

**PENNSYLVANIA OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION**

# **OVR**

# **Transition Guide**

# **for Professionals**



**pennsylvania**

DEPARTMENT OF LABOR & INDUSTRY  
OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

**The purpose of this guide is to provide professionals with an overview of the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation's role in the School-to-Work process. It is intended to provide basic knowledge of what students with disabilities and their families can expect when becoming involved with OVR.**

**The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation is a state agency that helps individuals with disabilities prepare for, obtain and maintain employment. OVR is an eligibility-based program. OVR is primarily comprised of the Bureau of Blindness & Visual Services (BBVS) and the Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (BVRS).**

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Process**

- Referring students
- Eligibility determination
- Financial needs test
- Individualized plan for employment (IPE)
- Coordination of services with other agencies
- Competitive employment and case closure

# Referring Students

The optimal time for OVR to begin working with a student with a disability is when the student is ready, able, and available to engage in the activities necessary to establish an employment goal. These activities include the development of an IPE and participation in vocational services in order to become employed. The time at which this occurs is unique to each individual. Typically, this is two years prior to graduation. However, it may occur later due to onset of disability and the individual's ability to pursue competitive employment at that time. It should occur at a time when the student becomes interested in pursuing an employment goal and becomes available for vocational exploration.

An appropriate referral to OVR is any student with a disability who may need vocational counseling and guidance as well as assistance in preparing for, obtaining, or maintaining competitive employment. Competitive employment is a job in a community integrated setting, earning at least minimum wage. Students who have an Individualized Education Program (IEP) under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), students who have a Section 504 plan under the Rehabilitation Act, and any other students with disabilities who may or may not require specialized services in school including drug and alcohol and mental health services are appropriate referrals to OVR. If there are any uncertainties regarding who would be an appropriate referral, contact your local OVR office to further discuss it.

A referral to OVR can be made by anyone, including a student, a family member or school/agency personnel. Students under the age of 18 must have parent/guardian permission to become involved with OVR services.

Referrals can be made in person, by phone, or on-line at [www.cwds.pa.gov](http://www.cwds.pa.gov). Contact the local OVR district office, or the designated OVR liaison to determine the preferred method. At the time of the initial referral, OVR will need to provide the following information about the student to facilitate the application process:

- Name
- Address
- Telephone number
- Email address (if applicable)
- Date of birth
- Social Security number
- Gender
- Valid photo ID
- Brief statement about the student's disability

# Eligibility Determination

OVR's program is based on eligibility. It is not an entitlement program. A student must be determined eligible by an OVR counselor. The counselor must first determine that the student has a diagnosed disability, and that the student's disability substantially interferes with his/her ability to prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment. Finally, there must be a demonstrated need for OVR services in order for the student to successfully pursue or retain employment.

Only an OVR counselor, who has special training and experience, can determine if a student is eligible for OVR services. Existing records (medical, psychological, vocational, etc.), staff observations, family input, and student self-evaluation help the OVR counselor make an eligibility determination.

During the eligibility determination process, the OVR counselor assesses to what degree the student's disability significantly impacts or limits his/her functional capacities in the following areas: mobility, self-care, work tolerance, interpersonal skills, work skills, communication, and self-direction. Services will be provided based upon significance of disability and the availability of funds.

# Financial Need

The financial needs test determines to what extent the student may be required to contribute toward the cost of certain OVR services. These services will be outlined in the IPE. However, diagnostic and evaluation services, vocational counseling and guidance are always provided without regard to the student's and/or family's income.

Documentation of the student's and/or family's income is needed such as a tax return, W2, pay stubs, etc. If the student is receiving Social Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), a copy of his/her award letter or monthly benefit statement is required. Diagnostic and evaluation services, vocational counseling and guidance, rehabilitation teaching, orientation and mobility training, and job placement assistance are always provided regardless of the student's and/or family's income.

# Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

The cornerstone of the OVR process is vocational counseling and guidance provided by an OVR counselor. After the student is determined eligible, he/she works closely with an OVR counselor to clearly define an employment goal and jointly develop and Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

The IPE is developed to meet the student's unique vocational strengths and needs. The student's interests, strengths, and abilities guide the IPE development. The IPE will be developed based on results of testing and evaluations as well as the student's interests and aptitudes. Job market and employability will also be considered.

The IPE identifies the student's vocational goal, the services needed to attain the goal, and service providers that are to be utilized to assist the student to reach his/her specific goal. The length of time from OVR referral to successful employment varies widely depending on the content of the IPE and the unique circumstances of each student.

# Coordination of Services with other Agencies

A student may require support from other public, private or community agencies that will serve a role in the student's transition from school to work. These agencies may provide long-term supports that the student may need to achieve and maintain his/her employment and independence as an adult. Representatives from these agencies should be invited to participate in the development and implementation of a student's Transition Plan while the student is in school. These agencies include but are not limited to:

- Department of Human Services
  - Office of Intellectual Disabilities
  - Office of Mental Health
  - Bureau of Autism Services
  - Office of Long-Term Living
  - Office of Children, Youth and Families
- Department of Health
- Department of Labor & Industry
  - Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
  - Youth Programs
- Institutions of Higher Education
- Other public/private agencies and community resources



# Competitive Employment and Case Closure

The goal of receiving OVR services is for the student to obtain and maintain competitive employment. This goal is achieved when the student is working in a community-integrated setting earning at least minimum wage in a job that is consistent with the student's unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice. Students will, ideally, work in a position of employment to become financially self-supporting and independent.

An OVR case is closed when the student achieves his/her vocational goal and is successfully employed for at least 90 days, at which time the case is closed. If necessary, post-employment services may be available after a case is closed. Other agencies may be able to provide funding to the student for long-term supports necessary to maintain employment.

# How Can School/Agency Personnel and OVR Help One Another?

Starting at a young age, students benefit from a systematic approach to career development. OVR counselors can provide technical assistance to school/agency personnel to assist in the development of learning activities and opportunities that are centered on career exploration and development. To prepare students for employment and OVR involvement, school/agency personnel can work with OVR staff to:

- Evaluate the strengths and needs of the students being referred.
- Utilize ongoing assessment techniques to effectively assist students plan and prepare for employment.
- Develop a career portfolio and utilize it as a tool for the student's self-development
- Create ongoing work-based learning opportunities, such as job shadowing, mentoring, and paid and unpaid work experiences with the students.
- Develop "Team Teaching" activities on topics such as: OVR orientation, career exploration, self awareness, self advocacy, self determination, disability awareness, eligibility vs. entitlement, job readiness, job seeking and job retention.
- Provide presentations to staff, students and families regarding transition services.
- Learn about each other's policies, operations and procedures.
- Identify and work through barriers to achieve an effective and collaborative process for transition from school to work.

# Ask Your OVR Liaison About...

- Project SEARCH
- Project Promoting Academic Success (PAS)
- Summer Academy
- Hiram G. Andrews Center
  - Cognitive Skills Enhancement Program (CSEP)
  - Center for Assistive & Rehabilitative Technology Program (CART)

**To learn more about the  
Office of Vocational Rehabilitation  
please visit our website at  
[www.dli.pa.gov/ovr](http://www.dli.pa.gov/ovr)  
Click on "Disability Services" and then on the  
"Office of Vocational Rehabilitation."**



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