

National Autism Data Center Fact Sheet Series

December 2016: Issue 9



Life Course Outcomes
Research Program



Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was signed in 2014 and went into effect in July of 2015. This act is a reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (1998) with substantial changes. One goal of this act is to increase employment opportunities for those with intellectual and developmental disabilities by changing some of the rules and requirements in the

original Workforce Investment Act.¹ Some areas of focus included supported employment, sheltered workshops, and pre-employment transition services. After enactment of WIOA, each state created a new four-year plan to address the federally required changes. Below, we will address some of the major changes associated with WIOA.

Three changes in WIOA that might help improve employment outcomes

1

Guidelines to increase transition services

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services, which are governed by WIOA, provide transition services to youth with disabilities to address the problem of students not receiving services to transition from school to work until late high school or following high school exit. WIOA places new emphasis on these services and defines a new group of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS). VR agencies must now work with their state Department of Education to create and provide these services to students with disabilities. Examples of Pre-ETS include job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences and self-advocacy training. Pre-ETS might be specifically designed for an individual or could be delivered in a group format. These include programs that combine classroom teaching with on-site work experiences.

WIOA attempts to shift funding to provide vocational services earlier during the high school years, in order to properly assist students in entering the competitive workforce. Specifically, 15% of all VR funds for each state must go toward providing Pre-ETS for students with disabilities. In addition, WIOA requires VR counselors to be involved earlier in the transition process to assist schools in ensuring students with disabilities are receiving appropriate transition services. Per law, all students with a disability can receive Pre-ETS, regardless of whether they are receiving special education services. With these new measures in place, more students with disabilities might receive Pre-ETS prior to exiting secondary school, facilitating their transition into employment.



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Improvement of supported employment services

Supported employment (SE) services are designed for individuals with the most significant disabilities who need help learning or adjusting to a new position. A person with a “most significant disability” is defined in VR regulations as someone who has more than one disability or a disability that highly affects more than one functional capacity. One of the main types of SE services is called on-the-job training, in which a VR counselor goes to the work site with the individual receiving services to help him or her learn the daily tasks of the

position. Prior to implementation of WIOA, SE services were only provided for up to 18 months after employment. This was deemed insufficient, and WIOA extended post-employment supports by an additional six months, for a total of 24 months. Half of state SE grant funds must go toward serving youth with the most significant disabilities (as defined by the law). These measures may help increase the number of individuals with significant disabilities receiving SE and post-employment services.

3

Efforts to increase integrated employment

Segregated workplaces are institutions that only hire disabled workers and typically pay them less than minimum wage. WIOA contains a section entitled “Limitations on Use of Subminimum Wage.” This section strongly emphasizes the need to reduce segregated settings, and focus on competitive, integrated employment. This means that disabled individuals are expected to be immersed in a traditional job setting with non-disabled workers making at least minimum wage. Prior to job placement in a non-integrated setting at subminimum wage, WIOA requires documentation detailing why

youth (ages 14-24) could not secure competitive, integrated employment. If the individual remains in a segregated setting, such documentation must be provided every six months. Also, section 511 of WIOA prohibits educational institutions from contracting with segregated employment settings. These changes may increase the number of competitive, integrated settings in the country, increase earnings for people with disabilities, and increase access to this type of work for those with disabilities. The effects of these changes will require ongoing monitoring.

References:

1. The Arc. (2015, June). WIOA: What it means for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (I/DD). Retrieved on November 29, 2016 from <http://www.thearc.org/document.doc?id=5183>.

How to cite this information: Murthy, V.D., Rast J.E., Roux A.M. National Autism Data Center Fact Sheet Series; Issue 9. Philadelphia, PA: Life Course Outcomes Research Program, A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, Drexel University, 2016.

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The Life Course Outcomes Research Program is building a base of knowledge about the things other than clinical interventions that promote positive outcomes for people on the autism spectrum and their families and communities.

