

THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT OF 2014: AN OVERVIEW OF THE LAW AND IMPLICATIONS FOR COLLEGE STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITY

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The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 is the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. WIOA funds and supports state vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs. It has enhanced supports for young people with intellectual disabilities (ID) who wish to access postsecondary education, find a job, and develop a career.

Perhaps the most important aspect of WIOA is the emphasis on competitive integrated employment. Competitive integrated employment is work that takes place in inclusive, typical work settings and for which employees, with and without disabilities, receive a competitive wage. This means that schools, VR programs, and postsecondary education initiatives must prepare young people with disabilities to work alongside people without disabilities in job settings that pay at least the minimum wage.

As one of the major outcomes of inclusive higher education is to support students with ID to achieve integrated competitive employment, there are significant implications in the new law for colleges and universities that enroll students with ID.

When WIOA was drafted, the lawmakers recognized that youth with ID are not attending postsecondary education and engaging in competitive integrated employment at anywhere near the rate as their same-age peers. In August 2016, the labor force participation rate for people without disabilities was two and a half times that of people with disabilities (76.3% v. 30.4%).

In calling attention to this great discrepancy in competitive integrated employment for people with disabilities, including those with ID, the new law states that one of the purposes of the reauthorization is to “ensure, to the greatest extent possible, that youth with disabilities and students with disabilities who are transitioning from receipt of special education service...have opportunities for postsecondary success.”

In recognizing the importance of postsecondary education for young people with disabilities, including those with ID, WIOA requires states to do the following:

- Have their state VR programs annually budget for and spend **at least 15 percent of their federal dollars to assist young people with disabilities to transition** from high school to postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment.
- Annually report the number of people with disabilities assisted by state VR programs to **enroll in and complete postsecondary education programs.**
- Ensure that state VR programs **coordinate services with other agencies, including public schools, to facilitate the transition to postsecondary education** and competitive integrated employment.
- Support state VR programs to train their personnel on procedures, practices, and strategies to **enable individuals with intellectual disabilities and other individuals with disabilities to participate in postsecondary educational experiences.**
- Ensure that state VR programs make available to students with disabilities in K-12

Five things to know about WIOA

- 1) WIOA reauthorizes the Rehabilitation Act
- 2) For the first time in federal law, competitive, integrated employment is defined
- 3) The law creates a new Administration for Independent Living in the Department of Health and Human Services
- 4) The law requires young people with disabilities to try competitive integrated employment before enrolling in a subminimum wage program
- 5) VR programs must provide young people with disabilities with pre-employment transition services such as interviewing skills

programs and their families **information about opportunities for enrollment in postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education.**

- Requires that state workforce development programs and VR programs support young people with disabilities to **earn postsecondary credentials that will enhance their ability to obtain a valued job** (see Fast Fact #5 for more details on meaningful postsecondary credentials).

If you are on staff at an institution of higher education and are enrolling students with ID, contact your state VR office to begin discussions about how their staff might support students in your program. You can find the director of your state VR program on the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) website.

If you are a young person with ID who is still receiving services from your high school, talk with your teacher or special education coordinator about working with your state VR program to enroll in postsecondary education.

WIOA is a big step forward for support for students and youth with disabilities. Find out more about your state vocational rehabilitation programs and how they can support you to attend college and prepare for competitive integrated employment by visiting the Rehabilitation Services Administration website, where you will find a wide variety of resources.

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REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) website: www.rehabnetwork.org/resources/state-vr-directors/

Fast Fact #5: Current Status of Meaningful Credentials for Students With Intellectual Disabilities Attending TPSID Model Demonstration Programs. www.thinkcollege.net/images/stories/CredentialFF5_F.pdf

Insight Brief #25: Credential Development in Inclusive Higher Education Programs Serving Students with Intellectual Disabilities www.thinkcollege.net/images/stories/25developing%20student%20credentials_F.pdf

nTIDE Jobs Report at University of New Hampshire Institute on Disabilities website: www.iod.unh.edu/About/News/15-12-04/nTIDE_Jobs_Report_Employment_Continues_to_Drop_for_People_with_Disabilities.aspx

Rehabilitation Services Administration website: <https://rsa.ed.gov>

United States Department of Labor Employment and Training Administration (ETA) resource page about the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: <https://www.doleta.gov/wioa/>

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, 29 U.S.C. 3101 (2014). <https://www.congress.gov/113/bills/hr803/BILLS-113hr803enr.pdf>



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