

Pushing the Integrated Employment Agenda: A Case Study of Maryland's High-Performing Employment System

By Jean E. Winsor, Cady Landa, Allison Hall, and Caro Narby

**Key Findings
from the RRTC
on Advancing
Employment**

Read this brief to learn about the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of Maryland's success in achieving integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD across three state systems: IDD, vocational rehabilitation (VR), and education.

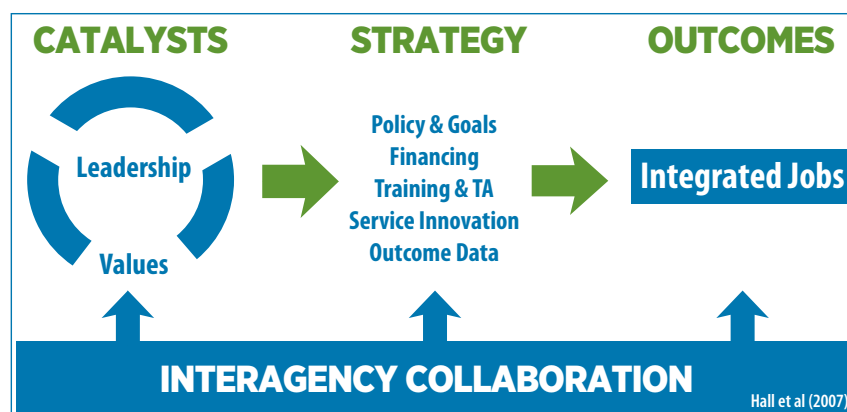
Introduction

This brief summarizes data collected from key informants in Maryland about the state's efforts to support integrated employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). It highlights features that contribute to the effectiveness of Maryland's collaborative structures that have resulted in the state's success in achieving integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD across three state systems: IDD, vocational rehabilitation (VR), and education. Presentation of these features is organized by the seven elements of the Higher-Performing States Employment Framework. These elements have been found to be important in achieving higher rates of competitive integrated employment outcomes for people with IDD.

The large variation in employment participation across state IDD agencies suggests that examining state agency policy and practice is vital for understanding employment outcomes. The High Performing States Employment Framework (Figure 1) was developed over ten years ago from research that considered common strategies and approaches across state IDD agencies with high levels of integrated employment outcomes, and identifies seven elements that communicate commitment to the goals of community inclusion and integrated employment (Hall et al., 2007).

Given the increasing emphasis on a cross-systems focus and interagency collaboration, this model is evolving to encompass the systems' interactions, relationships, and partnerships that characterize higher-performing states. Building on this foundation, project staff and partners in this research are exploring the relationships between state strategy and employment outcomes, with the goal of producing a framework where systems intentionally align practices with a priority for employment.

Figure 1. High Performing States Employment Framework



Methods

In 2015, researchers at the Institute for Community Inclusion's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities developed the State Employment System Performance Composite Indicator. The indicator was developed using data representing employment outcomes for state IDD agencies, state VR agencies, and state public education systems. The composite indicator represents an overall state employment system performance ranking (Smith et al., in preparation).

RRTC on Advancing
Employment for Individuals
with Intellectual and
Developmental Disabilities

A PROJECT OF

ThinkWork!
INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION, UMASS BOSTON



This study used the results of the indicator to identify states with higher-ranking employment systems. The ten states with the highest-ranking state systems in 2013, as evidenced by State Employment System Performance Composite Indicator scores, in ranked order, were Maryland, New Hampshire, Vermont, Oregon, Washington, Iowa, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Colorado, and Delaware. To understand what collaborative interagency policies and practices are being implemented in states with relatively high rankings in integrated employment, and to contribute to the evolution of the High Performing States Employment Framework, a case study of Maryland, the state that achieved the highest ranking in the composite indicator analysis, was conducted.

Data was collected from a wide variety of sources, including publicly available policy and practice documents from the state IDD, VR, and education departments; expert interviews with past and current technical assistance providers and state agency staff members; and key informant interviews with state agency staff in formal positions of leadership within the Department of Disabilities, the Developmental Disabilities Administration, the Special Education/Early Intervention and Rehabilitative Services Divisions of the State Department of Education, and the Maryland Association of Community Services. The Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) is Maryland's IDD agency, and the Division of Rehabilitative Services (DORS) is Maryland's VR agency.

Interagency Collaboration and Partnership

There is a shared statewide intra- and interagency responsibility and authority for coordinating transition services and achieving competitive integrated employment of youth and working-age adults with IDD. This collaboration draws on the participation of a broad consortium of stakeholders across the state. Collaborating public agencies should at a minimum include state and local education, VR, workforce, IDD, and Medicaid agencies.

Informants, both current and retired, commented that among Maryland agencies serving individuals with IDD, collaboration is the way of doing business. Several structural features support the interagency collaboration that characterizes the state's service delivery and system change efforts.

- » A cabinet-level Department of Disabilities is charged with working with all of the state's agencies to coordinate and improve delivery of services to individuals with disabilities, and to ensure their full integration and economic participation.
- » The Interagency Transition Council for Youth with Disabilities, charged with ensuring effective interagency planning and delivery of services, now has wide representation from nine state agencies (including 11 divisions, with statewide, regional, and local participation), parents, advocates, providers, and students.
- » DORS, which delivers VR services, and the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention, which focuses on transition, are both housed within the Maryland State Department of Education.
- » The private agencies through which DDA and DORS provide services have shared accreditation and are jointly certified to receive funding from both agencies.
- » The state's long-standing transition initiative has required a strong collaboration among the Division of Special Education/Early Intervention, DORS, and DDA in delivering transition services.

State agency leaders interviewed for this study explained that collaboration is a process that is built on interpersonal relationships characterized by trust, mutual respect, and a sharing of knowledge that incorporates deep understanding of each of the agencies working together. Many of the administrators in the Department of Disabilities, the special education and rehabilitative services divisions of the State Department of Education, DDA, and provider agencies have worked together for several decades on increasing the competitive integrated employment of individuals with IDD.

Strategic Goals, Policies and Operating Practices

State and local agencies' goals and operating policies require and support competitive integrated employment and postsecondary education as the first and preferred options in planning and service delivery for youth and working-age adults with IDD.

Competitive integrated employment for individuals with IDD has been a long-standing goal of the Maryland state government. Beginning in the late 1980s, there has been a public commitment to providing transition services to students with IDD, with the goal of increasing their competitive integrated employment. Since 1989, Maryland, through the Governor's Transitioning Youth Initiative, has entitled all students with IDD leaving high school to a full year of supported employment and other day services delivered by DDA and VR providers. On an annual basis, since this time, the state budget has prioritized and allocated funds for these youth.

In 1995, the state legislature passed a law requiring Maryland's State Departments of Education, Health and Mental Hygiene, Labor, and the Governor's Office for Individuals with Disabilities¹ to create an interagency state plan for transitioning students with disabilities. To further deepen the interagency emphasis, in 2000, the governor signed an executive order that established an interagency transition council for youth with disabilities, with 21 members.

This council is charged with improving postsecondary outcomes for youth with disabilities and annually reviewing and updating the interagency state plan to meet several goals. These goals include cross-agency training and technical assistance for professionals, parents, students, and advocates; accountability reporting on services and outcomes; coordination with state and federal workforce and system reform efforts; identifying and replicating promising practices; and recommending policy changes and funding priorities. A 2007 executive order updated and expanded the membership of the transition council as well as the goals of the state plan and duties of the council.

These efforts collectively set the stage for Maryland to develop a formal Employment First policy. Maryland state agencies had a strong Employment First culture, with consistent messaging about employment as a goal for all people of working age. In 2008, DDA, working with stakeholders in a strategic planning process, developed a formal position statement that clearly stated that DDA considers employment as the first option for all people of working age receiving DDA services.

Maryland's Employment First initiative is led by representatives of the Department of Health, DDA, and the Department of Disabilities as they partner with other state agencies and community stakeholders, including the dedicated members of the Maryland Employment First Leadership Team. A five-year strategic plan was created to improve employment systems and increase the number of people with IDD working in the community (Employment First Maryland, June, 2016).

Operating processes have also been an important part of Maryland's efforts to build the capacity of their employment service system. Maryland works to ensure that state education policy, in all grade levels, supports community employment as a goal of transition from school to adult supports. Maryland aligns the Multi-State Alternate Assessment with the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards to promote high academic outcomes and readiness for postsecondary options, including employment.

State policy requires schools to have transition planning as part of each student's Individual Education Plan (IEP) beginning at age 14. To facilitate seamless transition for youth, each school district has a transition coordinator and a DORS (VR) counselor with expertise in transition. The DORS counselor is assigned to students with IDD two years prior to school exit, and is expected to attend student IEP meetings.

¹Now Department of Disabilities

Leadership

Leadership is defined as taking responsibility for the transition of youth and young adults with IDD from high school to competitive integrated employment or postsecondary education, and for working-age adults with IDD from non-integrated employment services to competitive integrated employment. Leadership is dispersed through the state, regional, and local agencies that play a role in the transition and employment of these groups.

Our analysis found that in Maryland, across the three service systems, leadership is values-driven. One respondent described leadership as centered on a “common belief that all and each and every person is valued ... employable ... and can be supported with meaningful employment and meaningful income.” This belief is punctuated by a strong drive to improve and do better, and there is a culture of innovation among the administrators we interviewed.

Key informants interviewed for this study included people in formal positions of leadership within four key state agencies: the Department of Disabilities, DDA, Special Education/Early Intervention, and DORS. They all described as part of their jobs:

- » providing a consistent focus on increasing competitive integrated employment;
- » consistently and regularly articulating a vision for bringing employment to scale across the state both within and across systems and to external stakeholders;
- » aligning resources to support the vision;
- » monitoring the effectiveness of their efforts and modifying their efforts as needed;
- » embedding common effective service and administrative processes within and across state agencies;
- » committing to continuous improvement;
- » facilitating inter-organizational relationships; and
- » building capacity throughout systems.

These informants spoke of sharing the goal of increasing competitive integrated employment of individuals with IDD, and they shared an understanding that one agency cannot do it alone. They referenced a focus on problem solving and frequent communication. Other key themes were the importance of trust and mutual respect in their working relationships. Although there has been quite a bit of turnover in the top leadership of the DDA, many of the informants had worked for the state on disability issues for many years and had built strong relationships with one another over time.

Several qualities characterize the leadership style of those we interviewed. One characteristic is that leaders regularly draw on the insights and creativity of staff engaged in delivering service. For example, a steering committee of district-level transition coordinators is regularly convened by the Special Education Division and is asked to provide input into the development of state policy, practice, and distribution of the division’s discretionary funds. Another characteristic is a focus on removing barriers to success. As one informant put it, “And I think that it’s also really critical to listen to the themes of the barriers and to constantly be strategizing ... what needs to change”

State agency administrators who were interviewed as part of this study also stressed the importance of dispersing leadership throughout the service system, including the point of direct service delivery. They are clear that local champions at the point of service delivery must have the skills needed to forge well-functioning cross-organizational relationships and the latitude to creatively pursue positive outcomes for the individuals they serve.

Across each of the state agencies studied, intentional actions to build leadership capacity were described. Examples include the use of retreats and conferences to build leadership among direct service providers and school district transition coordinators.

Capacity Building

There is a sustained and significant investment in education, training, and technical assistance to support statewide goals regarding the transition of youth and young adults with IDD from school to postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment, and for working-age adults with IDD from non-integrated employment services to competitive integrated employment. These investments are targeted at the staff of state agencies, schools and providers, youth and young adults, their families, and employers.

Maryland agencies demonstrate strong commitment to capacity-building for both state agency staff and service providers at all levels. These efforts have focused on building a statewide understanding of goals and service outcomes, as well as methods to enhance and monitor service quality and ensure best practice. Additionally, capacity-building efforts incorporate opportunities for staff at all levels to express concerns to administrators and allow them to respond to the challenges staff and providers experience. The outcome is that policy and practice are able to evolve in a more fluid manner than is traditional for state administrative systems.

DDA and DORS jointly, and often with the engagement of statewide private provider networks, invest in building the capacity of employment service providers, who are typically, in Maryland, vendors of both agencies. Conferences, retreats, and trainings give opportunities for participants to share experiences and build leadership skills. Rather than promoting a particular service model, there is an effort to transmit skills that allow providers to be person-centered and tailor services to the specific needs of each individual served.

The development of staff capacity is also encouraged within state agencies. DDA, DORS, and Special Education/Early Intervention emphasize the importance of supporting staff to build collegial relationships within and across agencies and stakeholders. Within the culture of Maryland's employment service system, there is an acknowledgement that staff capacity is a function of both "what you know" and "who you know" (both internal and external to the state agency). There is recognition that efforts to build relationships are integral in promoting cross-organizational knowledge sharing, and that these types of relationships should be fostered at both the administrative and service-delivery levels.

Performance Measurement and Data Management

Data on service delivery and employment outcomes for youth and working-age adults with IDD are shared by state agencies, and are used to track progress and support state agencies and policy makers in developing policies and procedures.

Since 2000, Maryland's Interagency Transition Council for Youth with Disabilities has been charged by executive order to produce annual reports on the achievement of goals related to the transition of youth from high school, and to regularly create and review an annual report called the Interagency State Plan for Transitioning Youth with Disabilities. These reports have included data on the delivery of transition services, high school graduation, and employment and postsecondary education outcomes. They identify and report the activities of each partner that impact the delivery, quality, and availability of transition services. Service quality is included as a measure of success.

As noted in the section on capacity building, DDA and DORS typically contract with similar employment providers across the state. Qualified DDA providers are assumed to be eligible to become DORS providers, and vice versa. The shared pool of providers has resulted in the DDA-DORS collaboration in the design of similar staff qualifications and quality assurance measures. These shared measures and qualifications are part of cross-agency capacity building efforts to support a thriving service provision network. However, as is suggested in the Funding section of this report, the cultures of the DDA and DORS systems have posed some challenges to this model.

Each state agency also is engaged in the collection of specific employment outcome measures. As is required by federal mandates, DORS has long participated in the collection of data for the federal Rehabilitation Services Administration-911 database, and Special Education/Early Intervention collects data specifically related to IDEA post-school outcomes measures (Indicator 14). More recently, DDA developed a robust data collection system that includes employment outcomes for all individuals with IDD and is used to inform systems transformation efforts.

Funding

Funding strategies prioritize and support competitive integrated employment and postsecondary education for transitioning youth and working-age young adults with IDD.

Maryland is unique in having, since FY 1989, an annual state budget allotment for IDD and VR services supporting the transition from high school of youth with disabilities. These funds reflect an effort to achieve positive employment and career development outcomes, and guarantee a year of postsecondary DDA- and DORS-funded transition services to all exiting students with IDD. This budget allotment has allowed transitioning students to bypass waiting lists for DORS-funded services.

Maryland's public policy supports the coordination of DORS and DDA funding in providing services to individuals, and contracted DDA providers of employment services are assumed eligible to become a DORS vendor for job coaching and job development services. However, in practice, providers can struggle with the coordination of these two sources of funding for employment services. Informants shared that provider agencies are far more likely to exclusively use DDA funding for employment services.

The characteristics of these two funding sources are, from the provider perspective, quite dissimilar. One provider that works both within the DDA and DORS systems described:

Each system has a culture, a personality, a language and a process unique to itself. The provider ... has to morph itself to be like each of them and to be able to access each of them for the people they're working with ... We're asking the provider ... to maneuver ... these systems... and [they are] really different ... It's so cumbersome going to one system versus the other ... If 95% of your funds come from our DDA process, you may not have an infrastructure to support the DORS process ... It's such a small amount of money, and you have to work for it ...

The DDA funding structure is based on a daily payment rate for employment services and can be used to pay for supplementary day services. Further, the DDA payment system only requires the provider to offer proof that the individual was in attendance. Conversely, the DORS funding structure is fee-for-service, and is tied to specific billable activities. Also, providers that have the billing system infrastructure to bill for DDA-funded services often do not have the infrastructure to meet the more complex requirements for billing DORS. Many providers have mistakenly believed that they cannot bill both DORS and DDA for distinct services delivered to individuals on the same day.

In practice, there can be difficulty at the local level with coordinating DDA and DORS funding systems when it comes to vendors' ability to deliver employment services to high school students. For example, providers might choose to exclusively use DDA funds and do not access DORS funding because of the DORS requirement to ensure students have a source to pay for long-term supported employment services.

These issues have represented a challenge to Maryland's employment services system. However, the relationships and joint capacity-building efforts across multiple state agencies have resulted in efforts to address them. For example, efforts have been made to clarify that providers can bill both DDA and DORS for distinct services delivered to individuals on the same day.

Services and Service Innovation

State agencies create opportunities for schools, providers, youth, and working-age adults with IDD and their families to use best practices and creatively develop supports for transitioning to postsecondary education and competitive employment.

Maryland's employment system has developed a culture of innovation to improve employment outcomes for individuals with IDD. For example, Maryland was an early adopter of career planning services for this population. For 25 years, the state has developed, implemented, and refined a collaborative system of transition from school to work. The policy and practice directives of DDA, DORS, and Special Education/Early Intervention, as well as school district-level transition specialists, have focused on moving youth with IDD to integrated employment, and made formulation of postsecondary goals a mandatory part of the IEP process for students starting at age 14.

The state has also made use of resources available through Project SEARCH, PROMISE grants, Disability Employment Insurance grants, the Disability Innovation Fund, and technical assistance from the State Employment Leadership Network, Transcen Inc., Maryland Inclusive Higher Education Collaborative, the Think College National Coordinating Center, and the Office of Disability Employment Policy. All of these resources have helped to infuse promising practices into Maryland's employment system.

Innovation flows freely at both the systems and individual levels. It is goal-oriented and collaborative: two characteristics that enhance long-term success and integration. Innovation is supported by administrators, who encourage it at all levels of the service delivery system. Staff are supported to be thinkers rather than followers of script. Instead of solely focusing on the use of mandatory standardized training for service delivery staff, state agencies also encourage innovative thinking at the provider level by facilitating retreats where direct service staff share experiences and engage in facilitated problem-solving.

A focused use of discretionary funding also helps to build new approaches to services and systems. The Special Education/Early Intervention Division invested discretionary funds in developing a digital portfolio, accessible on phones, tablets, or computers, that students begin to use at age 14 and can build on after they leave high school. The division also is funding a state college to develop a college-level post-secondary education program for students with IDD, and a nonprofit education advocacy agency to develop indicators of high-quality postsecondary transition.

Conclusion

The High Performing States Employment Framework provides context to the factors that permit state IDD, VR, and education agencies to support a high percentage of individuals with IDD in employment. The description of policies and practices that occur within and across state agencies in Maryland provides valuable information to support the implementation of both federal and state laws and initiatives to improve the economic outcomes of individuals with IDD. Preliminary findings from the Maryland case study suggest that there is a longitudinal component to state's success which depends on state government stakeholders, the service provider community, and the advocacy community.

Additional findings suggest that state agency policy and practices that specifically address how supports will evolve over time is an important component of building an Employment First culture. The findings from Maryland illustrate that systems change is a commitment that requires a long-term dedication to reframing how services are designed to support individuals to obtain their goals.

Maryland State Agency Appendix

To further support understanding of how specific state agency actions contribute to overall successful employment outcomes for individuals with IDD, this appendix summarizes data collected from extensive document review and interviews with key informants in Maryland. While not an exhaustive commentary on how the system functions, the following information highlight actions that contribute to Maryland's effectiveness in achieving integrated employment for individuals with IDD across three state agencies (Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Education). Presentation of these actions is organized by state agency and by the seven elements of the Higher Performing States framework that have been found to be important in achieving higher rates of competitive integrated employment outcomes for people with IDD.

Maryland Developmental Disabilities Administration

Leadership

- Through the 1990s and early 2000s, Maryland's DDA had leaders who emphasized employment at the agency. This included a Statewide Coordinator for Transition and Employment Services. Staff who had responsibility for Medicaid HCBS waivers also helped to prioritize employment and develop relationships within the DDA regional system to facilitate employment outcomes for individuals with IDD.
- Despite a period of high-level leadership changes at DDA, long-term staff with deep institutional knowledge continued to spotlight the importance of employment. For example, one regional staff member served as co-chair of the Employment First work group.
- More recently, DDA has experienced a resurgence of high-level leadership that has not only prioritized employment, but is working to embed employment into all efforts to improve system outcomes. For example, leadership staffers have been active in DDA's efforts around the Charting the Life Course Framework. These efforts have also focused on embedding employment as a key expectation from youth to adulthood.

Strategic Goals, Policies and Operating Practices

- In 2004, DDA established a vision for employment services: "All Marylanders with developmental disabilities will have opportunities to be employed in their communities, in jobs of their choice, and will receive the supports they want and need for success." That same year, DDA established the Self-Determination Employment Taskforce. The taskforce builds strategies to increase self-determination, community employment, and choice within jobs, and ensures that people with IDD receive the supports they want and need for success.
- Over time, Maryland has evolved the vision of DDA employment services. In 2008–2009, DDA worked with stakeholders to develop a strategic plan to improve employment outcomes. DDA's vision expanded to become focused on employment as the first outcome for individuals. One respondent shared, "The DDA believes that all people with developmental disabilities CAN work, and contribute to their community, when given opportunity, training, and supports that build on their strengths. Employment will be the first option considered for all people of working age who receive DDA services."
- Maryland has used a series of waiting list initiatives, including in FY2012, a 5-year \$15 million initiative, to address the needs of individuals who were waiting for Medicaid Waiver services. The funding was earmarked to support people in the most integrated settings possible, including individual integrated employment.
- DDA has used established connections with stakeholders, such as the DD Coalition, as incubators for ideas and to provide feedback as new policies and practices are implemented. Using this strategy, DDA has been able to facilitate stakeholder buy-in prior to the implementation of changes, and to identify unintended consequences after changes were implemented. This has allowed DDA to act quickly to clarify and revise policy or provide additional guidance to the field.

Funding

- DDA encourages the use of DORS funding for short-term employment services, e.g., job development, assessment, short-term coaching, particularly for individuals on the waiting list or newly entering services.
- DDA pays for day and employment services with a day rate (6 hours of service per day). Alternatively, the state VR agency (DORS) uses a fee-for-service payment method.
- There had been long-term confusion in the field about whether service providers could provide DDA and DOR services on the same day. DDA has since clarified that an individual can receive DDA and DORS services on the same day as long as the DORS- and DDA-funded services do not occur within the same service hours.
- Currently, DDA does not have a specific financial incentive payment for integrated employment. However in 2003, DDA piloted the Fiscal Incentive Program for Employment Services. This program paid providers a one-time incentive payment of 10% of the individual component of the rate, per person, if the provider assisted the individual with securing and maintaining a job of their choice in the community for 6 months.
- Historically, DDA has offered comprehensive waiver services but, through conversations with the DD Coalition, began exploring the development of an individual and family supports waiver for individuals starting at three years old. The intent of this type of waiver is to facilitate a comprehensive lifelong inclusive array of supports to help individuals live a full life in their community.

Capacity Building

- DDA holds approximately 150 trainings per year for agency personnel and case managers. The training announcements are posted on the DDA website and sent as e-alerts from the Statewide Coordinator for Transition and Employment Services. A small proportion of these trainings are related to integrated employment. For example, DDA held regional trainings on work incentives and benefits, job development, and customized employment.
- DDA has created an e-list of supported employment and day program directors for the purpose of providing ongoing information and resources related to best practices in community-based employment, updated policies, operating procedures, and training opportunities.
- DDA has co-funded trainings and conferences through the years related to employment, such as the Maryland APSE training series, the Statewide Self Employment Conference, and the Annual Transitioning Youth Conference.
- More recently, DDA has offered provider-specific technical assistance to about 15% of providers on a case-by-case on-request basis through several mechanisms including the Statewide Coordinator for Transition and Employment Services, through the Community Rehabilitation Program-Rehabilitation Continuing Education Programs (CRP-RCEP), and through the use of DDA regional training funds.
- DDA itself has benefited from capacity-building opportunities through the Employment Learning Community, State Employment Leadership Network, and Office of Disability Employment Policy.

Interagency Collaboration and Partnership

- The Governor's Transitioning Youth Initiative was a primary catalyst in establishing the long-term interagency collaborative relationship between DDA, DORS, and the Department of Education.
- The Governor's Interagency Transition Council for Youth with Disabilities originally met bimonthly and now meets quarterly. Its membership includes a broad group of stakeholders including DDA, DOR, education, behavioral health, higher education, parents, and individuals.
- Qualified DDA providers are assumed eligible to become DORS providers, but still must formally apply to take on that role.
- Maryland has used formal agreements with DORS to support individuals who are or will be eligible for DDA services to pursue employment. A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between DDA and DORS, updated in 2006, resulted in DORS agreeing to fund/serve students who are 18–21 and are eligible for DDA services, as well as individuals served in day programs. This was important because students are not eligible for Governors Transitioning Youth Initiative funds until they are 21. In 2007, to support implementation of the MOU, DORS and DDA drafted an implementation plan. Today, the MOU is being updated to reflect updates to best practices and

changes in federal policy such as the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. There is a strong belief in MD that to provide the best employment services, MOUs like this one must be reviewed and updated regularly.

Services and Service Innovation

- DDA has participated in several statewide employment initiatives, including the Medicaid Buy-In, transforming the state set-aside program for state contracts, the Medicaid Infrastructure Grant, and developing Work Matters fact sheets for providers, employers, and job seekers.

Performance Measurement and Data Management

- Quality assurance measures have long been a focus of DDA's employment systems change effort. Employment and day services are monitored to ensure compliance with regulations by the DDA's licensing and monitoring entity, the Office of Health Care Quality. For many years, DDA provided a report to the Governor's Office, through the state's Managing for Results process, on performance measures related to the number of people receiving "employment training" versus those "achieving integrated employment outcomes."
- Prior to joining National Core Indicators in 2011, DDA conducted its own quality of life survey that included employment as an indicator related to general well-being.
- More recently, DDA has focused on the development and implementation of an employment performance measurement system. In October 2012, a cross-stakeholder working group developed guiding principles and goals for the Maryland Employment Outcome Information System. The goal of the system is to help DDA and its community of stakeholders to develop the supports and infrastructure necessary to fulfill the vision and goals of Maryland's Position Statement on Employment Services, and to provide longitudinal data that support Maryland's goals to improve participation in integrated employment and the quality of employment outcomes.
- Since 2013, data has been collected on each adult who receives services from DDA. The focus is on the employment outcome, not on the service the person is receiving. In addition, a simple yes/no question is asked about participation in non-work activities. The categories are:
 - » Individual competitive job
 - » Individual contracted job
 - » Group integrated job
 - » Self-employment
 - » Facility-based/sheltered work
 - » Community-based non-work (yes/no only)
 - » Facility-based non-work (yes/no only)
- For each employment category that a person participates in, data is collected on total hours worked for pay, gross wages earned, and whether the person received paid time off. For contracted work, an additional question asks if the job was part of a set-aside contract. For the two non-work categories, data is collected on whether the person participated in that activity during the reporting period and, if the person participated in community-based non work, whether they participated in a volunteer job.
- The questions differ slightly for self-employment to account for the nature of a small business. Data is collected on the number of hours spent working in the business, and on business income and expenses over a three-month period. Information is collected in the spring and fall. The data collection period is any consecutive 14-day period within the defined reporting month. This 14-day period can vary for each individual being reported on, but must be a consecutive period. To support implementation, recorded webinars about using the data collection system were made available to DDA providers.

Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services Summary

Leadership

- Maryland was a pilot state for the Supported Employment Systems Change grants that were offered in the 1980s and 1990s. The careers of a cadre of DORS staff were shaped by their engagement in this work. DORS staff across various levels became comfortable with talking about supported employment and helping families to understand the service.
- DORS staff have worked collaboratively with national innovators in employment services and made changes to the service structure of the state VR system. For example to facilitate seamless transition for youth, each school district has a transition coordinator and a DORS (VR) counselor with expertise in transition. The DORS counselor is assigned to students with IDD two years prior to school exit, and is expected to attend student IEP meetings.

Strategic Goals, Policies and Operating Practices

- DORS has always been focused on employment in the community as the preferred outcome. As Employment First became the priority for individuals served by DDA, DORS was able to support the focus on community employment through its own consistent uniform message.
- DORS and the state department of education have a long history of cooperative agreements that prescribe roles and responsibilities. For example to improve the process of exiting school and obtaining a job when a youth is referred to DORS, DORS opens a case in the two years prior to a student finishing high school. DORS transition counselors work with youth to develop an employment plan and attend Individual Education Planning meetings. As the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act continues to be implemented, it is anticipated that these actions will occur at an even earlier age.

Funding

- DORS funding is short-term only. Therefore, the focus of the department's work is on developing natural supports and a high-quality hand-off to other service sources.
- DORS has worked with DDA to address the myth that individuals could not receive services from DORS and DDA on the same day if the services are not duplicative.

Capacity Building

- DORS and the state department of education are co-located under the same state agency, Maryland State Department of Education.
- The co-location helped to disseminate knowledge across departments regarding employment and special education policy and practice. Additionally, the two departments had cooperative agreements that laid out roles and responsibilities, and conducted an annual statewide conference. DORS staff are transition counselors in the schools, ensuring that employment cases are opened two years prior to school exit and that schools have information and guidance to ensure that referrals are made to DORS.
- DORS' community provider specialist is responsible for working with DDA's employment specialist to conduct joint training and quality management regarding employment outcomes, earnings, and job satisfaction.
- In 2014 Maryland received a PROMISE grant, and DORS has participated in cross-training of its counselors and transition coordinators with PROMISE grant staff.

Interagency Collaboration and Partnership

- DORS leadership is upfront that their department cannot achieve its goals alone, and needs partners and collaborators (DDA, education, behavioral health, etc.). To that end, DORS staff strive to develop relationships with their partners that are based upon trust and commitment to the common goal of getting the best outcomes for individuals.
- These relationships lend significant support to formal collaborative structures that emerged from the original cooperative agreements mandated by the Interagency Transition Council for Youth with Disabilities. Formal agreements are updated on a regular basis and the information disseminated to staff at DORS and partner agencies through annual training conferences.

Services and Service Innovation

- DORS was the grantee for the Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative. Through the grant, DORS received technical assistance through TransCen, Inc. One outcome was supporting local DORS staff and school districts to connect and ensure that transition-age youth were engaged with DORS at an early age.
- DORS continues to seek out new grant funds to support additional collaborative efforts for transition-age youth. In 2016, DORS received a Rehabilitation Services Administration grant for the Maryland Work-Based Learning Collaborative.

Performance Measurement and Data Management

- DORS and the state department of education have a strong history of sharing data. Currently, both agencies make use of the Aware case management system to track and share information. The education department noted that the coordinated data collection allows them to track students when they begin DORS services, identify the services the youth receive, and track employment outcomes to inform IDEA post-school outcome data.
- Aware is used by DORS to measure both individual client and counselor progress. At the counselor level, activity reports help individual counselors benchmark their progress towards placement goals and inform their case management activities. At the provider level, DORS staff examines referrals and outcomes for each DORS community rehabilitation provider.

The Maryland Department of Education Special Education and Early Intervention Division

Leadership

- Staff in leadership focus on taking a lifelong view on individuals' academic development. Beginning during the early intervention phase, individuals with significant support needs are supported to develop reliable communication competencies based upon the idea that for students to be successful, they need to have the skills to effectively express themselves.
- The Special Education and Early Intervention Division focuses on building staff capacity to take on leadership roles as well as hires leaders outside of state government who have specific expertise on topics such as transition, post-secondary education, and employment.
- The Special Education and Early Intervention Division set an example for local education authorities by modeling collaboration with DORS and DDA at the state level. Leaders of each of the state agencies regularly consult with one another about emerging policies and practice decision to identify potential consequences to other agencies' missions.

Strategic Goals, Policies and Operating Practices

- Many of the initiatives and goals within the Department of Education are centered around transition, particularly transition from high school into community-based employment.
- Division leaders have a culture of reviewing and revising practices to understand areas of success and areas for improvement. For example, acknowledging that the portfolio assessment process could be improved to better integrate the topics and concepts of the Common Core Curriculum, and to better support college and career readiness, the state undertook a new statewide assessment for students that require the most support.
- One specific operating policy is the requirement that local education authorities address the transition from school to work by at least the age of 14. The Special Education and Early Intervention Division also has specific guidance regarding the corrective action criteria for non-compliance with the regulation.
- To encourage the academic development of youth with more significant support needs, regulations state that students can pursue a standard diploma until 11 or 12th grade to ensure youth and their families have adequate opportunity to participate in the standard curriculum for all students in Maryland.

Funding

- The Maryland Department of Education does not directly contract with employment services providers for youth and young adults enrolled in school. However, the department actively collaborates with DORS and DDA to disseminate knowledge and practice guidance to local education authorities about how to use DORS services to fund employment services and supports while youth are enrolled in school and how to facilitate the transition to DDA funding for long term employment supports post-school exit.

Capacity Building

- DDA, DORS, and Special Education and Early Intervention Division emphasize the importance of supporting staff to build collegial relationships within and across agencies and stakeholders.
- The Special Education and Early Intervention Division collaborates with other agencies on the development of grant applications to increase and support the competitive integrated employment of individuals with IDD.
- The Special Education and Early Intervention Division worked with other state agencies to apply for technical assistance from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition.

Interagency Collaboration and Partnership

- Collaboration between state agencies is a particularly crucial aspect of the relatively successful outcomes observed in Maryland. Inter-agency collaboration is key theme across the Department of Education's initiatives and efforts.
- The Special Education and Early Intervention Division and DORS have MOUs in effect to guide collaboration in delivering transition services to high school students and facilitating statewide conferences on transition.
- The Special Education and Early Intervention Division collaborates with DORS on cross-training of DORS counselors and school transition coordinators on implementing WIOA pre-employment services to students.
- The Special Education and Early Intervention Division has strong collaborative and facilitative relationships with district-level secondary transition coordinators. It brings these coordinators together on a regular basis and encourages them to foster community-wide collaboration of stakeholders within their individual districts.
- The Department of Education is part of the Governor's Interagency Transition Council for Youth with Disabilities.

Services and Service Innovation

- The policy and practice directives of DDA, DORS, and Special Education and Early Intervention Division, as well as school district-level transition specialists, have focused on moving youth with IDD to integrated employment, and made formulation of postsecondary goals a mandatory part of the IEP process for students starting at age 14.
- The Special Education and Early Intervention Division invested discretionary funds in developing a digital portfolio, accessible on phones, tablets, or computers, that students begin to use at age 14 and can build on after they leave high school.
- The division also is funding a state college to develop a college-level post-secondary education program for students with IDD, and a nonprofit education advocacy agency to develop indicators of high-quality postsecondary transition.
- The Division of Special Education is currently working with DORS and DDA on designing a system for early work with students with IDD and their families on pathways to employment.
- In many school systems, school administrations are helping students with IDD explore employment possibilities before students are referred to DORS in 11th grade.

Performance Measurement and Data Management

- Since 2000, Maryland's Interagency Transition Council for Youth with Disabilities has been charged by executive order to produce annual reports on the achievement of goals related to the transition of youth from high school, and to regularly create and review an annual report called the Interagency State Plan for Transitioning Youth with Disabilities.
- The Special Education and Early Intervention Division collects data specifically related to IDEA post-school outcomes measures (Indicator 14). The Department of Education continues to improve its system for tracking student outcomes, and stresses the importance of sharing outcome measures and data across agencies.

ThinkWork!



This brief is a product of the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, a research project of ThinkWork at the Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston. ThinkWork is a resource portal offering data, personal stories, and tools related to improving employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Acknowledgements

The development of this brief was supported in part by Grant # 90RT5019, the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research, and Grant #90RT5028, and the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, both grants funded through the Administration for Community Living (ACL), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The content of this brief does not necessarily represent the policy of ACL or HHS.

For more information

Jean Winsor, PhD
Senior Research Associate
Institute for Community Inclusion
School for Global Inclusion and Social Development
Jean.Winsor@umb.edu

Suggested Citation

Winsor, J., Landa, C., Hall, A., & Narby, C. (2018). Pushing the Integrated Employment Agenda: A Case Study of Maryland's High-Performing Employment System. Issue 16. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.

www.ThinkWork.org/rrtc