic characteristics. Data from each of the comparison states demonstrate that it is possible for states with structural characteristics like Arizona to support a high percentage of individuals in jobs in the community.

Table 2: Demographic characteristics of Arizona and comparison states

State	Demographic Characteristics		
	43–66% Non-Hispanic White	27–46% Hispanic	>2% American Indian/Alaska Native
Arizona	X	X	X
Alaska	X		X
Iowa			
Kansas			X
Minnesota			X
Nevada	X	X	X
N. Dakota			X
S. Dakota			X

Source: American Community Survey, 2021

Table 3: Structural characteristics of Arizona and comparison states

State	Structural Characteristics			
	Medicaid Managed Long Term Care Services*	Decentralized Public K–12 School System / Strong Local Control**	Right to Work State***	High Proportion of Long Term Services and Support Participants with IDD Living in Family Home*****
Arizona	X	X	X	X
Alaska		X		
Iowa	X		X	
Kansas	X		X	
Minnesota	X	X		
Nevada			X	X
N. Dakota			X	
S. Dakota			X	X

Sources:

* Lewis et al., 2018

** At least 5% of public school students are in charter schools (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

*** National Right to Work Legal Defense Foundation, 2019.

**** PROMISE TA Center, 2019.

***** The state has above the median state proportion of 43% of Long Term Services and Supports participants with IDD living in family homes (Larson et al., 2018).

Table 4. Percentage of VR closures into employment by race and state

State	White	Black/African American	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander
US	65.9%	27.4%	1.2%	2%	0.4%
Alaska	55.8%	11.6%	25.6%	2.3%	0.0%
Arizona	73.9%	11.3%	4.1%	2.3%	1.8%
Iowa	89.2%	8.2%	0.3%	1.0%	0.2%
Kansas	85.2%	9.3%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Minnesota	75.7%	10.9%	2.4%	4.0%	0.4%
N. Dakota	83.2%	5.3%	7.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Nevada	73.7%	19.7%	1.3%	0.0%	1.3%
S. Dakota	83.5%	4.1%	8.3%	0.8%	0.0%

Source: RSA 911 PY 2020-2022

APPENDIX E—
PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION STEPS AND TIMELINES

Appendix E has a section that is VR program specific, a section that is focused on interagency activities, and a section focused on Arizona Employment First activities. We have identified proposed activities and timelines for the next 18 months (about one and a half years) to begin specific actions and the timeline is divided into 4-month periods of time. This does not imply that actions will be completed in a 4-month period, but rather that efforts to address the issue should begin. Lastly, we did not include every recommendation that we suggest in this report in this section and it will be up to VR and its partners to determine how and when to address each of the recommendations.

Actions for Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation

November 2023–January 2024	Review report and identify key myths partners have about VR transition services Enter into agreement to pilot draft Customized Employment scope of work Begin planning for statewide training on supported and Customized Employment for VR staff and vendors Learn about existing DIF grantees and consider how AZ VR could improve supported employment services by applying for future DIF grants
February 2024–April 2024	Develop materials that correct key myths about VR transition services, including guidance to the field Pilot Customized Employment scope of work Present systems change ideas for DIF grants to DERS and DES to gain support for applying for impending funding opportunity announcement
May 2024–July 2024	Develop training materials internal and external to VR, correcting myths about VR transition services Review and revise Customized Employment scope of work based on feedback from pilots Continue to pilot Customized Employment training Adjust policy, procedures, and job aids to align with allowable service provision As appropriate, consider applying for DIF funds
August 2024–October 2024	Disseminate materials on websites, social media, and training that correct myths Finalize training for VR staff and vendors on supported and Customized employment
November 2024–January 2025	Implement Customized Employment statewide Update existing Job Development and Retention scope of work
February 2025–April 2025	Monitor effectiveness of Customized Employment scope of work via outcomes Evaluate additional training needs Evaluate additional recommendations within this report and develop steps to address as practical

Actions for Arizona Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Education, and Division of Developmental Disabilities

November 2023–January 2024	Review report and identify key myths partners have about interagency collaboration and services during transition
February 2024–April 2024	Develop materials that correct key myths about interagency collaboration and services during transition, including joint guidance to the field
May 2024–July 2024	Develop training materials internal and external to each agency correcting myths about interagency collaboration and services during transition
August 2024–October 2024	Disseminate materials on websites, social media, and training that correct myths
November 2024–January 2025	Work with Arizona Employment First to distribute materials they have developed to complement existing agency and interagency activities to support transition
February 2025–April 2025	Evaluate additional recommendations within this report and develop steps to address them, as practical

Actions for Arizona Employment First

November 2023–January 2024	Review report and identify key myths partners have about transition services and ask VR, DDD, and education how they can support correcting these myths to the public
February 2024–April 2024	Form a sub-group to "Build a Better Employment Consumer" and invite individuals and families to be a part of this group, including individuals with IDD Engage with the Arizona Community of Practice on Transition (AZCot) and ask if they would partner on an updated transition timeline that is focused on employment as the priority outcome Form a sub-group to develop and pilot a feedback form for youth and families who participate in Pre-ETS that describes the content the individual was exposed to and make formal recommendations for next steps on how to engage with VR, education, and DDD to further the youths' goals
May 2024–July 2024	Identify resources individuals need to be better consumers of employment services Form a subgroup with AZCot to develop an updated transition timeline that is focused on employment as the priority outcome Using feedback from the pilot, revise and disseminate the Pre-ETS feedback form and next steps for individuals to take to pursue employment
August 2024–October 2024	Formally share materials developed by the subgroups with all Arizona Employment First partners, and through established processes, gain consensus for these materials and identify a process for dissemination through partners Disseminate materials developed by VR, DDD, and education that correct myths on websites, social media, and training
November 2024–January 2025	Hold a 1-day employment summit and highlight agency, interagency, and collaborative changes and products that have occurred over the last 18 months
February 2025–April 2025	Evaluate additional recommendations within this report and develop steps to address them, as practical