

## **Section I: Competitive Integrated Employment Overview**

Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE), real work for real pay is the gold standard of transition outcomes for students with disabilities. The work should align with the post-school employment goals of the student and is the desired transition outcome for all students with disabilities who choose to work, regardless of disability or needed accommodations or support. CIE should be a realistic and desirable expectation for all students.

CIE options should be individualized and align with a students' interests, preferences, skills, and support needs; and with the labor market needs of businesses. As families, schools, VR and other partners plan and engage in transition planning with students, it is important to understand that individual needs and employment goals will be different for each student. By making the connection between students' interests, skills, and preferences with business needs, good job matches can be brokered so that employment is a mutually beneficial outcome for both the student and business.

### **How is Competitive Integrated Employment defined?**

The Rehabilitation Act defines competitive integrated employment as work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis for which an individual is: (a) compensated at or above minimum wage and comparable to the customary rate paid by the employer to employees without disabilities performing similar duties and with similar training and experience; (b) receiving the same level of benefits provided to other employees without disabilities in similar positions; (c) at a location where the employee interacts with other individuals without disabilities; and (d) presented opportunities for advancement similar to other employees without disabilities in similar positions.

For an FAQ that addresses the criteria for an integrated employment location within the definition of "competitive integrated employment" in section 7(5)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and its implementing VR program regulations in 34 CFR §361.5(c)(9)(ii) (see 81 FR 55629 (August 19, 2016)), see:

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/wioa/competitive-integrated-employment-faq.html>.

IDEA of 2004 defines competitive employment in measures B and C of Indicator 14 which measures post school outcomes for students with disabilities. This definition states that competitive integrated employment occurs when a student has worked for pay at or above the minimum wage in a setting with others who are nondisabled for a period of 20 hours a week for at least 90 days at any time in the year since leaving high school and includes military employment.

### **Why is Competitive Integrated Employment Important?**

Research has demonstrated that employment is a factor associated with an individual's overall quality of life or assessment of their well-being (Canha, Simoes, Owens, & Matos, 2013). However, when we look at employment outcomes of students with disabilities transitioning from school to work they have persistently lagged behind their peers without disabilities (Fogg, Harrington, & McMahon, 2010). A 2013 report from the U.S. Department of Labor indicated that only 26 percent of students with disabilities are employed after high school compared to almost 64 percent of their peers without disabilities. Additionally, persons with disabilities experience the highest rates of poverty of any subcategory of Americans recorded by the Census Bureau. Of the nearly 30 million individuals with disabilities ages 18–64, 27 percent, or more than 4 million people, live in poverty. This is more than double the rate of 12.5 percent for the entire population (Office of Disability Employment Policy, 2013).

### **How do we prepare students for Competitive Integrated Employment?**

Attempts over the last decade to synthesize what works in transition have increased the knowledge base about effective transition practices (Cobb & Alwell, 2007; Test et al., 2009). Among the important findings is that solid academic preparation in conjunction with transition planning, student empowerment, family involvement, activities that connect transition resources, and work experiences are critically important in influencing school-to-work transition outcomes.

Work experience has been consistently identified as the most important predictor of post-school employment success for students with disabilities, regardless of disability or intensity of special education services (Carter et al., 2012; Fabian 2007; Test et al., 2009; Bullis et al. 1995, Wagner et al., 2014). Work experiences are useful in all phases of career development and can take different forms. One consistent message across federal policies and research is that students with disabilities should be provided opportunities to experience work in competitive integrated jobs that take place in the community.

Empowering students to determine, plan for, and receive appropriate work experiences and workforce supports is key to a student being successful in competitive integrated employment. Students with disabilities and families that collaborate with educators, local agency personnel, and businesses are more likely to be employed as adults. Perhaps more interestingly, the nature of the support provided to the student on and off the job often determines the difference between a successful job placement and an unsuccessful one (Brewer, 2005).

Collaboration among partners working with students is also important and can lead to the desired outcome of competitive integrated employment after high school. When collaboration is directly focused on outcomes for students with disabilities and the systems that serve them – rather than merely referring them for a “hand off” to the next responsible party – higher school completion and employment rates are likely (Fabian & Luecking, 2015).

Finally, while amendments to the Rehabilitation Act expects all students to be prepared for CIE with needed supports, if a student or family chooses subminimum wage employment, specific procedures must be followed. See the following link for information about Section 511: <http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services/law-reg-and-policy/section-511-limitations-use-sub>

### **How are Pre-Employment Transition Services (Rehabilitation Act) and Transition Services (IDEA) provided collaboratively to reach Competitive Integrated Employment?**

Both education and vocational rehabilitation have key roles and responsibilities in improving employment outcomes and assisting students in achieving competitive integrated employment. Both entities must be involved in creating opportunities for students to develop skills and knowledge to prepare for careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Within education there has been an increased emphasis on educational services that are mindful of optimal post-school outcomes that include CIE (IDEA, 2004; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Schools are required to begin transition planning for students with disabilities no later than age 16 (age 14 in some States) and earlier if the IEP team determines it's appropriate. This is to ensure time for students to explore career options, participate in work experiences, develop necessary academic and work place skills, access needed transition services that will prepare them for post-school education, training and employment. Introducing students to a VR counselor early and including them on the student's IEP team with appropriate consent, will increase the student's ability to access opportunities that address their needs in achieving a CIE outcome.

Schools have a variety of academic and career development opportunities, such as Career Technical Education (CTE), dual enrollment, and work based learning to provide experiences and skills that increase students' success in the workplace. Partnering with these programs has the potential to decrease duplication and increase special education and VR 's ability to provide students a variety of pre-employment transition services and transition services.

State educational agencies (SEAs) are required to collect and measure post-school employment outcomes for students with disabilities (i.e., competitive employment within one year of high school graduation) as indicated above in Indicator 14. These data are collected in partnership with the LEA to provide schools with data to inform them of their transition service strengths and areas of needs in reaching CIE outcomes for students with disabilities. VR is required to collect specific data elements for students with disabilities receiving of pre-employment transition services as well as transition services.

The Rehabilitation Act, as amended by WIOA, expands the population of students with disabilities who may receive services and the kinds of services that VR agencies may provide to students with disabilities who are transitioning from school to postsecondary education. It also requires that VR agencies provide, or arrange for the provision of, pre-employment transition services for students with disabilities in need of such services and the services are coordinated

with local educational agencies (LEAs). Pre-employment transition services include required, authorized and pre-employment transition coordination activities and are to be an early start at job exploration. The required activities are direct services to be provided to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services, which include: job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs and institutions of higher education; workplace readiness training; and instruction in self-advocacy, including peer mentoring.

Although transition planning for students begins at age 16 in most States, VR agencies may elect to provide pre-employment transition services at an earlier age to students with disabilities who are enrolled in an educational program. These services may be provided to all students with disabilities (including those who have individualized education programs (IEPs) and plans for accommodations or services under section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act) in coordination with LEAs to prepare students with disabilities for CIE. Congress intended pre-employment transition services to be provided to the broadest population of students with disabilities to ensure that as many students with disabilities as possible are given the opportunity to receive the services necessary in order to prepare for and achieve a CIE outcome. In order to accomplish this intent, VR agencies need to work with SEAs and LEAs to ensure that the pre-employment transition services and transition services provided under IDEA create a seamless transition for students with disabilities from secondary education to postsecondary education and employment.