DBVI State Rehabilitation Council Meeting Minutes – February 24, 2022

Present: Heather Allen, Sherrie Brunelle, Gerald Doody, Martha Frank, Tom Frank, Linda Goodspeed, Harriet Hall, Fred Jones, Sarah Kirby, Rose Lucenti, Kaelyn Modrak, Charlie Murphy, Steve Pouliot, Olga Pschorr, and John Spinney.

Harriet Hall called the meeting to order. Fred Jones welcomes partners. Overview of the eight goals for the WIOA State Plan, and SRC members will be asked for specific recommendations, strategies that may assist DBVI to make better progress on each goal. SRC recommendations from today’s meeting will be added to the WIOA State Plan. Once public hearing is completed, and plan is signed by the Secretary, the plan will uploaded to the WIOA portal by March 16th.

Harriet offers opportunity for additions to the agenda and invites public and guests the opportunity to speak. SRC moves on to discuss WIOA state plan goals and strategies.

Goal 1. DBVI will align services to support consumers in achieving the WIOA Common Performance Outcome Measures.

**SRC member recommendations:**

* DBVI will consider the use of zoom to deliver career assessments online, and to offer training opportunities for DBVI clients to access and interact with zoom and other online platforms.
* The focus on how to remove the barriers within the assessment would be priorities (submitted by Martha Frank).

 Goal 2. DBVI will increase the percentage of consumers earning more than minimum wage at closure.

* This goal and the indicators related to it are based on the state minimum wage.

**No additional recommendations were made under goal 2.**

Goal 3. DBVI will increase consumer opportunities to participate in post-secondary education and training and gain industry recognized credentials.

**SRC member recommendations:**

* DBVI will look at longitudinal data under this goal as an ongoing strategy. Of those students who start post-secondary education and training, how many finish.
* VFN specifically recommends looking at flexible pathways and dual enrollment opportunities for students.
* Agency of Education agrees that the dual enrollment is a good data point. John Spinney will put forward a data request – historically a low number of students with disabilities are accessing the dual pathway, and Vermont would like students on IEPs and 504 plans to access dual enrollment to the greatest extent possible.
* Tom Frank recommends specific industry recognized credentials may not solely relate to the college degree, citing the importance of IT credentials for employers as one example; this recommendation could be included in the longitudinal data recommendation of this section, above.

Goal 4. In partnership with VDOL and Community Partners, DBVI will create more opportunities for DBVI consumers to participate in training programs.

**SRC member recommendations:**

* DBVI will find and improve access to new apprenticeship opportunities for individuals who are blind and visually impaired, that are not the typical construction, plumbing and heating pathways.
* SRC members discussed history of stipend and minimum wage offering through DVR, DBVI and DOL programs, in collaboration with DOL, Resource and VABIR partnerships.
* Rose Lucenti, Vermont Department of Labor shared history of stipends, Fair Labor Standards Act, and DOL programs that offer minimum wage. DOL has always cut checks directly for minimum wage for consumers, stipends have been provided in certain instances.
* DBVI will continue to develop the partnerships with VABIR, Resource, DOL and other entities that can run the payroll for specific work experiences and payment of minimum wage.

Goal 5. DBVI will continue to implement highly effective Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) for students statewide.

* DBVI works to achieve outcomes in five core areas under WIOA through Learn, Earn and Prosper, LEAP program. The menu of options available to students through LEAP are available statewide. This year, summer residential option will be available at Champlain College.
* Vermont is fortunate to have structure of DBVI collaboration with VABVI to have 14 teachers for the Visually Impaired in the schools versus other states where each school district hires their own teachers.

**SRC member recommendations:**

* DBVI will continue to coordinate with Vermont Center for Independent Living to provide self-advocacy training and workshops for youth. Sefakor has provided weekly workshops over 5 weeks in coordination with DBVI’s LEAP program, last year. DBVI looks forward to continued collaboration in the LEAP program over the next year.
* TVI’s recently participated in Market Decisions research forum. While that data is being compiled, TVI’s specifically want to hear from DBVI staff in the beginning of each school year.
* DBVI will incorporate opportunities for students being taught about their disability (submitted by Sherrie Brunelle).
* DBVI will support youth to practice self-advocacy skills and how it impacts the employment environment (submitted by Martha Frank).
* SRC discusses importance of helping to incorporate braille study in IEP, DBVI counselor participation in IEP meetings can assist in this effort (Charlie Murphy initiates this discussion).
* John Spinney, AOE adds that anything that can help students can be included in the IEP
* Steve Pouliot, VABVI serves 300 students, 20-25 students have braille written within the IEP. It can sometimes be a challenge to get the student a family to agree that Braille instruction is needed.

Goal 6. DBVI will continue to expand efforts to effectively serve employers through Creative Workforce Solutions (CWS).

**No additional recommendations were made under goal 6.**

Goal 7. DBVI will continue to seek opportunities to expand and/or improve services for underserved populations including individuals who need supported employment.

* Fred describes funds available (3,000 for adults, 3,000 for youth under age 24). The challenge for youth is that while short term supported employment services can be provided for up to 2 years, student must already be employed
* DBVI coordinates with designated state agency (DSE) for students who meet the criteria of the DSE and has a separate partnership with CCS in Chittenden County.

**No additional recommendations were made under goal 7.**

Goal 8. Consumer satisfaction with DBVI services will be maintained or increase.

* Market Decisions research is being compiled for 2022-2023

**No additional recommendations were made under goal 8.**

**Next steps:**

* Fred will take these recommendations of the SRC to incorporate into the State Plan. After SRC recommendations from today’s meeting are added and public hearing is complete, the plan is then signed by the Secretary and uploaded to WIOA March 16th.

Open discussion, other thoughts and observations, informal updates from partners:

* DBVI will have a panel from the Vermont Council of the Blind on what works and what needs work at March staff meeting.
* Outreach is an important part of this work as highlighted within DVR’s new brand of HireAbility. All DVR and DBVI agencies in New England are working on outreach.
* Charlie Murphy highlights dynamic collaboration with Laura Siegel as she moves collaborations forward within DAIL and AHS. VCIL has hired Valerie Hughes to fill her position and is very excited to welcome her aboard.
* Tom Frank highlights ABLE library, Karen Gravlin, services are not solely for individuals who are visually impaired, may be of great resource to additional partners.
* Martha Frank highlights upcoming webinars from Vermont Family Network and April 14th Wrightslaw special education conference, details shared with partners following the meeting.

Adjourn.