



## **A Plan to Improve the Educational System's Effectiveness in Promoting Community Living for Persons with Disabilities**

Iowa Department of Education  
Director – Judy Jeffrey  
Olmstead Designee – Ralph Childers, Ed.D.  
Address – 510 E. 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50319  
Phone –515/281-4151 E-mail - [rchilders@dvr.state.ia.us](mailto:rchilders@dvr.state.ia.us)

### **I. Introduction**

It is the mission of the Department of Education to champion excellence in education through superior leadership and service. The Department is committed to high levels of learning, achievement and performance for all students, so they will become successful members of their community and the workforce. In addition, it is the specific mission of one division in the Department, Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, to work for and with individuals who have disabilities to achieve their employment, independence and economic goals. The Iowa Department of Education is committed to offering its disability-related services in the most integrated setting appropriate to each individual's needs. These services include preparation and support so that individuals may choose to live in a community with reasonable accommodations.

### **A. Department of Education Organization**

The Department of Education is composed of six divisions: the Division of Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education (ECESE); the Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation; the Division of Financial and Information Services; Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services; the Public Broadcasting Division (Iowa Public Television) and the Division of Libraries and Information Services (State Library).

### **B. Overview of Department of Education Programs and Responsibilities**

The Department of Education provides a broad array of services to the citizens of Iowa.

The Division of Early Childhood, Elementary and Secondary Education (ECESE) provides administrative and school improvement services including accreditation of local

Grimes State Office Building - Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

PHONE (515) 281-5294 FAX (515) 242-5988

[www.state.ia.us/educate](http://www.state.ia.us/educate)

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public school districts, nonpublic schools, and area education agencies. It oversees early childhood education and provides instructional services support including professional development and the administration of many federal programs including No Child Left Behind. This division also includes the teacher quality program, practitioner preparation and licensure, food and nutrition, and school transportation. One of the bureaus in this division, the Bureau of Children, Family, and Community Services, has as a primary focus the administration of education and support services for children and youth with disabilities. All bureaus in the division are responsible for non-discriminatory practices in programs and services and accommodations to assist all learners with disabilities to access all available education programs and support services to succeed in education and transition into the community.

The Division of Community Colleges and Workforce Preparation provides career and technical regulatory services for community colleges and secondary school districts. In addition, this division includes veterans education, adult basic education, English language learner programs, and Carl Perkins. It also conducts equity reviews for community colleges and community school districts, and coordinates the community college accreditation process.

The Division of Financial and Information Services provides both internal (agency) and external support. They do planning, research, and evaluation which includes planning and executing special projects for the agency; developing general procedures for data collection, analysis, and reporting to meet state and federal program needs; and dissemination of selected data and information for special needs. The school finance team has responsibility for school budgets and finance including the school finance funding formula, school budgets and audits, district consolidation and reorganization, and the School Budget Review Committee. Internal Operations supports the staff and operations of the Department including budgeting, accounting, purchasing, printing, and personnel. Information Technology provides mainframe computer programming, operation and network services for the department's local area networks, and data processing support.

The Division of Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services works with disabled students and adults. They provide career oriented counseling, training, and placement for eligible individuals with disabilities and make determinations, under contract to the Social Security Administration, regarding the eligibility of applicants for Social Security Disability and Supplemental Security Income benefits.

Iowa Public Television is Iowa's statewide public broadcasting network. IPTV provides alternative educational programming to Iowans throughout the state. They also provide Ready to Learn Preschool programming, the K-12 Classroom series, Educational Resources for teachers, CD-ROM and K-12 Connections virtual field trips, School to Careers, Transitions (designed to help high school students make the move to college), professional development for teachers, the Iowa Distance Learning Database, and access to college credit telecourses.

The State Library advocates for Iowa libraries and promotes excellence and innovation in library services in order to provide statewide access to information for all Iowans. Their programs include both general and specialized research services for state

government, legal and medical communities, and the people of Iowa; the state Law Library, library development services, State Data Center (a cooperative program with the U.S. Census Bureau), and the State Documents Center.

### **C. Ways the Department of Education Services Relate to the Olmstead Decision and Community Living for People with Disabilities**

In *Olmstead v. L.C.*, 527 U.S. 581; 119 S.Ct. 2176 (1999), the Supreme Court found that no one should have to live in an institution or nursing home if they can live in the community with reasonable support. Governor Vilsack's Executive Order Number Twenty-seven directed state agencies, including the Department of Education, to evaluate their policies, programs, statutes and regulations for compliance with *Olmstead*, and to identify barriers and develop a plan for improving the availability of community-based services for qualified individuals.

Department of Education policies support serving students in the least restrictive environment and the Department strives to assist local districts as they provide students with disabilities with the skills they need to live and work as independently as possible. Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services works with older students and adults with disabilities to help them obtain the training, accommodations, and support they need to engage in productive employment, to live as independently as possible, and to participate in the community.

### **D. Description of Existing Department of Education Services, Programs, or Activities that *Already* Promote and Support Community Living**

There are four primary programs in the Department that contribute to community living for persons with disabilities:

- The Bureau of Children, Family, and Community Services provides primary oversight and guidance to local school districts and area education agencies regarding identification and educational services for children and youth with disabilities birth to 21 years of age. These services are provided in the least restrictive environment and are designed to give students the skills and abilities they will need to get a job and live as independently as possible.
- Vocational rehabilitation services are provided to eligible persons with disabilities under an Individual Plan for Employment in order to assist them to prepare for, obtain, and retain jobs in areas of their choosing and within their capacities. In addition, IVRS has counselors assigned to every public high school and community college to assist with transition issues and provide support to IVRS clients who attend community colleges.
- Vocational rehabilitation offers independent living services to persons with disabilities who do not plan to go to work, but need these services to continue or return to living in their own home or apartment. IVRS no longer runs a residential evaluation facility – all evaluations are done in community settings.
- Disability determination services, offered by vocational rehabilitation, adjudicate the eligibility of applicants for SSDI and SSI benefits.

## II. Results of Self-assessment and Barrier Identification

### Summary of Barriers by Type

<b>Issue/Barrier</b>
<b>Information Deficits</b>
Sharing of information is difficult because many are misinformed or uninformed about confidentiality requirements and standards.
There is a lack of communication between divisions/bureaus around issues relating to persons with disabilities.
There is no systemic statewide data on persons with disabilities, the services they receive, and their outcomes.
Despite mass outreach efforts, many parents, educators and rehabilitation counselors are uninformed or misinformed about policies, independent living options and practices that effectively promote and prepare individuals for choice-making and working and living in the most integrated settings in the community which leads to low or no expectations.
<b>Training Deficits</b>
Some parents, educators, and rehabilitation counselors do not believe that individuals with disabilities are capable of working and living in integrated communities, or that they have a role in assisting individuals with disabilities to live successfully in the community ("it's not my job"). There is a lack of coordination across programs, which should develop common goals, shared resources and common monitoring. There is a lack of sharing of information that restricts or blocks coordination.
Knowledge of the need for, and methods for early identification of transition needs, including assistive technology, are not wide spread.
Educators do not have the knowledge and expertise to deal with mental health issues in the classroom, work, or community.
Most teacher preservice programs spend little time on transition issues.
Disability support service providers at institutions of higher education have no consistent knowledge of disabilities and ways of assessing the need for and type of accommodations needed.
<b>Service Capacity</b>
Many schools do not promote self-determination and choice making, let alone provide direct instruction when needed. Reasons cited include: limited instructional time, competing priorities, no control/impact on curriculum. There need to be opportunities for trials with community living.
There are limited providers/slots for working and living in integrated community sites.
IVRS counselor caseloads are so high that they must parcel out their time and the available money to try for equity instead of meeting individual needs. This has caused a waiting list for VR services.
Transition planning and services are not fully supported or coordinated at state and local levels.

Outcomes would be better if services were more coordinated across school, work, and living segments of a student's life.
<b>Public Policy</b>
There needs to be greater focus on student needs and the ability to access accommodations, rather than on the political agenda.
Schools are required to publicly report their students' progress in academic areas. There are no such requirements for community living- resulting in an increased emphasis on academics and a decrease in work experience and other areas related to choice making and living in the community.
The number of work experience service providers is diminishing.
Procedures to determine eligibility for services differ across agencies. There is more focus on core academic subjects and less focus on work related activities.
Secondary and Post-Secondary have different roles and responsibilities with regard to accommodations that need to be made. This sometimes leads to confusion and misunderstanding on the part of the person needing the accommodations.
<b>Funding</b>
There needs to be a coordinated transfer of Assistive Technology from school to where the student goes next. Paying for assistive technology devices and services after graduation might lead to more independence.
More funds are needed for community options.
We are not able to draw down all available federal funds due to insufficient state match.
Better coordination of services across agencies is needed to avoid duplicate assessments and services.

**Olmstead Strategic Action Plan**

**III. Strategies to Promote Community Living**

In order to most effectively address the broad range of barriers that were identified, The Iowa Department of Education has identified two primary strategies and a number of activities that cut across all identified barriers. Strategies:

1. Improve the capacity of state, area, and local educational and vocational rehabilitation systems to provide services that are effective in preparing individuals for and supporting community living for persons with disabilities.
2. Improve data collection and analysis of indicators related to the preparation and results of persons with disabilities.

A more detailed description of the activities to address each strategy is provided below.

**Strategy 1. Improve the capacity of state, area, and local educational and vocational rehabilitation systems to provide services that are effective in preparing individuals for and supporting community living of persons with disabilities.**

The Iowa Department of Education will engage in six primary activities to improve the capacity of vocational rehabilitation and state, area, and local education systems to provide services that are effective in supporting community living of persons with disabilities: (a) professional development to improve student achievement, (b) learning supports, (c) post-secondary accommodations, (d) self-determination as a school reform effort, (e) Iowa Rehabilitation Service System (IRSS), and (f) the Employment Network. A brief description of each activity is provided here. A more detailed description of the steps necessary to complete each activity is provided in *Section V. Action Planning*.

a. Professional development to improve student achievement. In order to serve students in the least restrictive environment, teachers need skills and strategies for meeting the individual learning needs of all students. In its ongoing academic initiatives such as Reading First, Every Child Reads, Every Student Counts, and the Striving Learners Component of the Iowa State Improvement Grant, the Department is providing teachers with research-based strategies for teaching their content to students, including students with disabilities.

b. Learning supports. Learning supports encompass a wide range of strategies, programs, services and practices that create conditions and environments that enhance connections to school and community and alleviate barriers to learning for all students. Currently, efforts to support youth and their success in school are often fragmented and inefficient because the staff overseeing them work in isolation and are solely focused on one or two areas of support. This body of work is designed to pull these fragmented structures and efforts into an organized and cohesive continuum of programs and services that are all focused on common results for youth. By creating systems of supports at the state, regional, and local levels, this work promotes healthy development and addresses barriers to learning, thereby increasing the chances that all children and youth have an equal opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

c. Post-secondary accommodations. The purpose of this project is to increase the access of youth with disabilities to post-secondary education and post-secondary disability services through two major approaches: (1) Increasing the identification and use of appropriate classroom accommodations, and (2) Increasing the quality and relevance of information shared between secondary and post-secondary schools, including a history of accommodations.

d. Self-determination as a school reform effort. Individuals with disabilities who have strong self-determination skills are generally more likely to live successfully in the community. While many curricula exist for teaching self-determination skills, systemic instruction of self-determination skills in schools has been difficult to achieve. In an attempt to broaden the systemic instruction of self-determination a small systems change project has begun. This project is working with a small number of high schools over a period of four years to determine ways to systemically include self-determination

as a school reform effort. Anticipated results of the project include methods for statewide implementation.

e. Iowa Rehabilitation Service System (IRSS). A computer system will be designed to manage cases and caseloads of vocational rehabilitation counselors. Although this system will improve the consistency of data and help with decision-making, its primary purpose is to increase the capacity of the system to provide quality services. Full implementation of IRSS will result in reducing the time counselors spend on paperwork, increasing the quality and systematic use of client feedback, more time for counseling resources directed to client needs, more efficiency in the purchasing of services for clients, and, ultimately, more persons with disabilities in better jobs at higher wages.

f. Employment Network. A regional placement network will be developed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of locating and contacting employers to make a successful job placement. This network will develop contacts with a wide range of employers and provide a system so that one counselor contacts employers but all counselors know of a potential job opening. The network will also include training opportunities for IVRS counselors in placement techniques and for employers regarding persons with disabilities as employees. It is anticipated that the results of this network will include increased willingness of employers to hire persons with disabilities and an increase of the number of people with disabilities who are placed in well-paying jobs.

**Strategy 2. Improve data collection and analysis of indicators related to the preparation and results of persons with disabilities.**

The Iowa Department of Education will engage in five primary activities to improve the data collection and analysis of indicators related to the preparation and results of persons with disabilities: (a) Project Easier, (b) secondary transition accountability system, (c) study of the employment preparation received by Iowa youth, (d) adoption of the Iowa Youth Development Results Framework, and (e) development of a six year plan for special education. A brief description of each activity is provided here. A more detailed description of the steps necessary to complete each activity is provided in *Section V. Action Planning*.

a. Project Easier. Project EASIER (Electronic Access for Iowa Education Records) is the Iowa Department of Education's initiative involving the transfer of individual student records, including records for students with disabilities. The mission of the project is to reduce data burden, encourage better decision-making by establishing and maintaining a cost effective method of accessing and transferring accurate and timely education information among school districts, postsecondary institutions and the Iowa Department of Education. Underlying principles of the project include a commitment toward reduction of paper-based state reporting, building on existing technologies available to schools, a commitment toward the elimination of paper-based college transcripts, the voluntary adoption of a common basis for facilitating meaningful information exchange, and greater security of confidential student information. As this system develops and becomes fully implemented it will be aligned with the special education MIS data through the use of a common student identifier.

b. Transition accountability system. The transition accountability system will include a set of standards and indicators (based on the Freidman Results-based Accountability Model) that annually provides state data on the status of youth with disabilities as they exit high school and after they have completed high school. Data as students exit high school will include variables such as graduation rate, drop out rate, perceptions of high school, plans for the fall following graduation. Data after students have completed high school will include employment status and post-secondary education. Students with and without disabilities will be included as participants. The system will also include a method for reporting and using the data to make decisions, including a long-term plan to address secondary transition of youth with disabilities from high school to community life. This activity is dependent on the receipt of grant funds.

c. Study of the employment preparation received by Iowa youth. The purpose of this study will be to determine the type of employment preparation that districts offer to high school students with and without disabilities, and the type of employment preparation that these high school students access. Data will be collected through a review of course catalogs and a review of transcripts of ninth and twelfth graders. A random sampling of 45 districts will be selected for participation in this study. It is anticipated that data will be collected on up to 12,000 Iowa youth.

d. Adoption of the Iowa Youth Development Results Framework. The Iowa Youth Development Results Framework, designed by partners of the Iowa Collaborative for Youth Development (ICYD) has been developed to facilitate local and state collaboration toward the successful transition of all school age youth. A group of seven State agencies serving youth with disabilities in transition will use the Iowa Youth Development Results Framework and disaggregate the data from the leading indicators to assess how well youth with disabilities in Iowa transition into higher education and work.

e. Completion of a six-year plan for special education. A six-year state performance plan will be developed and shared with the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) by December 2005. The plan will address a number of monitoring priorities for both Part C and Part B (see Table 1). The six-year plan will also address a redesign of the special education monitoring system that will ensure that AEA compliance monitoring is valid and effective and provide in-depth information about a priority area of focus. The processes designed for each will be implemented annually and resulting data will be used to build system capacity at all levels. Focused monitoring will begin with a study of the implementation of the least restrictive environment.

Table 1. Areas of the Six-Year Plan, as Required by OSEP.

<b>Part C Monitoring Priorities</b>	<b>Part B Monitoring Priorities</b>
Child Find/Public Awareness	FAPE in the LRE
Family Centered Services	Parent Involvement
Early Intervention in Natural Environments	Disproportionality
Effective Transitions	Effective Transitions
Effective General Supervision	Effective General Supervision

#### IV. Action Planning

<p><b>Strategy: 1. Improve the capacity of state, area, and local educational and vocational rehabilitation systems to provide services that are effective in preparing individuals for and supporting community living of persons with disabilities.</b></p> <p><b>Objective:</b> Prepare individuals with the skills they need to live independently and engage in productive employment.</p>			
<p><b>Activity 1a: Improving Student Achievement</b></p>			<p><b>Lead Division:</b> ECESE</p>
<p><b>Action Steps</b></p>	<p><b>Responsible Bureau</b></p>	<p><b>Key Partners</b></p>	<p><b>Timeline</b></p>
<p>1. Work with local school districts and AEAs to strengthen reading instruction at the middle and high school levels. 2. Build local capacity for math instruction, K-12.</p>	<p>BIS</p>	<p>BCFCS, AEAs, LEAs</p>	<p>Spring, 2007</p>

<p><b>Activity 1b: Learning Supports</b></p>			<p><b>Lead Division:</b> ECESE</p>
<p><b>Action Steps</b></p>	<p><b>Responsible Bureau</b></p>	<p><b>Key Partners</b></p>	<p><b>Timeline</b></p>
<p>1. Review and analyze multi-system youth data. 2. Develop intra-agency Learning Supports action plans based on need.</p>	<p>BCFCS</p>	<p>Public Health; Criminal Juvenile Justice Planning; Department of Human Services; IVRS; Workforce Development</p>	<p>2008</p>
<p><b>Activity 1c: Accessing Post-secondary Accommodations</b></p>			<p><b>Lead Division:</b> ECESE</p>
<p><b>Action Steps</b></p>	<p><b>Responsible Bureau</b></p>	<p><b>Key Partners</b></p>	<p><b>Timeline</b></p>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Develop training materials.</li> <li>2. Pilot training materials.</li> <li>3. Implement training statewide.</li> <li>4. Develop common framework.</li> <li>5. Pilot common framework.</li> <li>6. Revise framework as necessary.</li> <li>7. Implement framework statewide.</li> </ol>	BCFCS	Iowa DSS providers, DVRS, AEAs, LEAs	Spring, 2007
<b>Activity 1d: Self-determination as School Reform</b>			<b>Lead Division: ECESE</b>
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Responsible Bureau</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Pilot planning and implementation in 2 schools.</li> <li>2. Roll out process to an additional 6 schools.</li> <li>3. Evaluate process.</li> <li>4. Scale-up process for statewide implementation.</li> </ol>	BCFCS		2011
<b>Activity 1e: Iowa Rehabilitation Service System</b>			<b>Lead Division: DVRS</b>
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Responsible Bureau</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify basic case processes of vocational rehabilitation</li> <li>2. Use technology to automate as many of the processes as possible.</li> <li>3. Build the new system</li> <li>4. Train staff to use the new system.</li> </ol>	All bureaus of IVRS	Clients, IVRS staff, contractors, partners	Spring '06
<b>Activity 1f: Employment Network</b>			<b>Lead Division: IVRS</b>
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Responsible Bureau</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Timeline</b>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Research what other VR agencies have done in this regard.</li> <li>2. Develop a system specific to Iowa</li> <li>3. Train staff in how to use the system</li> <li>4. Implement the system</li> <li>5. Review and refine the employer network system.</li> </ol>	Rehabilitation Services Bureau	Other State VR agencies, Club 26, employers	Ongoing
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<b>Strategy: 2. Improve data collection and analysis of indicators related to the preparation and results of persons with disabilities.</b>			
<b>Objective:</b> Collect data and results in order to assess and modify programs as necessary.			
<b>Activity 2a: Project EASIER</b>			<b>Lead Division: FIS</b>
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Responsible Bureau</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Continue development and implementation of Project EASIER.</li> <li>2. Coordinate with BCFCS to align EASIER data with Special Education IMS data.</li> </ol>	PRE	BCFCS, LEAs	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>TBD – based on future activities</p>
<b>Activity: 2b. Transition accountability system</b>			<b>Lead Division: ECESE</b>
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Responsible Bureau</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify standards and indicators.</li> <li>2. Identify data sources.</li> <li>3. Pilot system.</li> <li>4. Evaluate/refine system.</li> <li>5. Implement system statewide.</li> </ol>	BCFCS	Parents, Department of Blind, IVRS	Summer '07

<b>Activity 2c: Study of the Employment Preparation Received by Iowa Youth.</b>			<b>Lead Division: ECESE</b>
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Responsible Bureau</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collect course offerings data.</li> <li>2. Collect student access data.</li> <li>3. Analyze and interpret data.</li> <li>4. Write report and recommendations</li> </ol>	BCFCS	AEAs, LEAs, Parents, Students, UNI, ISU	Spring, 2006
<b>Activity 2d: Adoption of the Iowa Youth Development Results Framework</b>			<b>Lead Division: DVRs</b>
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Responsible Bureau</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Timeline</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Identify leading indicators for the successful transition of youth with disabilities</li> <li>2. Identify data sources, availability, and gaps</li> <li>3. Facilitate the development of data collection methods</li> <li>4. Analyze the data</li> <li>5. Develop a reporting system to disseminate the results</li> </ol>	Improving Transition Outcomes Grant	DE, DHS, DOB, DHR, IWD, Governor's DD Council	2008
<b>Activity 2e: Completion of a Six Year Plan for Special Education</b>			<b>Lead Division: ECESE</b>
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Responsible Bureau</b>	<b>Key Partners</b>	<b>Timeline</b>

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Collect indicator data.</li> <li>2. Develop plan.</li> <li>3. Submit plan to OSEP.</li> <li>4. Continue to collect indicator data.</li> <li>5. Review and revise plan as necessary.</li> <li>6. Report annually.</li> </ol>	BCFCS	SEAP	December, 2005
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**V. Interagency Collaboration**

Issues requiring interagency collaboration are addressed in the individual activity action plans.

**VI. Monitoring Progress**

An annual review will be conducted to determine progress made toward implementation of action plans.