>> We're going to give it another 30 seconds or so and hit the record button. I'll give you a prompt, Rebecca and then we'll get underway. It looks like folks are dialing in, we'll see if we can get underway in just a bit. Okay... Rebecca, seems like it's slowing down a little bit with folks joining us, you want to hit the record button and we'll get going?

Thank you, good morning or good afternoon, everyone, depending on where you're joining us from. We're glad to have you with us. This is the first of three combined policy, student credential and VR Affinity Group calls.

We, as the facilitators of the three AG groups felt that given the significance of overlap that is occurring between these three topics, that there would be some value in combining for a bit to make sure we're fully addressing the needs of you as participants in each of these three Affinity Groups.

You know... frankly, we have no idea how this is going to turn out. As we consulted between ourselves and talked with others in the field and Think College and others, we decided to give it a go. We want to make this call, primarily, one of discussion and information gathering from which we hope to

center on some particular priorities you all have as a group to plan our subsequent calls around.

I want to note that we do have our call today captioned and... so... if you would like to access that captioning for the call today... there's a link that can be found in the chat box, Rebecca just put that link in there, if you click on that, you'll be able to access the captioning for our call today.

To begin with, the three of us, as facilitators will each take just a few minutes to try to put some things into context around our particular Affinity Groups as we come into this joined effort.

First... we're going to hear from Kelly Haines and the student credentials, or... that particular group. Then, after Kelly, we'll hear from Denise on a little bit of an update, information on the policy Affinity Group and then, I'll wrap that up.

After that... we will get into our discussion, so... hopefully that sounds good. So... what I'd like to do now and I'll make mention to you -- if you're joining us through the computer there, is a PowerPoint on the screen that we will utilize to begin with.

For some of the information that the three of us want to share. So... with that, I'll turn it over to Kelly.

>> All right... thanks, Russ. Hi, everyone. We're so excited to be here today. This is really great. As Russ mentioned, I'm going to start us off to talk a little about the student credentials Affinity Group, which is a relatively new group.

So... we've only had two meetings to date. Hopefully some of you that have joined those past meetings are here today to continue the conversation. But... as we've been talking within our National Coordinating Center, it just makes sense to have these three groups come together to think about how the development of those credentials in inclusive Higher Ed programs or otherwise, for students, how they're affected by public policies and through partnering or maybe not so good partnering, Voc Rehab agencies.

So... I'm just going to show a couple points here, some visuals to bring you up to speed about where our credential

group has gotten so far. So... we've been getting together to talk about what are the key characteristics of what's normally called meaningful credentials. We know there's no set definition here and that's sort of where we think the discussion needs to lie, so... we've been trying to parse out, you know... what do these -- what are the characteristics of meaningful credentials as they relate to programs serving students with intellectual disability and as part of that conversation, we've taken some time to take a step back and look at the credential landscape outside of programs, specifically designed for students with ID. And some of those characteristics that are coming up, there's some adjectives here, such as industry-recognized, employer-driven and credentials that are uniform and standardized and stackable and portable.

These are all kind of buzz words or... themes or things that have been emerging in the, in the broader credential landscape that we've been trying to reflect on as people in this kind of image field of credentials.

One of the things we're grappling with is how we can take on these credentials in the broader landscape and how to deal with this tug and pull of the way programs may be designed now, to be very individualized and made very accessible to students with intellectual disabilities and how those two things might come into balance. We've also just, very tip of the iceberg, started to discuss about topics related to how credential development efforts are linked to CTP status and also, accreditation standards.

So... if anybody from the credential group wants to chime in and add anything here, about where we've gotten to this point in our discussion, I'm putting up another visual of where I think we are and what the next step from the credential point of view is to think about how we are balancing the characteristics of programs as they are now, serving students with ID, versus what's happening outside in the bigger world of Higher Ed. This is where we are and I think what we'd like to bring to the table today. But... very much interested to hear what others coming from the VR and public policy point of view have to add to the discussion. That's it for me -- next, we'll hear from Denise.

>> Hi, everybody. So... what I wanted to do was just start by, by making sure that we're all on the same page, kind of some, some ground, I don't want it to be ground rules at all, but some background, so that we're all talking about the same

thing. The Policy Affinity Group has been meeting for a year or two off and on. One of the things we've talked about is credentialing and VR issues. It's come up over and over again. I wanted to raise -- and other things we talk about, we talk about [indiscernible] solution, et cetera. But... in this one, I thought it might be helpful to just set some definitions so we're all in the same place.

So... the policy tangle is the first thing. A paper written by Stephanie Smith Lee, Madeline Will and I. It's like 40 pages long. We thought we could do a page or two and explain all this stuff. We used it, but it didn't work that way. If you want to read it, you're welcome to it, it lays out a lot of stuff.

Let me move into what's important to know about this. As we move forward, part of what's important as we talk about credentials and VR... is to understand that policy affects all of this and there are actually definitions out there that we have to live by, or that, are misinterpreted, or that -- and those all fit into the policy world.

So... you know, as I say on this slide, you know... this is ARGH! ! ! Policies on these issues are statutory, so... there are actual definitions, for instance, of recognized postsecondary credential in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, WIOA. There's actual statutory definitions in Higher Ed Act and what it means to be a CTP, for instance.

Those things -- I mean, you could change them by going to the legislature, but the honest answer is those things won't change any time soon. Those are important to know. It's important to know where the terms come from, what they mean and if there's things we can affect or not.

The agencies are what you'd know as regulations. That's... you take the definitions in WIOA or Higher Ed Act and regulations that the Department of Education writes. There are formal things, which are real regulations and then there are statements that the agency makes. Part of the problem we've had in some of these definitions is that somebody from RSA will say something and it's not exactly right, because they really don't know what they're talking about, when you're taking a definition and applying it to what we do and the programs that we learn.

So that's another problem, but that's another level. Whether our federal statutes or regulations, that's what the federal part means, whether there are federal statutes or regulations or agency -- you know, your local VR department can't just change those and say oh well. Those are things that everybody in all the states need to live with and need to interpret correctly. They will say oh well at times, but theoretically, those are things they have to live with and we all have to live with.

Okay... federal, state, that's your VR agency. What your VR agency does, when they take a statutory definition from one of the laws that Congress has passed or a regulation, from -- that RSA has put out and then they interpret it and maybe they interpret it so we like it and maybe they interpret it so we don't. Actually, it's even more confusing because sometimes they interpret it differently within the same state. Sometimes it gets down to a whole nother level.

Those are things we can influence, if they're incorrect interpretations based on what the federal government said. But those are things we can influence.

Legislation and then -- then one last piece that -- that's why I said ARGH! The legislative piece, your state, Congress, is trying to do something new. In the Higher Ed Act reauthorization going on now, maybe they're trying to do something new. That's not a law yet, but placed within [indiscernible] --

There are various levels. If you take nothing else away from what I just said, there are various levels and some we have to live with, some we can influence to change. All of them you can influence and change, but some are more likely than others.

The other thing I want to say is the definitions. There are a variety of definitions out there, for instance... recognize post-secondary credential as a specific definition in WIOA.

The, the industry-recognized credential has some specific definitions and Russ, I think, is going to talk about that later. Meaningful credential is not a legislative or regulatory or, there's no definition of that. So... when we're talking about meaningful credentials, we need to understand that we're

trying to build a definition, that is useful for us, but is not something that the legislature or Congress says we have to do.

The other kind of, and certificates versus credentials is another one. We have to be careful when we use those words. Credentials means one thing in one world and another thing in our world. Certificates may mean something in our world, but it's not the same as it means in other worlds, part of what we are trying to determine and put into place, and part of what Kelly is talking about in her group, which is why I think we all need to be included here is... what is a certificate? What does it mean in the work we do? And is there a way that that can be uniform, across programs? It isn't right now. People kind of use the word certificate to mean different things.

And part of what we're hearing -- and that's part of the work the accreditation group is doing and others.

But... those are not-specific definitions that policy has developed that we have to live with. We can influence those.

And... obviously, I think, the gist of all of this for everybody -- oh and I'm sorry -- I skipped one thing. The Higher Ed Act versus WIOA. Higher Education Act was passed before WIOA. Some of the things in the Higher Education Act, do not strictly align with what is in WIOA and hopefully, there are regulations and things, and that's part of what's in the policy tangle, that kind of helps people understand how they fit together, but... it's not an easy fit.

So... that's another place where we can have an influence and try to have an influence with the Department of Education, but ultimately, in the long run, how does all of this affect students and how do we assist students in, in getting something valuable, from the programs that we are part of? And something that is recognizable in one way or another, by employers, by parents, by students, by colleges, whoever. How do we make that work? Hopefully I haven't thrown too much at you, again... my purpose was just to give you some baseline on what these are and to make sure that as we talk, we're really clear about, when we use the words, what we mean and where they come from.

Otherwise, we're going to end up tangled in more ways than VR is tangled.

I'm tossing to Russ now, because... I think Russ has the next piece of this to talk a bit more about VR.

>> Thanks, Denise and Kelly, thank you for your presentation before that.

Yes, I'm going to talk about the Vocational Rehabilitation Affinity Group. Very quickly, the group has been meeting since November of 2017, we've had -- I think eight -- maybe -- I think it might only be seven, this might be our eighth quarterly meeting, so far, in terms of the work that we're, we're doing with that group.

So... hold on just one second. The focus that we've had on, in the interactions in our -- in our particular Affinity Group has really been on the interactions between the programs as it relates to students with intellectual disabilities. When I'm saying programs, I'm talking about VR programs and programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

A few calls into our Affinity Group, it seemed like it would be important to do a survey to kind of identify what were the critical issues in that interplay between the two programs as they tried to work out meeting the needs of students who wanted VR and also wanted inclusive Higher Education and addressing some of the things that were emerging from that interplay.

And... at the end of that particular survey, three things came out very clearly, as areas of focus that were needed. One was simply communications between the programs. The second one was taking those communications and putting that into better partnerships and working together between the programs with the common good for common students.

And then the third piece, just simply dealt with policy. And so... again, here you see the overlap between the different Affinity Groups and the things that we do because policy became a significant part of that.

Kelly, if you'll go to the next slide. We've talked now for several phone calls, there seems to be two primary issues that emerge from all of those conversations and they really do lead to what this, this group kind of came together.

On the policy side of things, when you take a look at the, the interplay between programs of Higher Education for students with intellectual disabilities and VR, one of them had to do with restrictive or lacking policy directives that, that, in the

end, result in categorical denial of services from VR, in inclusive Higher Education, statewide.

Simply, you have a policy that says we don't do that, or there is no policy which allows for a million policies, where, in cases that same kind of stated policy, whether you call it actual or, or faux policy exist.

And the second one is, even if there is a policy, the fact that it's not consistently applied across the state for the provision of services to students. Who are in VR and seeking programs for students with intellectual disabilities. You see the overlap of policy there.

And the second one deals with the industry-recognized credential. This is a new standard for Vocational Rehabilitation that came out of WIOA. That's not something that VR has had in its bailiwick in the, in the regulations of policy or the act prior to WIOA. And it's nuanced. When you look at WIOA, there are elements of it that actually are somewhat separate, but they get convoluted together.

Under WIOA, there's a portion that talks about the workforce innovation system, where the players who make up that workforce system, that includes labor agency, workforce agencies, education agencies, Vocational Rehabilitation. Those systems, in unison, are to create an environment so that it, individuals can achieve an industry-recognized credential and that's kind of the ideal that's set within that system.

What happens, however... though... is when you separate each of those players so that while VR is part of that workforce system, VR also has its own separate title with its own purposes and objectives for the VR program as well. That doesn't necessarily require that same standard of industry-recognized credential in an of itself, as a system, but... only as it's part as a larger player within that big piece of the system overall.

And as a result, sometimes it gets hyper defined and... your Vocational Rehabilitation agency will define well, we can only get you to an industry-recognized credential and only if your program will do that.

So... I don't know if I'm, if I'm sharing that clearly enough, but... basically, if I could just state it another way, the VR system sometimes, will take a standard they need to meet

that is not particularly the standard of VR alone, but a standard for the system at large and all the players in that system.

And so... you, you find, sometimes, there's some definitions that vary across the board. That tie to this industry of recognized credential.

And as a result, sometimes that, that hyper-defined definition can be used as a rationale for nonsupport. And those are some of the things that we tend to see here, so... hopefully as each of us have taken our little piece, you can see how the overlap and the interplay between each of these topical areas come together, that, that we think, as a joint group, whether you're a program or maybe you're a person who is part of a Vocational Rehabilitation system, or you're a community advocacy or other support program or you're a parent or student... as you consider all of these pieces... they're the elements that come together in this particular merging of topics that we want to start to see what can we talk about? What are the things that we can do to -- that emerge as issues as you see them so we can start to put some purpose in them and put objectives to them and hopefully develop some resources to meet these common needs across the board.

So... hopefully I did that in an articulate-enough manner.

What we'd like to do, next, because I want to get to the meat of our meeting today, is to have some discussion. And I failed to mention early on, I want to do it right now, if you think your chat box open and if you don't, please do... you can scroll to the top of that chat box and maybe Rebecca will be kind enough to put that in there for us again, we have a link to a Google doc, if you access that link, you access the agenda through that link, you will be able to also add to this agenda, any of you who are joining the call today.

Now... as we come into discussion... by definition, Affinity Groups are a group of people linked by a common interest or purpose. That means, really... we want your involvement. We need to know what you are thinking, what you have questions on and what you can add to our overall efforts. As we talk about discussion, Kelly, Denise and I really want to encourage you all to participate in some fashion to inform the discussion today and we can draw out the particulars that we

want to dig deeper going forward. We tried to give a few options by which you can participate.

        We hope you'll join us with the online verbal discussion. So... please, you know... risk a little bit, if you're, this is something you're not comfortable with. We hope to have you speak up a little bit. However... if you're just simply not inclined that way, you've now, hopefully accessed the chat room and there's that option. If you can't find it, if you look across the bottom of your screen, on the computer, you'll see a little bubble and it says chat underneath that, click on that and it'll open that chat box if you haven't done it already.

        You also, now, hopefully have that agenda open, and you can add anything you'd like to as well. Maybe there's a question in the discussion that you want to make sure we get to that we haven't already listed there or whatever.

        Between us, we're tracking the chat box and the agenda and want to, you know... get your input and comments directly. That's it, without any further adieu, let's get talking between us.

        >> Hey, Russ?
        >> Yes?
        >> This is Kathy Becht from Florida. It's good to see you guys get all three of these groups together. I think it'll be really helpful because there is such overlap.

        I wanted to mention a couple things in putting it into context. In Florida, one of our grants for our TPSID, excuse me, one of our goals for our TPSID was that we were charged with creating a credential that all of our programs could use. That quickly became understood to be an impossibility because our programs were so diverse.

        So... instead, what we did was we created six credentials documents that are guidance documents. And... there's, there's a number of them and so... we did that and we're just now, this week, releasing them. We finally finished with them and releasing them to all of our programs in the state and to whoever we can give them out to.

        So... that was one piece. Because... we realize that our programs are so different, we have programs at technical colleges that already have credentials, we have programs at universities that have created their, created a new credential

and then we have some at, somewhere in between, state colleges and what not.

So... we realize that what we needed to do was put information out there and one of the documents that we created identifies when you send out your information, we need these components to be part of it and there's a, about a list of ten things that you need to include when you put it on your internet, that kind of thing, on your website.

But... then the other piece of that is that -- when putting these documents together, we included vocation rehabilitation and... we included a couple other folks to try and get a broader perspective of what needs to be in -- we call them credential guidance documents, but they're credential and tied in very closely with the program of study.

And... so... that was -- that was one piece I wanted to share and then the other piece was that... we did a study at the beginning of our grant, identifying what are the programs of study out there. And... I think that's a really important key for people to consider when looking at credentials, especially if they're looking across the state. That, creating credentials or a credential that's going to be uniform as someone said earlier is, I don't think it's a possibility, because the programs are so different.

So... in that research piece, we discussed what types of programs we see in Florida and at the time there, were eleven programs, we saw three different types. Those are just some pieces I'll put up, some links to share, but I thought those might be helpful.

The last piece, we went and talked to our Voc Rehab about a month ago and really made some huge headway in what credentials they'll accept and what kind of programs they're willing to support.

So... we, we've been -- feel like we've been doing a lot of things, but I think they're starting to come together.

>> Kathy, that's great. I appreciate your sharing the work you've done there and the fact you've got them ready to distribute and we'll, would be willing to share with this group is great.

>> Absolutely.

>> So... thank you for that. Let's see... as we get into the discussion -- I think that -- maybe the question to start with is... you heard from three of us now, just kind of throw a little bit out about what's going on in our area and the overlap but... sometimes that's clarifying, and sometimes that can add confusion. And so... are there things that we can clarify for you as a group? And what Kelly and Denise and I shared? To help maybe make things clear as mud for any of you as we talk.

>> Russ, I just want to point out, this is Rebecca, that some people are using the Google doc to put their thoughts down now. You might want to have open --
>> I do have it open. Brian and Susanna, thank you for adding your pieces to this. They're moving into some of the other questions that we have, but... before I move on to those, I just want to make sure that if there's any clarification from what the three of us shared that would be helpful to you, that we address those, so... please put them in the chat box. Or... speak up. If there's anything we can do there.

If not, we'll move into some of these other areas where people are adding pieces. Hearing none, then, I'll go to the second question, which is... you know... considering the presented issues, what other emerging issues are being faced? And... Brian's adding some material here, he says... we find that consumers need guidance about types of credentials, program outcomes, which are supported by state VR agency and whether these are exclusive.

For instance... if the consumer completes one credential, may they also be approved for a second stackable credential?

So... that's one of the issues that is presenting itself there. Thanks, Brian, for that input. And that, that question.

Any thought on that? Anything you'd like to add to any of those items? Uh-oh... Brian -- did you take that away after you put it in -- all of a sudden, it disappeared for a minute.

What other presenting issues are any of you facing? In addition to those?
>> Russ, there's one in the chat box that's really interesting. That I think people might be interested in and that's, Cheryl was a Ph.D. candidate from University of Illinois at Chicago. How do people make DVR funding portable to other states. They don't have TPSID funding yet. I know that's a

problem others are facing as well. If anyone has ideas, that'd be one way. The other way is to dig down into that in the future too.

>> Hi, can you hear me? This is Cheryl Widman. My understanding of DVR funding is that -- and a school that has been true, maybe a recipient of that funding, certainly for DVR, but we don't have a TPSID and to my understanding, we don't have portability with respect to funding, from state-to-state. Which means, if I'm living in Illinois, my child must attend a school in the state of Illinois.

But... if I want to select a TPSID for my child, let's say there's one existent in -- I'm just throwing this out, Indiana, my funding cannot be applied to the TPSID in Indiana. I look at that as a barrier, that's an issue that affects public policy, it affects whether or not students can get credentials and certainly, it's an issue with respect to Vocational Rehabilitation.

So... while I would love to start a TPSID in my state, I don't know where, you know... I'm just concerned about what exists right now and how do we enable portability of funding?
>> Yeah...

>> Sorry... because as a parent, I heard from other parents, these programs are so expensive. And also, I'm concerned about financial accessibility. I used to be a Chicago public school teacher and the students I taught don't have the financial wherewithal to attend a lot of programs or any programs, for that matter, without DVR funding.

>> Cheryl, this is Russ, maybe I can address a couple things. We don't want to answer a lot of questions, we just want to see what issues come out. You brought up a good one. A school doesn't have to be a TPSID in order to receive Vocational Rehabilitation funding.

>> Yeah.

>> And the other part of that is... while there is the option for states to give priority to in-state schools... to get the, the skills needed for employment outcomes, there's nothing that says that they cannot fund out-of-state programs as well, so... some of it might be just simply understanding what the state policy is and is that policy in alignment with regulations?

Again... that's where you start to see how VR services can merge into policy issues and especially, if you're looking at having a -- getting a credential that is recognized by VR for employment outcomes, then it starts to merge into the other piece.

So... again, I don't want to try to answer all of your questions here, but I think that's a really great issue that has two or three things around it that, that we may want to have some discussion with going forward. So... I'm glad you brought that up, I think we can provide some clarification to that issue.

>> Thank you so much.

>> And Brian's note in the chat box, is it possible to enter into a formal agreement as an external vendor to a state VR agency, even if the education agency exists elsewhere? That's an interesting one that ties into, ties into that same question -- Cheryl's same question.

Some of that depends on your VR agency and how you influence them and what they're willing to do and that's policy.

>> And Cheryl, I'm, I'm reminded that, Illinois does have, although they're not all TPSIDs, but postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities, there's 12 of them in Illinois.

>> Really?
>> Yes.

>> But they're not TPSID?
>> Not all of them are, being a TPSID or not being a TPSID is not necessarily relevant to VR funding for their particular programs.

>> Understood, yes, thank you.

>> Keep in mind, again... this is the definitional part from the law again, being a TPSID only means that you're getting funding from the federal government to help with your program. And... you've met certain qualifications, so... if you're not getting the funding, but you're finding funding is [indiscernible] -- and there are certainly programs who get funding from their states... who are supported by state scholarships, there are programs in other places that are getting other types of funding. But... that's still -- that's

still -- doesn't answer your questions about affordability and I totally understand those too. That's a big issue.

     >> I think so too. I think we can certainly address some of that as an issue for a future call. Cheryl, I'll also draw your attention, Dana in the chat box, just put a link to the college search where if you click on that, it'd bring up information on those programs in Illinois.

     >> Yes... yeah... thanks, I did that in the past and didn't see anything pop up at all.

     >> This is great -- I'm already -- I can see a couple emerging issues that, that seem to cross all these areas. Certainly the challenge of credentialing, having singular and separate credentials. That's certainly something that I think crosses all of these. I appreciate people chiming in.

     I'm going back to the Google doc. Susanna has been adding information relative to work going on in Georgia. We're trying to figure out how VR should view our programs. Are they transition programs or Higher Education programs? Our DVR seems like it makes more sense to get a degree, even if it's a college Higher Education campus.

     Then she says to the trickle down effect, the state VR agencies have decided to support IPSE, but there's lots of misinformation and lack of information in regional and area offices. Again... speaking to some of that inconsistency within VR from one portion of the state or one office of the state, of the state to another one.

     So... thank you, Susanna, for that addition of some of the things that you're, you're seeing. That cross all of these.

     >> This is Kathy, again. We had that issue or have that issue, but... we're just told, recently that the certificate, if they're earning a certificate or credential or whatever it is, that given everything else is where it should be -- VR can support the program.

     So... that was an interesting and wonderful thing to note, but... so, from that perspective, and we'll see what comes of it, but... it didn't matter whether it was a transition or a PSE-only.

>> And that's really great to hear from Florida. I think that's much more consistent with what the Vocational Rehabilitation Act and its regulations are saying.

What you run into, from state-to-state and sometimes even from, in a different state, from one part of the state to another part of the state, you get a lot of variations in the definitions of what they feel like they can support. In other words... you know, maybe they'll only support it if it's a credential. If it's -- or a certificate, but they won't if it's not.

>> That's right, yeah.

>> And another portion you might say, it's a certificate, but not an industry-recognized certificate and therefore, we won't support your certificate. If it were an industry-recognized certificate, then we would. So... there's just so much variation out there, in terms of what people define. That's where I talk about -- that's my referencing to, sometimes we get to the point of hyper defining what it is that we will or we won't support, or what we think we can or we can't support, that it ends up being more of a barrier than it becomes an opening up doors of opportunity.

>> Right.

>> Russ, this is Denise, that's exactly what, for instance, Susanna's been doing in Georgia. Going in and having a conversation, and saying, you know... not, not a "you're wrong, this is what the statute says." But... rather, here, let me share some information with you. I know we all want these students to be successful but... here's what the statute says. Here's what the regulations say. Here's somebody you can talk to, who is a former VR director, who can explain how these things can actually work. And understand the programs. And... actually, we're all trying to be successful here. And... again, that's why the policy and the, the law and regulations are important. But... it still takes building those relationships and what I call advocacy to go in and say... here's how we could all make it work and all be successful. A lot of times, they want to be able to help you, they just don't think they can and you can show them how. I know that's something Susanna's doing, clearly, that's what Kathy's been doing in Florida as well. Since we heard from both of them.

>> A couple thoughts as we talk about this and... I know some of you can read them in the chat box, but I want to highlight a couple of points that are being made. Dana is, is, is making a comment. You know... do they make the same argument for students with other disability who are working towards a degree? Maybe is a student with a disability, but not an intellectual disability. I think that's a great point and one I try to bring up when I work with programs, whether it's VR or inclusive Higher Education. We setting a different standard for students with intellectual disabilities, compared to students with other disabilities, who are going to college. And... if they are, if there are different standards, that, that can be programmatic, up to and including the possibility of discriminatory.

You know... if I could be so bold. Then... Erin from New Jersey says they developed a career pathway credentialing program. They were prompted to look at in-demand occupations and then the New Jersey industry-valued credentials list and merge those together. I don't want to necessarily read the whole piece, but... that's where the Higher Ed program and Vocational Rehabilitation, access to labor market information, to kind of tailoring some credentialing programs that, they're offering, for students, to get to particular jobs that have occupational opportunity at the end, and getting them those credentials that they can move into that.

I, I'm summarizing a lot there, Erin, if there's a piece that I missed or got out of line a little bit, please chime in and let me know.

>> No... you got it right, I think that, that, the key for us, when we were talking about credential creation, versus adapting or embedding credentials that were in existence and we decided on the latter, would be appropriate for us.

>> Yeah... good. Thanks. I appreciate that, Erin.

>> I think relationship to what Dana said as well, that their VR is questioning -- where did her notes go? It's questioning whether the certificate is required for career area and we found a very similar thing that, in order for VR to be able to, to support a student in that direction, that our credentials really needed to be very employment-directed. And... so... they had to point to a, a specific industry and so... that's the direction that we've gone. It's been, we tried

to start with a liberal arts type of focus, and... really just about every program has had to move to that very-specific career focus, such as, education or child care or... hospitality, those kinds of things, and that kind of relates to what Dana has mentioned.

>> And I think that's a really great point, Kathy and... you know... being a career Vocational Rehabilitation person, there's some legitimacy to that. Vocational Rehabilitation is about employment. The services provided, whatever the service may be... does need to be directly related to that person eventually obtaining an employment and now... under WIOA, more of a career-path employment.

And so... it's not unreasonable for that, as long as, I think, we keep it in balance with the purposes of that employment outcome and, and the educational intent that is there as well. And so... you know, I'm glad to hear that you've been able to cross that bridge, Kathy and I think that's an excellent point to work with. So... there's give and take on both points. A key thing is number one, balance, and Denise brought it up earlier. Starting by building a relationship with that rehabilitation agency, so that you can kind of have the discussions that are being talked about by Kathy and Erin and others.

>> Yeah... Russ, this is Kelly, I just wanted to chime in too. Dana and I were having a side convo in this chat, but it relates to what you're saying about balance. I think one of the issues that remembers grappling with on the credentials side of the house is that when you get so focused on being job-driven, you start to lose some of the other parts of what going to college is all about. And... when you get locked into these kind of industry-recognized career pathways, you start to lose some of that flexibility, some of that exploratory nature of what college is about, for so many students in life.

So... I, I -- no right answer here... but... it's just -- yeah... it's a hard thing to kind of, to think about.

>> Yeah... you're absolutely right. And... I want to, I think you've hit it right on, balance is the key, because... how -- I mean, if you took a look at the typical Vocational Rehabilitation agency, it's going to vary from state-to-state to state, because... some states are more pro-education, some stats are -- I don't want to say they're not pro-education, some are

more so than others. You'll find that typically, across the board, you'll find that probably, you know... 40 to 50% of the funding that VR extends and services is to education. And... it's education that includes that, that balance of liberal arts, being able to -- to be able to fit in and have a general enough understanding and still be vocationally-relevant.

So... I'm glad that that point has come up. Because... if it -- again, that industry-recognized credential can be, be defined so firm and hard, that, ultimately, you know... you could make, you could make the argument if that were the case -- which it isn't the case. Let me be clear, that's not the case. You could say, why are we funding anyone to go to college. We have to be doing on-the-job training for everyone or something to that effect. And... that's, that's, that takes away from other components of the Rehabilitation Act that are so critical, including informed choice and drawing on people's interests or aptitudes or capabilities in some of those kinds of things.

>> May I say something here, in regard to what Kelly just said? As a special educator?
>> Absolutely.

>> Am I able to say something?
>> Absolutely.

>> It's a really important issue for me. When we're speaking about individuals who are developmentally disabled, one of the things we want to be able to do through inclusive education is continue to develop life skills. Self-determination skills, social skills, and all the skills that are requisite, not just for integration into jobs and the community, but better quality of life outcome. It isn't just about the credentials, it's about all these other things that are so important in terms of continuing to develop and finding an ability to continue to develop these neural pathways.

If we can do that at the same time that we are helping students gain credentialing, we're, we're, you know... achieving, hopefully the best of all possible worlds.

So... really, that is just so important. To me and I wanted to say that we should never forget that a lot of this, in my -- from my perspective, is about continued brain development. Does that make sense to anybody?

>> It makes perfect sense and I couldn't agree with you more. I think that speaks largely to the purpose -- that's what -- we use the term rehabilitation, for Vocational Rehabilitation, but... that's really what the core -- if you go back and look at the Nexus of the program, to bring people to their potential.

>> This is Denise. I agree with everything everyone has been saying. But... I do want to put a caution in there. I'm a policy person and... we are currently working on reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. You also have to keep in mind throughout this entire conversation that the reason that Congress people vote for these programs is employment-based. It's a really interesting tension, I went to a liberal arts college, I totally get it all. It's a really interesting tension between how we talk about these programs and what the messaging needs to be as we talk to policymakers. Because... they are looking for education -- they're looking for employment. Either that or we need to educate them and understand it's more than unemployment. The way things are right now, what they're looking for is employment statistics, are these folks employed? Are they earning money? Are they... whatever, whatever. It's a tension, I think, we need to continue to talk about.

>> This is Rebecca -- couldn't it be that... and Russ and Kelly and everybody. Couldn't it be like, that, most college degrees that are offered -- there's a certain set of requirements that need to be met and you specialize in your third year or fourth year, even to get a Bachelor's Degree. All the classes, you don't really want to take, I'm just wondering, I was an English major and I remember my family saying... oh my gosh, she's going to starve to death because she's an English major. (?) If I come out of college and know how to write and read and talk to people and manage my work, then I'm prepared for any job. I think that case could be made for anybody.

So... students are going to college like Kelly and Dana were saying. They're learning how to manage their schedule and go to the bank and take classes and learn about deadlines... that's half the battle. Because... I know plenty of kids coming out of college that can't do any of that. They are, you know, super-duper business degree people and... that, that's just my two cents --
>> I don't disagree with anything you just said -- for some

members, for some policymakers, that'll be the case. It's part of understanding -- we talked about this at the beginning. Part is understanding who your audience is, who you're talking to and how you're talking to them and what it is they're looking for and what you can show.

So... for some, the great day to think about employment outcomes is what they want to hear. For some, talking to them about -- or the differences between students in these programs and students with intellectual disabilities, not in these programs.

For some, the independent living piece of it will be very important and... and... choice and... self-advocacy and all of that, it just all depends. So... yes, all yes and.

>> This is Dana. So... my, my -- I have a couple things, but... one is, is -- there seems to be a disconnect a little bit between how do we make this person-centered? And... offer some variety because we do have that. We have child care, people interested in animals, people interested in dinosaurs, prehistory and trying to help them carve a career out of that...

So... how do we have a specific credential, yet, still make it person-centered? My other question -- can we look at the data, I can't cite the data and don't have a completely logical set-up here, but... it'd seem to me that we're doing people, at least with intellectual disability, potentially a disservice by being so down in the weeds on this. Certificate for an industrial -- recognized industry certificate, because... if we look at the data that shows that people, irrespective of disability, who graduate from college, have a Bachelor's Degree, what their employment and career trajectory is... and contribution to the tax base, which is, which is the other thing that Congress might want to hear... is significantly more. We know that, right? There's statistics out there that say that.

So... the thinking would be that the same goes for people with intellectual disabilities or people with disabilities. So... then, are there data out there that shows what people who have achieved a liberal arts degree, what -- the career they're in -- or look at the inverse of that to say for people in certain career areas... do they have a degree that aligns with that? And then we can make that argument back to the policy people to say... look... the general population doesn't have this requirement. Why are we placing this on -- this subset of

people with disabilities that have had limited access to
Postsecondary Education in any form for forever, so... you
know -- I -- I just think the general population -- try to
emulate, perhaps, some of those research numbers to be able to
equate them.

>> The research is there and it does support that there is,
among people with learning disabilities, there's very little
difference in the income-earned by those who completed college
education and those without disability that completed a college
education.

I know, for a fact, the data is out there, it's older now,
when I reported out, I think it was 2013 -- I was underscoring
the importance of individuals with autism to get Postsecondary
Education, basically predicated on the little difference in
income earned by those with disability and those without, as
long as they had university education. I don't know about the
data, with respect to individuals with IDDD, it's a subject I'm
very interested in. It's a research topic that I'm planning on
investigating myself. Once my own dissertation is completed.
It's a very important question, but... if we just look at the
data for those with other learning disabilities, you can see
that the gap in income closes and that's something that one
would arguably want to argue for.

>> I'm going to jump in at this point, because... we're
just a couple minutes before the hour. And... we -- I mean,
we've come so -- we've had such great discussion and we didn't
even get to the point of being able to debrief on what we did
today. So... what I'm going to suggest that we do, because...
we planned this for an hour, I know many people probably have to
get off the call for other reasons. What I think Kelly and
Denise and I will do is take the notes and the comments and the
additions to the agenda and there's some really good ones in
there. Brian just added one several minutes ago, if you haven't
read, you should, around... you know... industry-recognized
credentials and not necessarily even respected by employers.

So... I think, I think what I'd like to do is maybe pull
out several topics that seem to be common in this. We can do a
little bit of back and forth with you to make sure that we're
hitting on the topics that came up and we can continue this
discussion next time, to these kind of boiled-down issues that
have come up today. And... start giving resources to it and get
more information around it. How's that sound?

>> That's great. This is Denise, I just want to say, you guys rock! This has been a phenomenal conversation. This is exactly what we hoped we'd get out of this.

>> Yeah.

>> And thank you for sharing what you are facing. That's -- we have lots to talk about and... we are more than happy to do that.

>> Yes... this has been fantastic, everyone, thank you so much. We're going to -- we're going to move forward with this, and start putting some pieces together. Thanks to everyone who added some pieces to this, and... next time, we'll put the whole meeting to some discussion.

So... without any further adieu, we'll cut you loose for today and see you in three months, but in between, look for some stuff for us to help get prepared for that meeting. Thank you, thank you, what a great meeting today.

>> Thanks, everybody.

>> Thank you, yes.

[Call concluded at 3:01 p.m. ET].

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