

Illinois Department of Human Services
Division of Rehabilitation Services
Draft Vocational Rehabilitation Portion of the WIOA State Plan
February 2020

a. Input of State Rehabilitation Council

All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:

1. input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council's functions;

SRC Comment: The Council continues to encourage DRS to pursue outreach to potential VR customers in communities across the state. This is necessary to have an impact on the number of successful VR outcomes produced by DRS each year. DRS needs to share their outreach plans with the SRC and work together to create an improved process.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that continued outreach efforts are necessary for the success of the VR program in Illinois. Working with the SRC, a number of projects have been implemented in the last two years to further this objective. Beginning in the fall of 2018, the Community Partnership Initiative made use of over 125 community partner agencies to provide more than 1,000 presentations to more than 7,000 people with disabilities who are potential VR customers. In addition, DRS implemented an online system for DRS staff to report community outreach and stakeholder contact activities. This has provided the opportunity to track progress in communication with community agencies and stakeholder groups with an interest in DRS services. Also in 2019 DRS conducted an online survey of community providers to obtain perspective on issues of concern to our providers and the people they serve. DRS intends to continue these efforts each year to expand our customer base and broaden the scope of the program.

DRS will establish a major community outreach effort in 2020. This outreach effort will include a number of community partner agencies that will work with DRS to identify targeted populations and communities of interest that have not been effectively connected to the VR program. Beyond the outreach effort, these projects will provide an additional layer of customer support to help customers remain engaged in the VR program and monitor their ongoing progress toward a successful outcome.

SRC Comment: SRC members believe that consistency of services and information given at DRS offices is still an area that needs improvement. DRS needs to demonstrate what steps have been taken to improve consistent service delivery throughout the state.

DRS Response: DRS worked with SRC members to modify and complete the Quick Reference Guide and make this available online to DRS staff in the fall of 2018. The Guide itself was an adaptation of the Casework Procedure Manual and essentially served as its replacement. A pilot test of the Guide in several DRS offices had been conducted in 2017 and the overall feedback was that it should be distributed to all staff.

In addition, a one-page VR Quick Reference Checklist was developed which summarized the key elements of the Quick Reference Guide. The intention of the Checklist was to have a brief set of reminders for VR counselors that could be used as a desk reference in the course of their day-to-day operations. The Checklist was distributed in late 2018 and feedback from staff has been quite positive.

SRC Comment: Transition services continue to be a priority for SRC. The SRC would like to see an increase in the number of transition students submitting applications for the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. The SRC recommends that DRS target schools, social security administration, medical professionals and centers for independent living to increase referrals and applications and educate the public about VR.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that continuing efforts should be made to expand services to students with disabilities. In 2018 DRS established the Fast Track Transition program designed to serve students with disabilities aged 14 and 15 that have not typically been served through the STEP program. These students are being served as potentially eligible individuals under WIOA. This means that pre-employment transition services can be provided more quickly without going through the typical VR process of certifying eligibility and writing an IPE. To provide the Fast Track Transition Services DRS has established contracts with 22 community agencies, including 20 centers for independent living. As of January 2020 over 1,000 students were being served through the program.

SRC Comment: The Council encourages DRS to expand its use of social media platforms to reach out to potential VR customers and also to promote employment in DRS, particularly for VR counselors.

DRS Response: In the last two years DRS has worked with the DHS Office of Communication to establish a presence on social media. DRS has developed posts that highlight VR success stories and include a link to the VR online application screen, enabling users to initiate VR services very simply. In addition, the DHS social media effort includes posting of job vacancies with links to additional information on the CMS personnel page. While this is just a beginning of a social media presence, DRS believes that ongoing efforts will contribute to future success for the program.

SRC Comment: The SRC believes that the joint Strategic Planning sessions have been very beneficial. SRC would like to continue to have annual Strategic Planning sessions with DRS that focus on specific measurable goals.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that ongoing strategic planning efforts are beneficial to both parties. Joint strategic planning meetings were held in 2018 and 2019 as day-long activities including participation by SRC members and DRS staff. Both meetings included members of the DRS leadership team as well as field office representatives. The 2019 meeting focused on a SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats), as well as an analysis of the primary advantages and disadvantages for DRS at the present time. Ongoing efforts such as these contribute to a positive relationship between the SRC and DRS and help identify opportunities to improve agency programs and services.

SRC Comment: The SRC remains concerned about the DRS hiring process for VR counselors and the ongoing number of vacant counselor positions. There has been discussion that the qualifications for VR counselor (and 6i supervisors) is too narrow and thus restricting the number of potential applicants. DRS also should review options for paid internships for VR counselors rather than rely on unpaid internships. Several other states have paid internship programs, and this gives them an advantage over Illinois for hiring counselors.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that there have been difficulties in filling vacancies for certain positions. DRS made changes to the specifications for the VR counselor position, which also impacts the 6i supervisor position. In response to changes in degree titles issued by graduate schools, DRS modified the range of acceptable Master's degree titles, including, for example, "Master's in Rehabilitation and Mental Health Counseling". In 2019 DRS further modified the specifications to include individuals with a Licensed Professional Counselor or Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor credential issued by the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation. DRS believes that these steps will increase the number of potential applicants and contribute to reducing the overall level of vacancies.

DRS has also initiated an effort to change the specifications for the Rehabilitation Counselor Trainee (RCT) position. All rehabilitation counselors hired by DRS begin with this title. Currently applicants must have completed their Master's degree to be hired as an RCT. The proposed changes will allow hiring individuals who have completed their primary coursework toward their degree, but who must still complete an internship to graduate. This will result in what is essentially a paid internship for the applicant. The proposed changes will be submitted in the spring of 2020.

SRC Comment: SRC members believe that it is important to continue to increase the number of employers working with DRS and community partners. SRC has already seen the progress made through DRS's business engagement initiative. SRC is committed to helping increase the number of meaningful employer relationships. DRS needs to identify the steps to be taken that will advance this objective.

DRS Response: DRS agrees that employer engagement and business services are essential components of the VR program under WIOA. In 2019 DRS created the Planning and Business Development Unit to consolidate and expand business engagement efforts in the agency. In addition to the three employment resource specialist (ERS) staff, DRS hired six business services consultant (BSC) staff to enhance our capability of providing services to businesses. As of January 2020 all staff are under supervision of a workforce development manager who is

coordinating their efforts across the state. These staff are responsible for reaching out to employers and business groups, such as chambers of commerce, to provide information about the DRS VR program and the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities. Staff also provide information on reasonable accommodations, hiring incentives and other topics of interest to employers. A data base has been developed to track employer contacts and connect these to eventual hires of DRS customers. While this team is still in the early stages of development, DRS believes it will make a significant contribution to meeting the needs of employers in Illinois.

SRC Comment: Based on the 2017 Satisfaction Survey results, the SRC believes that DRS should address DRS employee concerns. The working alliance between DRS staff and customers is extremely important. Improving experiences and the environment for staff could positively influence customer experiences. The SRC is requesting that a plan to improve DRS employee morale be developed and shared with the SRC.

DRS Response: Since her arrival in May 2019 Director Rahnee Patrick has made a priority of improving staff morale and the work environment within the agency. She has made site visits to the majority of local DRS offices and communicates directly with staff about their concerns. Through online staff surveys she continues to solicit input relating to staff morale.

2. the Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and

Responses are incorporated in the previous section.

3. the designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.

SRC Comment: The SRC wants to change the structure of Council operations by hiring a full-time executive director and developing a line-item budget for Council operations as well as funding for conducting customer surveys. The Council would also like financial support for conference travel for members and the executive director. These changes will enable the Council to be more effective in its role of supporting the Illinois VR program.

DRS Response: DRS is not in agreement with this proposal. DRS believes that the SRC can effectively conduct its operations within the current structure. DRS has provided funds for conference travel in the past and can continue to do so in the future. DRS will work with the SRC to identify entities to conduct customer surveys and needs assessment surveys through the state procurement process. DRS does not believe that a full-time executive director is required to coordinate the efforts of the group. DRS provides assistance through assignment of central office staff to facilitate meetings, organize agendas, arrange hotel accommodations, and generally support the activities of the SRC without creating a special appropriation. The position of DRS is that the current structure is sufficient to support the operations of the SRC.

b. Request for Waiver of Statewideness 012320

When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:

1. a local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;

The Division of Rehabilitation Services maintains a considerable number of third party cooperative agreements with other units of government, primarily school districts. These agreements are designed to increase the availability of vocational rehabilitation services to specific populations of people with disabilities. DRS has a contract with each entity that is consistent with Federal regulations (34CFR361.26) and includes the following provisions: (a) the vocational rehabilitation services to be provided are identified; (b) the local agency assures that non-federal funds are made available to DRS; (c) the local agency assures that DRS approval is required before services are provided; and (d) the local agency assures that all other State plan requirements, including the Order of Selection policy, are applied to persons receiving services through the agreement. The following is a list of the third party cooperative agreements now in place.

1. William Rainey Harper College. The purpose of this agreement is to provide post-secondary training to students in northern Cook County with hearing impairments, learning disabilities, and other disabilities who are eligible for VR program services. The college is a two-year public community college, which serves the northern part of Cook County. It is located in Palatine, Illinois.

2. The Evaluation and Development Center. The purpose of this agreement with the Board of Trustees of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale is to provide a continuing program of rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities in Southern Illinois. This agreement provides evaluation and placement, independent living, residential, information and referral, and rehabilitation engineering services to customers eligible for services from the VR program. This program primarily serves the Illinois counties of Franklin, Jackson, Jefferson, Johnson, Perry, Saline, Williamson, and Union.

3. Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP). The purpose of this program is to provide pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities through contractual arrangements with high schools, school districts and cooperatives across the state. In the current fiscal year, DRS has contracts with 149 local education entities. Of that number 133 are third party cooperative agreements and 16 are some other form of contract.

Collectively, these arrangements result in provision of pre-employment transition services to over 10,000 students each year. As of January 2020 a total of 10,946 students were enrolled in STEP in 643 schools. STEP services include: job exploration counseling; workplace readiness training including social skills and independent living skills; counseling on postsecondary educational opportunities; instruction in self-advocacy; and a variety of work-based learning experiences both in the school and in the community.

Schools with Third-Party STEP Contracts in State Fiscal Year 2020 (July 1 2019 to June 30 2020)

Community Unit School District 95, Lake Zurich; Sangamon Area Special Education District, Springfield; Eastern Illinois Area Special, Charleston; Decatur Public School District 61, Decatur; Quincy Public Schools, Quincy; Jacksonville School District 117, Jacksonville; Livingston County Special Serv, Pontiac; Massac County Unit School District 1, Metropolis; Granite City Com Unit Sch Dst9, Granite City; JAMP Special Education Services, Grand Chain; East Alton Wood River Comm HS, Wood River; Anna Jonesboro Community, Anna; Alton Comm Unit School District, Alton; Geneseo Community Unit School, Geneseo; Belleville Township High, Belleville; Collinsville Community Unit, Collinsville; Williamson County Special, Marion; Mid-State Special Education, Morrisonville; Triad Comm Unit School District 2, Troy; South Eastern Special Educ, Ste Marie; Perandoe Special Education District, Red Bud; O'Fallon Township High School, O'Fallon; Mt Vernon Township High School, Mt Vernon; Frankfort Community Unit, West Frankfort; Mascoutah Community Unit, Mascoutah; County of Jackson, Murphysboro; Bradley Bourbonnais Community, Bradley; Bethalto Unit No 8, Bethalto; West Central Illinois Spec Educ Coop, Macomb; Regional Office of Education, Bloomington; Ball Chatham School District 5, Chatham; Kankakee School District 111, Kankakee; LaSalle-Peru Township High, La Salle; Woodford County Special Ed Assoc, Metamora; Canton Union School, Canton; Hancock-McDonough ROE 26, Macomb; Princeton Township High School, Princeton; Dixon Unit School District 170, Dixon; Rochester Community Unit School, Rochester; Ottawa Township High School, Ottawa; Streator Township High School, Streator; Putnam County Community Unit, Granville; Highland Community School District, Highland; Tri County Special Education, Murphysboro; Galesburg Community Unit School, Galesburg; Springfield School District 186, Springfield; Jersey County CUSD 100, Jerseyville; Tazewell Mason Counties Special Education Assn, Pekin; Vermilion Assoc Of Special Education, Danville; Northwest Special Education District, Elizabeth; Community Unit District No 203, Naperville; Ogle County Educational Coop, Byron; Wabash & Ohio Valley Se District, Norris City; School District U-46, Elgin; Elmhurst Com Unit Sch District 205, Elmhurst; Evanston Township High School, Evanston; Black Hawk Area Special Ed, East Moline; Edwardsville Community Unit, Edwardsville; DuPage High School District 88, Addison; Allendale Association, Lake Villa; Lockport Township High School, Lockport; Board Of Education City Of Peoria, Peoria; Community Unit School District 300, Algonquin; Community High School District 155, Crystal Lake; Freeport School District 145, Freeport; Lincoln-Way Com High School, New Lenox; Mid-Valley Spec Ed Joint Agreement, St Charles; Aurora West School District 129, Aurora; Special Education Association, Bartonville; Joliet Township HS District 204, Joliet; Leyden High School District No 212, Northlake; School District 234 Ridgewood High, Norridge; Fenton Community High School, Bensenville; Glenbard Township High School, Glen Ellyn; Cook County High School District, Berwyn; Niles Township District 219, Skokie; Aero Special Educ Coop, Burbank; Marengo High School District 154, Marengo; Southern Will County Coop 22, Joliet; Speed Special Ed Joint Agreement, Chicago Heights; Northwest Suburban Special, Mount Prospect; Southwest Cook Coop Spec Ed, Oak Forest; Proviso Township High School, Maywood; Oak Park & River Forest High School, Oak Park; Community High School District 99, Downers Grove; School Association For Special Educ, Naperville; Plainfield School District 202, Plainfield; Maine Township High School, Park Ridge; Community Unit School District 200, Wheaton; Valley View Public Schools, Romeoville;

LaGrange Area Dept of Special Education, LaGrange; Community High School District 218, Oak Lawn; Thornton Township H S District 205, South Holland; School District 131, Aurora; Northern Suburban Spec Ed District, Highland Park; Special Ed District of Lake County, Gages Lake; Roxana Community Unit School, Roxana; The Hope School, Springfield; West Washington Community, Okawville; Cahokia Comm School District 187, Cahokia; Community Unit School, Woodstock; Johnsborg Community Unit School, Johnsborg; Hinsdale Township High School, Hinsdale; Huntley School District No 158, Algonquin; County of Kankakee 5 Manteno, Manteno; Rural Champaign County Special Education Coop, Champaign; Warren Township High School, Gurnee; Cons High School District 125, Lincolnshire; Mattoon Community School, Mattoon; McHenry Community High School District 156, McHenry; Indian Prairie School District 204, Aurora; Harvard Community Unit, Harvard; Columbia Community Unit, Columbia; Zion Benton Township High School, Zion; Community Unit School District 308, Oswego; Lake Forest Comm H S District 115, Lake Forest; Grayslake Community High School, Grayslake; Plano Area Special Education, Plano; Knox-Warren District #801, Galesburg; Consolidated High School District 120, Mundelein; Yorkville Comm Unit District 115, Yorkville; Community Unit School District, Sterling; New Athens CUSD, New Athens; Antioch Community High School District 117, Lake Villa; North Greene County, White Hall; Community Unit School 220 Barrington, Barrington; Breese Central High School, Breese; County of Christian, Taylorville; Round Lake Area Schools District, Round Lake; Winnebago County District 323, Winnebago; Exceptional Children Have Opportunities, South Holland; South Macoupin Association, Stauton; Franklin Community Unit School, Franklin.

2. the designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and

DRS develops third party agreements through a contractual process that specifies the rehabilitation services to be provided in each case. No services can be provided until the contractor agrees to the terms and conditions established by DRS, including (a) DRS maintains responsibility for establishing program eligibility and development of the IPE, and (b) the contractor must provide periodic reports of expenditures of non-federal funds.

3. All State plan requirements will apply

requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.

DRS third party contracts contain the provision that all services provided must be consistent with the Unified State Plan.

c. Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System.

Describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system with respect to:

1. Federal, State, and local agencies and programs;

General Information on Interagency Cooperation

Illinois DRS maintains cooperative agreements and working relationships with a wide variety of state, local and education entities that provide services to individuals with disabilities. DRS presently has interagency agreements in effect with several other state agencies. DRS has a long-standing agreement with the Illinois State Board of Education regarding the provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities age 14 and older. This agreement was renewed in September 2019. The renewed agreement places greater emphasis on the roles of each party in preparing students for the transition to employment, education and training. Presently DRS provides VR services to around 11,000 students with disabilities each year through contracts with 149 school systems. DRS provides vocational rehabilitation services to another 1,000 high school students with disabilities outside of the contractual system. In 2018 DRS created the Fast Track Transition program operated through contracts with 22 community providers to provide pre-employment transition services to potentially eligible students with disabilities. As of December 2019 DRS had served over 1,000 students through those contracts.

DRS also has agreements with 12 state universities and 36 community colleges in Illinois regarding funding for services to students who are VR customers. DRS has contracts and working agreements with around 115 not-for-profit community rehabilitation programs, which serve about 3,500 VR customers each year, providing job placement and supported employment services. DRS maintains working relationships with the Statewide Independent Living Council, as well as the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living, and has contracts with centers for independent living to provide a variety of rehabilitation services.

2. State programs carried out under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;

DRS has a longstanding partnership with the Illinois Assistive Technology Project (IATP), the state AT grant recipient. IATP provides a variety of services to Illinois citizens with disabilities, including many who are participants in the DRS VR program. Cooperative activities include joint staff training as well as the use of IATP staff for technology consultation on specific VR cases. DRS also works with IATP staff on general issues involving the accessibility of computer systems throughout Illinois state government. IATP also provides consultation on specific items of assistive technology and their applicability for VR program purposes. DRS has also worked with IATP on innovative approaches to purchasing assistive technology equipment for benefit of VR program customers.

3. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture;

DRS does not have formal interagency agreements with Rural Development Programs operated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. DRS intends to reach out to representatives of the Department of Agriculture to initiate a discussion of developing such an agreement.

4. Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and

DRS does not have specific agreements with non-education agencies serving out-of-school youth with disabilities. Out-of-school youth are served through contracts that DRS has developed with community rehabilitation program agencies, although the contracts are not targeted at that specific age group. Data for the current state fiscal year through December 2019 show that 41 percent of individuals served were under age 25, thus meeting the WIOA definition of youth with disabilities. DRS is exploring options for working with centers for independent living regarding their mandate to serve this population.

5. State use contracting programs.

DRS does not presently have formal interagency agreements with state use programs operated within Illinois. The state use program in Illinois is coordinated by the Department of Central Management Services, which awards contracts to state use providers and coordinates purchases on behalf of state agencies. State law requires that state use vendors maintain a 14c certificate from the Department of Labor to pay subminimum wages to their workers. DRS is working with the Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities Task Force in their efforts to reduce reliance on subminimum wages for state use positions.

d. Coordination with Education Officials

Describe:

1. DSU's plans

The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students.

The DRS interagency agreement with the State Board of Education identifies financial roles and responsibilities for transition services. This agreement was renewed in September 2019. The overall responsibility for funding a student's educational program lies with the local education authority, with support from the State Board of Education. DRS provides funding for vocational rehabilitation services, both through the STEP program and through general VR caseloads. DRS has contracts with 149 school districts, of which 133 involve the use of local school funds as VR matching funds. DRS coordinates and provides support for operational costs of regional Transition Planning Councils. DRS establishes qualifications for personnel it employs, and the State Board establishes qualifications for personnel working for school districts. Services provided to students with disabilities through STEP or through another arrangement focus on the key elements of pre-employment transition services as defined in WIOA: job exploration counseling; work-based learning experiences, counseling on postsecondary education, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy. While STEP places an emphasis on employer-paid work in the community, each of these aspects of transition services are available to students based on individual need.

Since 2009 DRS has worked with schools that have third-party cooperative agreements to ensure that federal VR requirements are followed in the provision of transition services. This has included a contract addendum as well as specific exhibits that are now incorporated into the contract package itself. DRS believes that these measures have resulted in an environment where all parties understand and are in compliance with these requirements. DRS provides consultation and technical assistance to educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post—school activities. This is accomplished through a number of mechanisms. DRS has assigned qualified rehabilitation counselors to act as liaison to every high school in Illinois. A fundamental part of the liaison role is to provide consultation and technical assistance to educators involved in the transition process. Transition Planning Councils in each area of the state work with school districts to identify students with disabilities needing transition services. Through the counselor liaison relationships, students with disabilities have ready access to the VR program. DRS counselors provide consultation regarding vocational services and provide general information on disability services available in the community. DRS also provides financial support to the Next Steps parent-training program to assist families in understanding their children's needs regarding transition services.

In 2019 the state legislature assigned responsibility for coordinating transition issues to the Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities Task Force. This entity is

responsible for developing policies and disseminating data on the functioning of the transition services system as a whole. DRS is represented on the task force along with the State Board of Education and other state agencies involved in serving youth with disabilities. DRS also coordinates regional Transition Planning Councils, with school and community rehabilitation programs also participating. State law requires that transition planning begin at age 14 ½.

DRS assists local schools in providing pre-employment transition services throughout the high school years. The Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP) is funded by DRS and provides financial support for students with disabilities during the high school years. Participation in DRS services for students in transition services, either through STEP or through another arrangement, is incorporated in the IPE during the time the student is in school. An IPE is developed no later than 90 days after the student has been certified as eligible for the VR program. Development of the IPE is coordinated with the development and of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) and transition plan.

2. Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:

A. consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;

The agreement provides that DRS will shall provide consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for pre-employment transition services and the transition of students from school to post-school activities and ensure that local DHS-DRS staff participate in IEP meetings where transition planning occurs. In addition, DHS-DRS shall establish and collaborate with local Transition Planning Committees to outreach to and identify students with disabilities in need of pre-employment transition services and individualized transition services as early as possible in the transition planning process. DRS and the local TPCs will also plan for the availability of community services for students with disabilities before and after exiting secondary education.

B. transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;

The agreement provides that DRS and the State Board of Education will cooperatively participate in planning, training, policy development, data collection, and resource identification and dissemination to improve transition planning for students with disabilities. Also, both parties agree to provide technical assistance to local education agency personnel regarding transition planning services for students with IEPs. Transition planning will facilitate the development and completion of IEPs and transition plans in coordination with the IPE for VR services.

C. roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;

The agreement describes the role of the State Board of Education to ensure that local education agencies engage students with disabilities and their families in transition planning when it is a mandated part of the IEP process. In addition, ISBE will encourage school districts to annually submit a summary transition goals and services to the local Transition Planning

Committee (TPC). The agreement describes the role of DRS to include providing consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for pre-employment transition services and individualized transition services facilitating the transition of students from school to post-school activities and ensure that local DRS staff participate in IEP meetings where transition planning occurs. The agreement also addresses the financial responsibilities of each party.

D. procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.

The agreement provides that DRS will collaborate with local Transition Planning Committees to outreach to and identify students with disabilities in need of pre-employment transition services and individualized transition services as early as possible in the transition planning process. DRS and the local TPCs will also plan for the availability of community services for students with disabilities before and after exiting secondary education.

e. Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(3)). Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-profit VR service providers.

DRS has contractual agreements with non-profit rehabilitation providers to provide services to VR customers. DRS works with the Facilities Advisory Council consisting of provider representatives to discuss issues and identify service needs in an ongoing manner. DRS conducts ongoing reviews of the effectiveness of service contracts with community agencies as part of a larger state-level effort to establish greater consistency in human service contracting. DRS contracts specify the responsibilities of the service providing agency, the performance basis of the contract, and the rates to be paid to the provider. DRS has contracts with around 115 not-for-profit community rehabilitation programs, which serve about 3,500 VR customers each year, providing job placement and supported employment services. DRS maintains working relationships with the Statewide Independent Living Council, as well as the Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living. DRS also has contracts with Centers for Independent Living to provide a variety of rehabilitation services, including pre-employment transition services under the Fast Track Transition program described elsewhere in this plan.

DRS develops community service contracts based on an assessment of need at the local level. Counselors and office supervisors work with regional administrators to identify specific areas of need and potential provider agencies qualified to provide services. To the extent possible DRS has utilized one-time funding to establish new service contracts with providers. Illinois has developed an emphasis on performance-based or outcome-based funding for human services. DRS has converted over 85 percent of its VR-funded contracts to a performance basis in the last three years. This means that providers earn payment when individuals are working in the community, with the maximum payment based on the individual achieving at least 90 days of successful employment. DRS believes this method aligns the interests of the individual, the provider and the VR program. Since 2017 DRS has utilized a performance-based contract for supported employment in which the provider is paid to maintain employment for individuals with most significant disabilities. DRS has also developed performance-based contracts for five community agencies implementing Project Search efforts across the state.

f. Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(4)). Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

For many years DRS has had a number of contracts and cooperative working agreements with community provider agencies to provide both supported employment and extended services to individuals with most significant disabilities. DRS has a standing committee of community rehabilitation programs known as the Facility Advisory Committee which meets regularly to discuss service arrangements, including but not limited to, supported employment. DRS believes that this group is the best mechanism for communicating with provider agencies and maintaining a grasp of the demand for these services. DRS also has an interagency cooperative team that involves the DHS Division of Mental Health to provide ongoing support services to individuals with serious mental illness.

In PY2020 DRS expects to continue the following levels of funding for supported employment activities. Using Title VI-B funds, DRS anticipates providing supported employment services to approximately 125 individuals, with total funding of \$0.95 million, utilizing 30 provider agencies. Using Title I funds DRS anticipates providing supported employment to approximately 1,450 individuals, total funding \$3.02 million, approximately 55 provider agencies.

DRS does not have a state-funded extended services program at this time. DRS will provide extended services to youth with a most significant disability for up to four years, or until such time that the youth reaches the age of 25 and no longer meets the definition of "youth with a disability" using Title I and Title VI funds.

Beginning in PY2020 DRS expects to implement an agreement with the DHS Division of Developmental Disabilities under which individuals can receive long-term extended supports through the DD Medicaid waiver program.

DRS also intends to pursue ongoing changes in its supported employment program. Illinois has seen a trend where the number of individuals participating in supported employment services has declined in recent years. DRS plans to reverse this trend by focusing on youth with disabilities who require additional support to enter and retain employment. DRS also anticipates additional supported employment customers being referred from agencies providing sheltered work.

g. Coordination with Employers

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.8(b)(5)). Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:

1. VR services; and

In 2019 DRS established a workforce development unit to focus on provision of services to businesses in Illinois. This unit employs 10 staff dedicated to business services, including six in the newly created title of business services consultant as well as three staff in the legacy title of employment resource specialist. Staff have participated in training activities utilizing national and local experts, as well as through structured online training. Members of the team work in partnership with business services teams organized in each of 22 Local Workforce Innovation Areas (LWIA). The workforce development unit provides information to employers on key issues relating to hiring people with disabilities, including reasonable accommodations, hiring incentives and the benefits of vocational rehabilitation services. Workforce development staff also communicate with rehabilitation counselors about employment opportunities they identify through contacts with employers and business groups.

DRS has an office supervisor or other manager as member on each local workforce board, participating in regular meetings and developing an annual memorandum of understanding and cost-sharing budget. This ongoing role also provides a key opportunity for interactive communication with employers as well as other workforce business representatives. Local board participation helps build relationships within the area and enables sharing information on employment opportunities as well as career exploration and work-based learning opportunities at the local level. DRS representatives also participate in the regional planning process related to WIOA implementation. This process is based on 10 economic development regions (EDRs) around the state. Within each region, extensive data analysis has been conducted to identify employment sectors that are most likely to account for job growth and expansion in the next five years.

DRS continues to maintain a business engagement data base that was developed in 2017 as part of the Job Driven Vocational Rehabilitation Technical Assistance Center project. While this has involved a small number of staff to date, the system has documented continued growth in employer contacts, ranging from providing basic information to facilitating job interviews for candidates. Since the initiation of the system DRS has documented 274 individuals hired and 129 successful employment outcomes at the targeted businesses. The data base is now being used by the workforce development unit staff and it is expected that both hires and successful closures will continue to increase.

DRS staff have also been active in planning and implementing a series of statewide WIOA Summit conferences, as part of a coordination team representing core WIOA partner agencies. The purpose of the summit is to bring together workforce partners and employers present information on workforce policies, highlight innovative practices, and demonstrate cooperative efforts around the state. The most recent summit focused on the theme of service integration,

the first such statewide conference in the nation according to WINTAC. Sessions include presentations on collaboration with business partners, economic development and sector partnerships, as well as maximizing local collaboration.

DRS continues to be an active participant in the National Employment team (The NET), established by the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). The purpose of the NET is to provide a coordinated approach by state VR agencies when dealing with employers that have a national or multi-state presence. Each state VR agency has a designated point of contact for communicating with NET employers. This helps ensure consistent communication about VR services involving the employer, as well as improving communication among state VR agencies where several states are working with the same employer. From the DRS point of view the NET has been a very positive experience for working with large employers, which typically offer full-time employment at higher than average wages.

2. transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.

As noted elsewhere in the plan, most efforts surrounding provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities are accomplished through third-party contracts with local school districts through the Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP). These contracts are performance based and include both paid and unpaid community work experiences for students. The arrangements with employers are developed by school personnel rather than by DRS directly. In the most recent state fiscal year, STEP students were involved in 2,698 full employer-paid work experiences and 1,351 other work experiences with community employers. Employers are actively involved in working with students and typically coordinate support with the STEP contractor. DRS monitors student work experiences through monthly reporting by the contractors, which include hours worked and earnings, if any. STEP contractors also work with employers to provide opportunities for job exploration.

In 2017 DRS established the Fast Track Transition program to provide pre-employment transition services to potentially eligible students with disabilities. In the first two years of the program the emphasis has been on serving 14- and 15-year-old students that have not typically been involved with STEP. In the current year 20 of 22 Fast Track contract agencies are centers for independent living. These contractors utilize local employers to provide opportunities for job exploration and workplace readiness training. As of January 2020 over 1,000 students were enrolled in Fast Track services.

h. Interagency Cooperation

Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:

1. the State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;

In 2018 the Department of Human Services, including DRS, completed a written agreement that the Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS), the State Medicaid agency. This agreement ensures that DHS and HFS will work cooperatively to promote the employment of people with disabilities and operate various Medicaid waiver programs efficiently. In addition, HFS and DRS representatives serve on the Employment and Economic Opportunity for Persons with Disabilities Task Force. This entity was created by state law and executive orders to be the key entity for studying and making policy recommendations that will promote employment of persons with disabilities. In addition, the task force has been designated as the key entity for promoting the concept of Employment First in the state.

2. the State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and

The State agency for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities is the Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD), which like DRS is part of the Department of Human Services (DHS). The primary operations of DDD involve a set of home and community-based Medicaid waiver programs. In 2019 DDD and DRS drafted an intra-agency agreement that updated policy statements and provided for improved communication between the agencies. A key element of the agreement was an understanding on referrals dealing with supported employment services funded by each agency, as well as funding for ongoing supports once VR funded supported employment has been completed. This is the first formal statement of such a policy and should contribute to more effective use of resources by both agencies. DRS believes that the new agreement will be particularly important due to the impact of a waiting list for DDD funded Medicaid waiver services and the availability of VR-funded supported employment.

A customized employment pilot project was created by state law in 2019, giving DRS primary responsibility for organizing and implementing the project, with the involvement of various state partners including DDD. As of January 2020, an implementation team involving both agencies has been created to develop policies and recruit qualified provider agencies to participate in the pilot project. While various efforts at implementing customized employment have taken place through DRS and DDD in the last five years, no consistent program has been implemented at the state level.

3. the State agency responsible for providing mental health services.

The state agency for Mental Health Services is the Division of Mental Health (DMH), also part of the Department of Human Services. In late 2018 DMH and DRS updated a written agreement to coordinate services relating to the vocational needs of individuals with a serious mental illness. The two agencies have enjoyed an effective partnership for several years. This

partnership is centered on provision of vocational services through the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) service model. DRS and DMH have worked with the IPS Employment Center (formerly the Psychiatric Research Center) to implement a fidelity-based service model that has been shown to be very effective in assisting individuals with serious mental illness in becoming employed. DRS and DMH have a cooperative funding model in which DMH utilized Medicaid funding to the greatest extent possible and DRS provides VR funds to support the vocational aspects of the IPS model. DRS has worked with DMH to expand IPS services to a youth population and intends to continue expansion to this group through additional pilot projects as funding becomes available. In addition, both agencies intend to participate in evaluation projects that document the effectiveness of IPS as an evidence-based practice. Research suggests that implementation of IPS principles in VR service provision can be of benefit to a wider range of individuals.

i. Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.10)). Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:

1. Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development

A. Qualified Personnel Needs.

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:

i. the number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;

DRS believes it has sufficient staff on hand to staff the VR program. Each staff category has a normal number of vacant positions, and DRS works aggressively to fill vacancies as soon as possible, in conjunction with DHS personnel managers. There has been little growth in the overall VR caseload in the last several years, which means that DRS has sufficient staff available to serve people with disabilities meeting its order of selection policy and has the capacity to fill vacant positions to continue to meet that level of need. DRS has 205 VR counselor positions with 170 on hand and 35 vacant positions, and 22 rehabilitation and mobility instructors, with 13 on hand and nine vacant positions. These staff are supported by 134 rehabilitation case coordinator positions, of which DRS has 116 on hand with 18 vacant positions. Counselor vacancies are somewhat higher than normal, but DRS anticipates that it will be able to fill these positions in the near future and return to a more normal pattern of vacancies. Data for 2019 show a total of 23,682 active cases in the DRS VR program. This gives an average of 139 individuals per filled rehabilitation counselor position and 204 per filled case coordinator position. These averages are somewhat higher than historical trends but will return to a more normal level when additional positions are filled. Specialty counselor positions have a slightly higher vacancy rate, but one that still allows DRS to provide services to select populations. DRS has 26 staff positions for counselors certified to communicate in sign language with three vacancies in this category, as well as 24 Spanish speaking counselor positions with seven vacancies in that category.

ii. the number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and

When fully staffed the number of positions by title will be: rehabilitation counselors 205; rehabilitation case coordinators 134; rehabilitation and mobility instructors 22; field office supervisors 35; field office support 55; staff administrative support 30; business enterprise

program for the blind staff 13; central office staff 91; bureau chiefs 2; and assistant bureau chiefs 5.

iii. projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.

DRS anticipates that its long—term replacement rate will remain roughly the same during the next two years. There have been no major changes to the state hiring or retirement systems and the pace of hiring and separations has been normal. In the last year the state budget process has also returned to a state of normalcy. Based on job application trends, DRS anticipates that sufficient applicants will be available to fill nearly all posted vacancies within a few months. The number of staff on hand and projected annual number of replacements by title are: rehabilitation counselors 205 (35 projected replacements); rehabilitation case coordinators 134 (18) ; rehabilitation and mobility instructors 22 (9); field office supervisors 33 (5); business enterprise program for the blind staff 13 (4); central office staff 91 (12); bureau chiefs 2 (0); assistant bureau chiefs 5 (2).

B. Personnel Development

Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:

i. a list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;

There are five nationally-accredited rehabilitation counselor education programs in Illinois: Adler University, Chicago; Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago; Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago; Northern Illinois University, DeKalb; and Southern Illinois University, Carbondale.

ii. the number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and

The most recent available data on enrollment in and graduation from the MA programs in rehabilitation counseling at the five universities is as follows: 72 students were enrolled; 40 graduated in the last year. The estimated replacement rate for DRS counselors is 35 per year, which is higher than the rate found in previous years due to the current somewhat larger number of vacancies. While many of these graduates will choose not to work for DRS, DRS believes that these programs make a significant contribution to its ability to hire new staff and replace staff who leave DRS. In Illinois graduates with an MA in rehabilitation counseling who pursue CRC certification are eligible to become licensed as a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) through the State of Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation

iii. the number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.

The most recent data for rehabilitation counseling graduates by program is: Illinois Institute of Technology, 10; Northeastern Illinois University, 2; Northern Illinois University, 11; Southern Illinois University, 7; and Adler University 10.

2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel

Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.

Each year DRS estimates the number of staff needed to operate the VR program, particularly the number of rehabilitation counselors needed. In addition, DRS works with university programs to estimate the number of students graduating from the programs and to understand each university's approach to student placement post-graduation. The intent is to have multiple applicants for each vacant counseling. This is generally true in urban areas, but applications are often limited in rural areas. Based on the information available from the university programs and the number of applications for posted vacancies, DRS faces an ongoing challenge filling vacancies in rehabilitation counselor positions.

DRS is pursuing a number of options to improve the staffing situation in the VR program and make services more available to customers. This includes efforts to simplify and accelerate the hiring process for VR counselors as well as implementing a Rehabilitation Counselor Aide position in areas with high demand for services. These efforts include shortening the process for contacting applicants for counselor positions as well as modifying the process for negotiating a starting salary. One alternative under consideration is to create a special process for geographic areas where it has proven difficult to attract applicants. DRS believes that the collective result of these efforts will be fewer VR counselor vacancies. In addition, the implementation of the counselor aide position will provide a means of engaging VR customers sooner.

DRS is also in the process of modifying the position description for the Rehabilitation Counselor Trainee position. The proposal is to allow DRS to hire individuals into the trainee title before they complete all requirements for a Master's degree. This would create what is essentially a paid internship for counselor trainees. Existing policies do not allow DRS to offer paid internships to graduate students. It is uncertain how soon this change could be implemented, but DRS believes this will eliminate a significant barrier to hiring qualified rehabilitation counselors.

DRS works with the Department of Human Services personnel unit to publicize available positions in DRS, attending numerous job fairs likely focusing on minority students and students with disabilities. The State of Illinois has recruiting policies which assist minority individuals in obtaining employment in key positions and encourages training and education for current employees. State policy also encourages the hiring of individuals with disabilities, which is utilized by DRS to the greatest extent possible. DRS worked with the state personnel agency to create a position dedicated to monitoring and assisting with the hiring of persons with disabilities in state jobs. In addition to recruitment, DRS works actively to promote the retention of individuals with disabilities and individuals from minority backgrounds.

These efforts include those sponsored by the Department of Human Services, of which DRS is a part, as well as through other state government organizations and membership associations. The purpose of these activities is to facilitate the training and professional development of staff from these populations, to promote understanding of the need for a diverse workforce, and to encourage the participation of staff in a variety of cooperative efforts aimed at making contributions to the organization.

These efforts include: (a) the Upward Mobility program, which is designed to further the careers of state employees such as those from minority backgrounds as well as individuals with disabilities. This program provides support for a variety of training and educational opportunities for staff during the course of their employment with the state. (b) the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities (ICED), which engages state employees with disabilities in activities related to promoting the hiring and career advancement of people with disabilities. DRS administration is closely involved in the operations of the ICED. (c) The Illinois Association of Minorities in Government is a membership organization promoting state employment for individuals from minority backgrounds, which is attended by DRS staff. (d) the Illinois Association of Hispanic State Employees holds an annual conference, which focuses on state employees from Hispanic/Latino backgrounds. DRS supports staff attendance at this conference each year. DRS believes that its sponsorship of attendance at these conferences and encouragement of membership in these organizations is a positive step in promoting a diverse workforce and a means of ensuring a high rate of job retention among its employees with disabilities and employees from minority backgrounds.

Internships. DRS has informal agreements with the four rehabilitation counselor training programs in the state to provide internship and practicum placement options for graduate students. At present DRS is not able to offer paid internships to counseling students. We continue to provide unpaid internships whenever possible, both to support the universities and students as well as to provide a job preview to students interested in working for DRS when they complete their training. As noted above DRS is preparing to implement a new hiring policy that will create what is essentially a paid internship for graduate students.

Strategies for Retaining, Recruiting and Hiring Personnel. DRS uses several strategies to recruit, hire and retain rehabilitation personnel. Key elements are promotion and publicizing the VR program, locating job candidates, monitoring the state hiring process, and identifying methods to encourage retention of staff. DRS works with the DHS personnel unit to conduct outreach activities to individuals who may be interested in state employment. DHS maintains a regular

schedule of job fairs, community events and recruitment initiatives that include a focus on hiring minority individuals. DRS offers unpaid internship and practicum opportunities in its field offices to graduate students from the five rehabilitation education programs. These are arranged with the university faculty and DRS administrators as needed. DRS also makes presentations to undergraduate students to expose them to the field of vocational rehabilitation and provide them with information on graduate rehabilitation education programs. DRS has an ongoing team composed of staff and administrators that focuses on issues related to hiring and retention of qualified staff. This group attempts to identify strategies that motivate staff to continue their employment, including rewards and recognition for high—level performance.

3. Personnel Standards

Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:

A. standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and

State Degree Standard. State Degree Standard. For several years, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) has had the requirement for all new counselors of a Master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling or a closely related field. The Master’s degree requirement for DRS vocational rehabilitation counselors is supported by state licensing categories as well. The applicable licensing requirement in the state is for a "Licensed Professional Counselor" license, which is issued by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation. This license is a generic counseling license and is not specifically for vocational rehabilitation counselors. The license requires a Master’s degree in counseling, rehabilitation counseling, psychology or related field. For purposes of the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), the requirement of a Master’s degree in rehabilitation counseling or a related field will be considered the state standard.

B. the establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.

All DRS staff are expected to participate in training events annually. Annual employee performance evaluations are designed to include training needs and expectations as identified by both the employee and the supervisor. Certain DRS sponsored training events are mandated for attendance by supervisors, rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation case coordinators. The staff development section (SDS) initiates new training activities and responds to specific requests for training from DRS administrators and field office supervisors. SDS coordinates the New Employee Orientation (NEO) training in which each new DRS staff participates in the first

months of his or her employment. This includes an overview of agency policies as well as a review of how the VR program operates in Illinois.

DRS administration periodically reviews the training objectives of the division to ensure that staff understand the VR program and the field of rehabilitation that is consistent with current policies and practices, including an understanding of the labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities. To that end, DRS has emphasized training around changes to the Rehabilitation Act brought forth by the passage of WIOA, as well as changes to the workforce system external to the VR program. DRS has cooperated with the state Title I agency to encourage staff participation in webinar presentations by other core and required partner agencies, to ensure a greater understanding of other workforce programs and how they may be of benefit to people with disabilities.

The most recent annual regional meetings featured presentations by Illinois State University and the Division of Substance Use Prevention and Recovery regarding program offerings and resources available to VR staff as well as job seekers with disabilities. DRS continues to explore additional training opportunities to enhance staff understanding of workforce system services. To the greatest extent possible online training methods are used to hold down costs and provide more immediate impact to DRS staff. DRS recently hired six staff for new business services consultants. The purpose of this position is to engage with businesses throughout the state and participate in the state's integrated business services framework. For many years DRS has had a small group of employment resource specialists who worked directly with VR customers and counselors to conduct job development and job placement activities. The remaining staff in these positions will be retained and their activities coordinated with those of the business services consultants. The new business service consultants will work exclusively with business customers to identify business needs and develop effective responses.

4. Staff Development.

Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:

A. System of staff development

a system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and

The DRS Staff Development Section (SDS) oversees the needs assessment, development, implementation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of all training programs offered within DRS. SDS has three full time trainers and a program manager in addition to one support staff. SDS is responsible for providing training to DRS VR staff as well as coordinating training from other sources and maintaining the training data base which tracks the number of training hours for each staff person. The following section lists training courses provided by the Staff Development Section in the last year, as well as statewide conferences attended by DRS staff with financial support from DRS. Training Provided by the DRS Staff Development Section

includes Job Placement and Job Development Strategies; Case Progression and Documentation; Degree and Non Degree Case Scenarios, Organization Techniques, SEP Training, Case Notes: Styles, Structures, and Time Management. Training Provided by External Training Resources include; Autism Training, Substance Abuse Disorders and Recovery, Compassion Fatigue, Juvenile Justice, Illinois Student Assistance Commission, and Effective Leadership. Conferences Supported by DRS: Illinois Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired; Illinois Association of Agencies and Community Organizations for Migrant Advocacy; Illinois Association of Hispanic State Employees; Latino Mental Health Conference; Statewide Transition Conference, Illinois Assistive Technology Conference.

DRS conducts periodic surveys of field office staff, including supervisors, counselors and case coordinators. The most recent staff survey was in the summer of 2019. Staff were asked about their training needs and the format in which they would like to receive the training. Most of the respondents preferred face to face trainings but they also requested webinars, online training, and videos. The top training requests for field office staff were burnout and stress management, conflict resolution, time management, customer service and telephone etiquette. The top VR-related training requests were college cases, IPE development, transition, STEP cases and certification. DRS is developing a plan to prioritize the training requests, develop training events when possible and arrange for external training providers if needed. DRS provides ongoing training to staff in all areas of VR counseling, including counseling and guidance.

All staff are required to take a four-day New Employee Orientation training course that focuses on the role of the counselor in the counseling relationship. A major emphasis is placed on role-playing various situations where counseling and guidance skills are used. Another major emphasis is on assessment of the individual's rehabilitation needs, beginning with the initial interview. Placement skills are emphasized in training activities including regional meetings held annually, as well as onsite training in field offices. Training focuses on job development skills, communication with employers and preparing customers for job interviews.

DRS makes training available in rehabilitation technology to all staff. DRS employs rehabilitation technology specialists who provide onsite consultation to counselors and assists them in developing plans for provision of rehabilitation technology to VR customers. DRS also has contractual staff who focus on rehabilitation technology issues and provide onsite training and consultation. DRS works in conjunction with the Illinois Assistive Technology Project; the State's AT grant recipient, to promote understanding of rehabilitation technology needs and identification of technology resources. DRS makes use of the rehabilitation technology program at the University of Illinois at Chicago as both a training resource and a service provider for VR customers.

B. Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge

procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.

Dissemination of Research Materials to Staff. The staff development section operates a small library with books and video materials available on numerous topics related to disability and

rehabilitation counseling. These materials are distributed to field staff upon request. In the last year the library has added new materials such as the Disability Handbook, Ex-Offenders Reentry guide, Customer Service Counts, and Conflicts in the Workplace: Sources and Solutions. DRS makes use of its intranet system to provide linkages to research sources and other new information relating to the field of rehabilitation. DRS supports staff participation in disability-related conferences within the state so that staff can learn about new developments in the rehabilitation field including presentations on research from university professionals as well as rehabilitation practitioners. In addition, key categories of staff such as rehabilitation counselors for the deaf and mental health specialist counselors, participate in regional and statewide groups that share current research relevant to their fields of study. The DRS initiative on Individual Placement and Support (IPS) services for persons with mental illness involves sharing research findings in a structured way with staff.

As noted above, a major emphasis in DRS has been the effort to obtain up-to-date interactive technology to facilitate training events and limit time and expense associated with travelling to training events. DRS has made use of an RSA quality grant to purchase video equipment, laptop computers and microphones to establish the capability for a two-way interactive video in all offices across the state. Testing of the technology has been successful and training events will be scheduled soon using the equipment. DRS has also worked with contractors to develop online training modules in key areas of VR casework. The idea is that counselors will be able to take training on key topics and improve their knowledge of important concepts directly from their office computer. DRS has also worked to implement standard webinar training events with visual presentation of materials along with spoken narration. Real time captioning is available as needed as an accommodation for webinar users. The staff being trained can interact with the presenter by responding to questions (“polling”) and by texting in questions. All webinar training events are followed up with an online participant survey that provides feedback on the training. Staff response to webinar technology for training has been very positive and DRS anticipates utilizing this format more often in the future. DRS has also started using YouTube videos to provide instructions on VR rules and policies. A new training technology is currently being piloted in cooperation with a company called SIMmersion, LLC. This company provides job interview skills training through simulated interviews. The participant works through three different levels to practice easy, medium and difficult interview skillsets.

5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs

Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.

Communication with Diverse Populations. DRS maintains rehabilitation counseling staff with expertise in communicating with diverse populations. A group of Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCDs) are employed throughout the state. These individuals are fluent in sign

language and conversant with deaf culture and provide the full range of vocational rehabilitation services to individuals who are deaf. The Bureau of Blind Services employs rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation instructors who are professionally qualified to provide rehabilitation services to individuals who are blind or visually impaired. DRS strongly encourages the use of Braille as part of training for individuals who are blind. In addition, rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation case coordinators are employed who are qualified to communicate with individuals whose primary language is Spanish. Staff are tested to qualify for bilingual positions.

DRS also works with individuals whose primary language is one other than English, Spanish or American sign language. While the number of such individuals is relatively small, it is equally important to be able to communicate effectively with them about their rehabilitation needs. The Illinois Department of Human Services maintains a computerized resource directory, which includes information on translation services for a variety of languages, including Polish, Vietnamese and Arabic among others. DRS counselors can link with these resources to provide translation services. DRS also uses a telephone-based translation service which can provide instant translations in over 200 languages through a company called Propio which requires only the use of two telephones. This company also provides video interpreting for sign language. When professional translators are not available, DRS works with family members or volunteer translators from community or religious organizations who can assist the individual.

6. Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Coordination of the CSPD and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Relationship to IDEA: DRS staff provide services annually to thousands of young people with disabilities, most of whom receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Approximately, 11,126 young people participated in the Secondary Transitional Experience Program (STEP) in 2019, which provides work experience during the high school years. The Next Steps program provides advocacy training to parents of students with disabilities. Part of the Next Steps training program includes providing information on the importance of transition planning. DRS staff who work with high school students participate in training offered by the Illinois State Board of Education and its Transition Systems Change project. DRS maintains an administrative liaison position with the State Board to facilitate communication about transition issues, including available training options. Approximately, 577 young people participated in non-STEP transition in 2019, which meant they had an open case with DRS but not currently participating in the program. There were also 659 students with disabilities participating in the Fast Track Transition program for the year 2019.

Also, DRS has staff who serve on the Education of Students with Disabilities Advisory Committee. There is no direct connection between DRS training efforts and the personnel development plan under IDEA. DRS staff are closely involved in the statewide network of

Transition Planning Councils (TPCs), which consist of rehabilitation and education professionals, as well as employers and school administrators. The purpose of the TPCs is to facilitate transition from school to work and to identify local issues that affect transition. DRS staff are involved with the schools in their communities and frequently attend training events sponsored by schools.

Since 2018 DRS management staff have met quarterly with members of the management team from the Illinois State Board of Education, with facilitation by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). These meetings have contributed to a deeper understanding of the services and programs offered by each party. In 2019 ISBE staff solicited DRS managers to present at the summer Special Education Directors Conference, providing a key leadership group with information on how pre-employment transition services are provided through DRS.

j. Statewide Assessment

(Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(a)).

1. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:

A. with the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services; Needs Assessment Framework. DRS has utilized a multiple component model for needs assessment purposes. The general idea is to build on existing information and evaluate any changes in data that reflect changes in customer needs. The premise is that customer needs tend to be fairly consistent from year to year but that trends can be identified which provide information on services needed going forward. The factors utilized by DRS include examining disability statistics, obtaining stakeholder input and conducting surveys. The general finding of these various sources is that the population is shrinking in Illinois, while the population of people with disabilities is growing slowly. The primary growth factors are in the minority population groups, particularly Latinos, as well as the ongoing growth in the number of individuals with autism.

Disability Statistics. There are two recent estimates of disability prevalence for Illinois. The first is from the American Community Survey for 2017, which shows a total of 675,092 working age Illinoisans reporting a disability, or 8.7 percent of the population. ACS respondents reported an average of 1.8 impairments each, meaning that most reported more than one impairment.

The Disability Statistics Compendium 2018 edition shows a total of 691,452 working age persons with disabilities, or 8.7 percent of the population. This represents an increase of 23,810 or 3.6 percent compared to the 2014 figure of 667,643. DRS will utilize the Compendium estimate for the 18-64 population. In addition, an interpolated figure of 25,166 individuals age 16 and 17 were added to create an overall estimate of 716,619 or roughly 716,600 individuals aged 16 to 64 that could potentially benefit from vocational rehabilitation services.

The Compendium data shows the following distribution of prevalence by impairment (or “difficulty” as phrased in the survey): Hearing impairments: 127,941 persons or 18.5 percent of those reporting an impairment; Visual impairments: 131,316 persons or 19.0 percent; Cognitive impairment: 279,394 persons or 40.4 percent; Ambulatory impairments: 328,153 persons or 47.5 percent; Self-care impairments: 125,710 persons or 18.2 percent; and Independent living impairments: 254,706 persons or 36.8 percent. Percentages total more than 100 percent since respondents reported an average of 1.8 impairments each.

Generally speaking, the disability categories used in the ACS and Compendium reports are of limited value for comparison to VR service categories. The vision and hearing categories are the most comparable. In the most recent state fiscal year, customers with vision impairments made up 3.7 percent of those receiving services, and individuals with hearing impairments made up 5.5 percent of the total. Persons with physical disabilities, including ambulatory

impairments, made up just 6.2 percent of the DRS service population. In broad terms persons in the category of cognitive impairments, including intellectual disability, autism, mental illness and learning disabilities, made up 61 percent of the total service population. The self-care and independent living impairment categories do not translate well to the VR impairment and cause system of categorizing disabilities.

It should be noted that the working age prevalence value for Illinois at 8.8 percent remains lower than the figure for the US as a whole of 10.3 percent. This difference has been consistent for several years. In 2011 the Illinois prevalence figure was 10.4 percent while the national figure was 12.2 percent. There is no known explanation for the overall reduction in working age disability at the national level or in Illinois, nor is there a convenient explanation for why Illinois remains lower than the national average.

Compendium data show that the employment rate for working age persons with disabilities increased from 34.9 in 2015 to 38.1 in 2017. An additional 30,231 individuals with disabilities were working in 2017 compared to 2015. The employment rate for working age persons without disabilities increased from 76.7 to 77.6 percent, although there was a decrease of 37,941 individuals working from 2015 to 2017. Together these statistics combine to show that the gap between employment for persons with disabilities and those that do not have disabilities declined in Illinois from 41.8 in 2015 to 39.5 in 2017.

There was virtually no change in the poverty rate for individuals with disabilities in Illinois, with 25.7 percent in poverty in 2015 and 25.5 percent in 2017. However, due to the increase in the number of individuals with disabilities, the rate reflects an increase of 4,781 individuals with disabilities living in poverty.

The gap between the median earnings of Illinoisans with disabilities and those without disabilities increased from \$12,205 in 2015 to \$14,109 in 2017. Between 2015 and 2017 the median earnings for individuals with disabilities increased by just \$384 (+1.7%) compared to the median earnings of non-disabled individuals which increased by \$2,288 (+6.7%). The median earnings for individuals with disabilities in 2017 was \$22,492 compared to those of non-disabled individuals whose median earnings was \$36,601.

Rate of health insurance coverage for individuals with disabilities in Illinois declined slightly from 93.2 percent in 2015 to 92.7 percent in 2017, although this remains somewhat higher than the rate for persons that do not have disabilities at 90 percent. About 55 percent of Illinoisans with disabilities continue to receive public health insurance.

The Disability Compendium also includes statistics on usage of Social Security disability benefits. Between 2015 and 2017 there was a decrease of 4,473 individuals receiving SSI disability benefits in Illinois, from 244,229 to 239,756 or 1.9 percent. At the same time there was a decrease of 2,728 in the number of children receiving SSI as blind or disabled, a reduction of 6.9 percent. Also at that time there was a decrease of 6,707 in the number of disabled workers receiving SSDI, dropping from 288,827 to 282,120 or about 2.3 percent. The cause of these reductions in persons receiving Social Security benefits is unknown.

The 2019 population of Illinois was 12,671,821, a drop of 51,250 or 0.4 percent in one year. Illinois has seen a decline of 187,092 individuals since 2015, a decrease of 1.5 percent in just four years. While population overall is dropping, the state is also aging. The impact is seen in the relative changes for various age groupings from 2014 to 2018 (data from the Disability Statistics Compendium). The population under age five declined by 1.6 percent. The school age population (age 5 to 17) dropped by 2.4 percent. The working age population (age 18 to 64) declined by 1.4 percent, with the number reporting a disability increasing slightly by 0.7 percent. However, the number of working age persons with a disability who were employed increase by 3.6 percent between 2014 and 2018. The population age 65 and older increased by 6.6 percent during that time period, and the number of older individuals reporting a disability increased by 4.4 percent.

Special Education Data. In the period from 2015 to 2017 the number of students receiving special education services (age 6 to 21) in Illinois declined by 2,009 or 0.8 percent, from 258,906 to 256,897. At the same time, the overall school age population declined by 70,876 or 2.6 percent, from 2,725,494 to 2,654,618. This is consistent with the overall stagnation of population growth in Illinois and declining birth rates. The combined result of these changes is that the percentage of students receiving special education services increased from 9.5 to 9.7 from 2015 to 2017.

Current counts of students by disability category along with number and percent change from 2015 to 2017: Specific Learning Disabilities: 102,266 (-1,268 or -1.2%); Speech or Language Impairment: 35,222 (-2,177 or -5.8%); Intellectual Disabilities: 16,199 (-668 or -4.0%); Emotional Disturbance: 18,623 (-575 or -3.0%); Multiple Disabilities: 2,546 (+88 or +3.6%); Hearing Impairment: 3,142 (-125 or -3.8%); Orthopedic Impairments: 1,048 (-75 or -6.7%); Other Health Impairments: 34,911 (+914 or +2.7%); Visual Impairments: 991 (-20 or -2.0%); Autism: 22,146 (+1,069 or +5.1%); Deaf-Blindness: 22 (-1 or -4.3%); Traumatic Brain Injury: 643 (-8 or -1.2%); and Developmental Delay: 19,138 (+837 or +4.6%).

These results are consistent with ongoing patterns of change. The categories with the largest increases are autism and other health impairment, which have seen continuing growth in the last decade. The number of students with autism in Illinois has increased by 49 percent since 2010 and 176 percent since 2005. The number of students in the other health impaired category has increased by 29 percent since 2010 and 65 percent since 2005. Whether this represents changes in the use of diagnostic categories or actual changes in the population is unknown.

The percentage of students with an IEP that spent 40 percent or more time in a regular classroom remained unchanged at 79 percent. In Illinois ongoing efforts have led to a high level of performance in implementing transition plans for students with disabilities. As of 2018 99.2 percent of students age 16 and older had an IEP that met all transition planning requirements, according to the State Board of Education. Approximately 77 percent of students were shown to be employed, enrolled in post-secondary education or some other training program within a year after leaving high school.

2018 Needs Assessment Online Survey

In 2018 DRS conducted a needs assessment survey using an online methodology. Just under 1,000 valid responses were received, about half from transition age youth and half from older individuals. About two-thirds of respondents were individuals with disabilities and the remaining third family members or guardians responding on behalf of a person with a disability. Respondents rated 11 typical VR services on a seven-point scale with end labels where 1 was “Lowest Need” and 7 was “Highest Need”. Each service included a brief description of what the service category includes, for example: “Self-Employment: Help planning for and starting your own business” or “Assistive Technology Services and Support: Special equipment and electronic devices to help with reading, speaking or using a computer”. While this approach was intended to make clear what services were being rated, in some instances it might not have worked as intended. For example, the distinction between ordinary job placement services and customized employment might be understood by VR professionals, but to someone reading the survey they seem quite similar: “Job Placement Services: Help in finding a job that matches individual skills” and “Customized Employment: Help getting a job or starting a business based on individual strengths and needs”. Indeed, both services had very similar high need ratings.

A key issue with the survey is that respondents tended to make extreme ratings, using the “7” rating on 30 percent of all responses. This is likely an artifact of the presentation of the rating options on the screen when completing the survey. Respondents also utilized the “1” rating 21 percent of the time and used the ratings 2 through 6 just 49 percent of the time. So while there were some differences between the rated services, the degree of variation was limited due to the rating scale issue. This makes the interpretation of survey results less meaningful for planning purposes.

The following need ratings were observed, ranked by the highest rated need, along with the percentage of highest need ratings: job placement: 5.3 need rating, 41.1% percent highest need; customized employment: 5.1 need rating, 38.6% highest needs; vocational training: 4.9 need rating, 32.8% highest need; on-the-job training: 4.7 need rating, 31.3% highest need; college support: 4.7 need rating, 40.3% highest need; supported employment: 4.6 need rating, 30.5% highest need; benefits planning: 4.0 need rating, 21.5% highest need; vocational evaluation: 4.0 need rating, 20.5% highest need; transportation: 3.9 need rating, 26.6% highest need; assistive technology: 3.2 need rating, 17.4% highest need; and self-employment: 3.0 need rating, 15.0% highest need.

The ratings overall indicate that respondents as a whole were interested in assistance with finding a job and with training to gain skills for employment. Interest in benefits planning was limited in that it applies only to individuals receiving Social Security. Self-employment as a VR service is used by only a small number of individuals each year, and consequently it had a very low need rating. And while assistive technology is vitally important for a subset of the VR service population, it is not utilized by the majority of customers and so its low need rating is not surprising. The low rating for transportation may seem surprising since a lack of transportation is mentioned with some frequency in surveys and public forums. Transportation had more “lowest need” than “highest need” responses, which seems to indicate that one’s response depends on whether transportation is available or not.

A subset of questions was asked only of transition age youth responding to the survey. A total of 49 youth completed the survey. The same issue with consistently high ratings applies to this data. The following need ratings were observed, ranked by the highest rated need, along with the percentage of highest need ratings: work-based learning experiences (paid): 4.9 need rating, 29.4% highest need; job exploration counseling: 4.8 need rating, 27.6% highest need; workplace readiness training: 4.8 need rating, 31.9% highest need; instruction in self-advocacy: 4.7 need rating, 27.4% highest need; counseling on post-secondary education: 4.4 need rating, 28.0% highest need; and work-based learning experiences (unpaid): 4.4 need rating, 20.7% highest need.

For both the general services ratings and the pre-employment transition services ratings, there was no consistent variation observed when comparing responses by type of disability, gender, race, or age. While there were some specific data points of interest, such as blind respondents having a higher interest in assistive technology and self-employment, much of the variation in responses did not form meaningful patterns.

DRS intends to issue a request for proposal in 2020 to engage a professional survey organization to conduct a need assessment survey on a much larger scale. The current sample size is not sufficient to allow for useful comparisons among categories such as race and ethnicity, gender, age, disability type or economic status. The larger scale study will need to incorporate a variety of methods to ensure participation by people with disabilities across the state, including those from targeted communities.

Stakeholder Representation DRS has two representative groups of stakeholders: the Facility Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives of community rehabilitation program agencies; and the STEP Advisory Committee, consisting of representatives of school districts that provide pre-employment transition services to students under third-party cooperative agreements with DRS. These groups each meet regularly with DRS senior managers to identify program concerns and express needs that have been identified in their local communities.

In 2019 DRS held a series of seven community forums across the state. The morning session focused on CRP issues and the afternoon session focused on transition issues. Over 300 individuals representing over 200 provider agencies attended the forums. The overall tone of the meetings was positive, in part due to longstanding relationships between DRS staff and provider staff. The CRP sessions identified these key issues: how to improve the referral process to and from DRS so that individuals can receive services in a timely manner; concerns regarding providing services to individuals whose primary language is not English; and how customized employment can be incorporated into the DRS contract structure. Transition issues included: protecting the confidentiality of students and family members while ensuring that students continue to receive services; how best to move students from potentially-eligible status to eligible status without service interruption; and the appropriate process for documenting provision of pre-employment transition services within the DRS system.

Participants in both sessions expressed an interest in creating a more efficient process for moving students from school-based to community partner-based services at the conclusion of high school. A general consensus is that DRS providers are interested in effectively managing

the existing service structure rather than identifying new services or programs. This is due, in part, to a feeling that providers are insufficiently staffed and experiencing financial concerns.

B. who are minorities;

Data from the most recent Disability Statistics Compendium shows that 35.7 percent of all working age persons in Illinois with disabilities are employed. However, there is considerable variability by race in terms of likelihood of employment. Among white working age persons with disabilities 38.5 percent are employed, while 34.7 percent working age Latinos with disabilities are employed and 44.3 percent of working age Asians with disabilities. However, only 24.6 percent of working age African Americans with disabilities report being employed, a clear disparity compared to other groups. As the ongoing DRS needs assessment process unfolds consideration will be given to identifying racial disparities and addressing them through program initiatives.

Survey data relating to needs of minorities with disabilities indicate that an ongoing issue remains services available in the preferred language of the individual. Language access is more available in the highly populated Chicago area, where vendor agencies utilize staff with appropriate language skills. In other areas of the state this continues to be a challenge. The increased availability of telephone language translation services and phone-based apps for translation has improved language accessibility to some degree in all parts of the state.

C. who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;

Needs of Individuals Who Have Been Unserved or Underserved by the VR Program

DRS maintains an ongoing effort to identify and serve deaf-blind individuals. This effort is coordinated by the DRS deaf services unit with the assistance of the Bureau of Blind Services. DRS works with audiologist and vision professionals to develop referrals for VR services. In recent years the number of deaf-blind individuals served at the Chicago training facility for the blind has grown significantly. While the overall number of deaf-blind individuals remains small, DRS believes that it will continue to increase the proportion of those individuals who receive VR services through its outreach efforts. DRS meets regularly with the Illinois Advisory Board on Deaf Blindness, a group composed primarily of individuals who are deaf-blind. This group offers its assistance to DRS in expanding services to this low incidence population.

DRS is involved in an ongoing effort to implement a system of individual placement services (IPS) programs for individuals with serious mental illness. Based on the success of the IPS model, DRS intends to continue gradual expansion of IPS services as funding allows. In addition, DRS is involved in expanding the scope of IPS services to individuals with developmental disabilities including individuals with autism and autism spectrum disorder. IPS research indicates that the model has great potential in helping individuals with a variety of disabilities. In the last decade the number of students in special education with these diagnoses has grown significantly, which has led to a gradual increase of autism cases in the DRS VR program. DRS works with advocacy groups and service providing agencies to identify service options and job placement strategies that will meet the needs of this group.

Survey data most frequently mention the needs of individuals with autism or autism spectrum disorders. The number of cases served by DRS where autism is the primary disability continues to rise each year. Community providers have a good level of success in assisting individuals with autism in obtaining employment, although this is at a somewhat lower rate than for other disabilities. DRS continues to work with community agencies to identify specific service options that will be of greatest benefit to this population.

D. who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and

DRS has cooperated extensively with the state Title I agency around disability initiatives from that agency funded by the Dept. of Labor. This involves local area cooperation and in many cases joint enrollment of individuals in Title I and VR services. A major statewide effort regarding service integration has increased the degree of interaction and cooperation between VR staff and other workforce staff at the local level. A specific focus has been on how local workforce partners can move beyond communication to a higher level of collaboration. For VR staff this has involved reaching out to local partners to identify methods of ensuring that individuals with disabilities can receive appropriate services regardless of which element of the workforce system they contact first.

E. who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.

The 2018 online needs assessment survey referenced above indicated that youth with disabilities express a high level of need for pre-employment transition services. While the survey had limitations, the overall intent of the respondents was clear. DRS identified a need to provide services to younger (14- and 15-year-old) students who were unlikely to participate in other transition programs. DRS initiated contracts with 22 community providers and eventually connected over 1,000 to pre-employment transition services through this mechanism. DRS also identified a need in Chicago where the local school district was unable to provide community work based learning experiences. DRS developed contracts with community rehabilitation program agencies to provide that element of pre-employment transition services which was otherwise unavailable to a large number of students.

2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and

DRS believes that the system of community rehabilitation programs in the state is well-developed and adequate to meet the needs of vocational rehabilitation program customers. DRS continues to examine the need for CRP services through various mechanisms. DRS meets regularly with a statewide committee of CRP representatives (the Facility Advisory Council) to improve services provided by CRPs in Illinois. DRS also conducted online surveys of CRP agencies in 2017 and 2019 to identify issues and concerns. As noted above, DRS conducted a series of seven community forums with CRPs to provide an opportunity for an in-depth discussion of relevant issues.

3. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act .

As discussed elsewhere in the plan, DRS has made several efforts to identify the needs of students and youth with disabilities. DRS believes it is capable of meeting the essential needs of students with disabilities through ongoing expansion of its existing program options. In the most recent state fiscal year DRS served nearly 12,000 students with disabilities. The goal going forward is to identify specific areas of the state where program expansion is needed most. This will entail the use of a more sophisticated, large-scale needs assessment methodology than has been used in the recent past.

DRS continues to meet four times a year with the STEP Advisory Council, a group representing school districts contracted by DRS to provide pre-employment transition services through the STEP program. This group helps identify issues and concerns about transition services as they are experienced at the local level. DRS believes that this mechanism is very important for managing the program and gaining an understanding of ongoing needs.

k. Annual Estimates

Describe:

1. The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services;

To estimate the number of possibly eligible individuals in the State DRS uses disability data from the U.S. Census Bureau as compiled in the Disability Statistics Compendium. Using the most recent Census data on disability prevalence and the most recent estimate of the Illinois population, DRS estimates that there are 716,600 individuals with disabilities in the state aged 16 to 64 who are possibly eligible for the VR program. Of that number, DRS estimates that there are 558,950 who would qualify for services under the DRS order of selection policy, and 157,650 who would not be likely to meet the State's order of selection policy. In addition, DRS estimates that there are 81,400 individuals with disabilities who are possibly eligible for VR services under Title VI, Part B. Of the 558,950 likely to qualify under the policy, DRS estimates that there are 193,500 who would be in the most significant disability category, 128,950 who would be in the very significant disability category, and 236,500 that would be in the significant disability category.

2. The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:

A. The VR Program;

In the VR program DRS estimates that 39,315 individuals will be served in PY2020

B. The Supported Employment Program; and

In the supported employment program utilizing Title IV Part B funds, DRS estimates that 120 individuals, all in the most significant disability category will be served in PY2020.

C. each priority category, if under an order of selection;

In the VR program DRS estimates that 19,895 individuals in the most significant disability category will be served in PY2020, along with 15,930 individuals in the very significant disability category and 3,490 individuals in the significant disability category. No services will be provided to individuals in the category of individual with a disability.

3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and

For PY2020 DRS estimates that there are approximately 157,650 individuals who would be eligible for VR services but not be in an open category of the order of selection policy.

4. The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.

For PY2020 DRS estimates that \$116,470,000 federal VR funds will be available, along with \$31,520,000 in non-federal funds for a total program budget of \$147,990,000. With an estimated 39,315 individuals to be served this equals \$3,764 in total funds per person served, with \$2,962 in federal funds and \$802 in non-federal funds.

For the most significant disability category the average total cost is expected to be \$3,786, with \$2,980 in federal funds and \$806 in non-federal funds. Total spending for the most significant disability category is estimated to be \$75,326,900, where \$59,282,270 are federal funds and \$16,044,630 are non-federal funds.

For the very significant disability category the average total cost is expected to be \$3,772, with \$2,968 in federal funds and \$803 in non-federal funds. Total spending for the very significant disability category is estimated to be \$60,083,950, where \$47,266,070 are federal funds and \$12,797,880 are non-federal funds.

For the significant disability category the average total cost is expected to be \$3,604, with \$2,837 in federal funds and \$768 in non-federal funds. Total spending for the significant disability category is estimated to be \$12,579,150, where \$9,899,790 are federal funds and \$2,679,360 are non-federal funds. No services will be provided to individuals in the category of individual with a disability and no funds will be expended.

DRS projects that all available funds, program income and carryover, will be expended on individuals in the open categories of the order of selection policy. DRS does not expect to have sufficient funds to serve additional individuals in the closed category of the order of selection.

I. State Goals and Priorities

The designated State unit must:

1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed

Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.

The goals and priorities in this Plan were jointly developed and agreed to by DRS and the State Rehabilitation Council. Any revisions to the goals and priorities were jointly reviewed and agreed to by DRS and the SRC.

2. Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs.

Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.

The following goals are established for the Division of Rehabilitation Services:

1. Achieve and exceed 6,000 competitive employment outcomes annually.

DRS believes it is reasonable to establish a consistent metric of 6,000 competitive employment outcomes per year. In the last five years DRS has averaged 5,251 outcomes with a high of 5,538 and a low of 4,990. To attain the 6,000 outcome level the following draft targets are established: 5,750 competitive employment outcomes in PY2020 (FY2021), 6,000 in PY20201 (FY2022), 6,250 in PY2022 (FY2023) and 6,500 in PY2023 (FY2024). DRS finished the most recent fiscal year with 5,100 outcomes and we can shoot for 5,500 in our current fiscal year.

2. Move at least 100 individuals per year from 14(c) employment into competitive integrated employment.

Our goal is to make consistent progress on creating competitive integrated employment opportunities for individuals working in subminimum wage settings. This will be accomplished using a variety of strategies, including: use of supported employment models; use of customized employment models; and development of new business models for agencies currently acting as 14(c) employers. The numerical targets are modest, but the main focus is on building a successful system for creating employment opportunities. The draft targets are: 100 individuals moving from 14(c) to competitive integrated employment in PY2020 (FY2021), 150 in PY20201 (FY2022), 200 in PY2022 (FY2023) and 250 in PY2023 (FY2024).

3. By the conclusion of PY2023 (state FY2024), DRS, working in partnership with the State Board of Education and local education authorities, will ensure that 100,000 students with disabilities engage in pre-employment transition services during their time in school.

WIOA requires all students with disabilities to receive pre-employment transition services. This requirement does not fall entirely on the VR agency. Rather, State government as a whole is given responsibility, including state and local education authorities as well as the VR agency.

We envision at least three levels of engagement with PTS. The first is participation in the STEP program, which involves individuals determined eligible for VR services and who have an active Individualized Plan for Employment that includes PTS. This program served 11,126 students in the most recent program year. The second mode of engagement is provision of services to potentially eligible students with disabilities through the Fast Track Transition program. This program is operated by vendor agencies under contract to DRS. In FY2019 the Fast Track program served 659 students.

The third mode of engagement will involve an improved level of coordination with local school systems. DRS will work with local schools and the State Board to enhance the understanding of PTS on the part of teachers and school administrators. Our belief is that most students with disabilities receive some form of PTS through participation in the transition plan developed beginning at age 14. The Illinois transition plan requires schools to address goals in the areas of employment, post-secondary education and independent living for all transition age students with an IEP. Many of the activities contained in the transition plans are equivalent to services defined as PTS under WIOA, but there is presently no means to account for provision of these services as PTS. DRS proposes to build upon the existing system to enable schools across Illinois to validate provision of PTS to students whether or not they participate in VR services through DRS

4. Increase earnings at case closure and at the second quarter follow up for individuals closed as competitive employment outcomes.

It is well known that people with disabilities are less likely to be employed compared to people that don't have disabilities and are also more likely to be employed part time. The typical VR customer closed as successful by DRS works about 26 hours per week, with many working even fewer hours. Regardless of the hourly wage, part time

work means lower overall earnings. VR counselors should work with their customers to identify opportunities for full time employment whenever possible.

5. Establish a process for transfer of individuals completing supported employment through DRS to receive support under the DDD waiver program.

DRS and DDD recently completed a new agreement regarding services to mutual customers. A key component is ensuring that individuals who have completed 24 months in VR-funded supported employment can be transferred to receive ongoing support from the DDD waiver program. This is a typical arrangement in many states but has not taken place consistently in Illinois.

6. Increase co-enrollment of VR customers in other WIOA programs

A basic tenet of the workforce system under WIOA is that an individual experiencing barriers to employment should be able to receive services regardless of which WIOA partner is the main provider. Receiving services from more than one WIOA partner is considered co-enrollment and should be encouraged whenever possible. This has not been a priority for DRS but it is something we should focus on more going forward.

7. Establish a career pathways model for students with disabilities served by DRS.

Various education and workforce programs utilize the concept of career pathways to guide services to individuals seeking employment. The general idea is that it is worthwhile to engage students with career concepts and the understanding that various jobs are available in a given industry with differing credential requirements. Rather than identify a job for an individual, the career pathways approach helps that individual understand how that job can lead to a career based on additional training and education. While DRS has been a leader in serving students with disabilities, we are lagging behind in adopting a career pathways approach for the students we serve. DRS should consider establishing pilot projects in selected locations, partnering with school districts and community colleges in those areas.

8. DRS will become a disability neutral organization, serving any person regardless of his or her disability.

DRS will revisit policies and procedures throughout the agency to ensure that the VR program is capable of serving any individual regardless of disability. The policy review and revisions will be completed by June 20, 2021.

9. Expand the IPS program to reach additional populations likely to benefit from the IPS approach, including youth with disabilities and individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism.

IPS is an evidence-based practice of providing vocational services to persons with disabilities. IPS was initially focused on individuals with serious mental illness, but additional research has shown that IPS principles and methods are of benefit to a wider range of people with disabilities. DRS will continue to expand IPS by reaching out to specific populations of persons with disabilities and identifying qualified providers to initiate services.

10. Establish an aggressive system of information, education and outreach to targeted populations to promote the growth of the customer base in the DRS VR program.

DRS will use an access navigator approach to identifying potential customers who can benefit from VR services in terms of achieving a competitive integrated employment outcome. DRS intends to contract with a variety of community partner agencies across the state that have connections to individuals in targeted communities that may not be aware of the benefits of the VR program. Referrals to the DRS VR program have declined by 17 percent in the last five years. In order to achieve growth in employment outcomes, that decline must be reversed. In addition to facilitating referrals to the VR program, the access navigator model will ensure that individuals with disabilities are connected to other community supports that might otherwise inhibit their participation in VR services.

11. Work with other WIOA partners to build the capacity to exchange data in a manner to protect confidentiality but which enables efficient cooperation among partners and improves the effectiveness of the workforce system.

The implementation of the workforce system in Illinois has been hampered by a lack of data exchange methodology or framework. While individual partner agencies have useful systems for collecting and managing information on the individuals they serve, the system as a whole is inefficient and duplicative. DRS is committed to ongoing efforts through the State Workforce Board to move toward a solution to the problem. This solution should build on the existing capacities of each agency.

3. Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:

Goals and priorities contained in this Plan are based on an analysis of DRS performance on program standards, as well as other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including reports from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted by RSA under Section 107 of the Act. In addition, the goals and priorities reflect the most recently completed statewide needs assessment and are based on the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA.

A. The most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;

Goals and priorities contained in this Plan are based on an analysis of DRS performance on program standards, as well as other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including reports from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted by RSA under Section 107 of the Act. The goals and priorities are based on the most recently completed statewide needs assessment.

B. the State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and

Goals and priorities contained in this Plan are based on an analysis of DRS performance on program standards, as well as other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including reports from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted by RSA under Section 107 of the Act. The goals and priorities are based on the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA.

C. other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.

Goals and priorities contained in this Plan are based on an analysis of DRS performance on program standards, as well as other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including reports from the SRC and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted by RSA under Section 107 of the Act.

m. Order of Selection

Describe:

1. Whether the designated State unit will implement and order of selection. If so, describe:

A. The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.

The priority of categories to receive VR services under the DRS order of selection policy are: 1. Individuals determined to have the most significant disabilities; 2. Individuals determined to have very significant disabilities; 3. Individuals determined to have significant disabilities; and 4. Individuals determined to have disabilities. For PY2018 and PY2019 the categories of most significant disability, very significant disability and significant disability will be open to services, unless a determination is made by the DRS Director that circumstances require a change in the categories open to service. The priority categories established under this rule are based solely on the definition of “individual with a significant disability” defined in the Rehabilitation Act (section 7 (21) (A)) and in regulations (34CFR361.36(d)(2) and 34CFR361.5(b)(31)). Categories of Eligible Individuals a) Pursuant to the provisions of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 USC 701 et seq.), DHS—DRS has established the following Order of Selection for the priority of provision of services to eligible individuals which counselors must follow when purchasing services for customers: 1) those individuals determined to have the most significant disabilities; 2) those individuals determined to have very significant disabilities; 3) those individuals determined to have significant disabilities; and 4) individuals determined to have disabilities. b) For the purposes of administering services under the order of selection, the Director of DHS—DRS will determine at the beginning of each fiscal year, or more often as necessary, which of the categories under subsection (a) will be open for service. c) Eligible individuals in a closed category under subsection (a) may choose to be placed on a waiting list for services. Criteria for Disability, Significant Disability, Very Significant Disability and Most Significant Disability Documentation of the determination that an individual has a most significant disability, a very significant disability, a significant disability or a disability must be in the individual’s VR case file, as well as documentation concerning the evaluation of his or her rehabilitation potential.

a) Prior to determining the significance of an individual’s disability, it must be determined that he or she: 1) has a disability, or a combination of disabilities, that causes a substantial physical or mental impairment that is similar, but not limited to, the following list of disabilities:

A) amputation, B) arthritis, C) autism, D) blindness, E) burn injury, F) cancer, G) cerebral palsy, H) cystic fibrosis, I) deafness, J) head injury, K) heart disease, L) hemiplegia, M) hemophilia, N) respiratory or pulmonary dysfunction, O) intellectual disability, P) mental illness, Q) multiple sclerosis, R) muscular dystrophy, S) musculo-skeletal disorders, T) neurological disorders (including stroke and epilepsy), U) paraplegia, V) quadriplegia (and other spinal cord conditions), W) sickle cell anemia, X) specific learning disabilities, or Y) end stage renal failure disease;

2) has a disability, or a combination of disabilities, that seriously limits his or her functional capacities, as listed in Section 553.150 of this Part; and 3) requires VR services over an extended period of time.

b) If an individual meets the requirements of Section 553.140(a), then the following criteria must be met to determine the significance of his or her disability:

1) To be considered an individual with a most significant disability, he or she must be an individual who has a disability that seriously limits three or more of his or her functional capacities and who requires multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

2) To be considered an individual with a very significant disability, he or she must have a disability that seriously limits two of his or her functional capacities, and must require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

3) To be considered an individual with a significant disability, he or she must have a disability that seriously limits one of his or her functional capacities and must require multiple VR services over an extended period of time.

4) To be considered an individual with a disability, he or she must have a disability that results in an impediment to employment but which does not seriously limit his or her functional capacities.

c) An individual who has been determined eligible for disability benefits pursuant to Title II (SSDI) or Title XVI (SSI) of the Social Security Act is considered to be presumed eligible for VR services and an individual with a significant disability, unless the analysis of his or her functional limitations and service needs, as described above, place the individual into a higher category of the order of selection.

Determination of Serious Limitation to Functional Capacities

a) For the purpose of determination of the degree of significance of disability, functional capacities shall include:

1. mobility — the physical ability of an individual to move from place to place and move the body into certain positions. This includes such activities as: walking, climbing, kneeling, stooping, sitting, standing, and similar activities;

2. self-care — the ability of an individual to perform activities related to his or her health and hygiene. This includes such activities as: grooming, bathing, eating, house keeping, medical management, and money management;

3. self-direction — the ability of an individual to organize, control and regulate his or her own personal, social, and work life. This includes such activities as: maintaining schedules and routines, following directions and established rules, organizing activities for oneself, and adjusting to changing circumstances;

4. work skills — the ability of an individual to demonstrate skills necessary to perform jobs that exist in the current employment market, regardless of demand for the particular occupation or the individual's prior work experience. This includes such activities as: learning and maintaining

work skills, cooperating with others in a work setting, using adequate decision making and problem-solving skills, and using academic skills commonly required in the workplace;

5. work tolerance — the ability of an individual to consistently and adequately perform a job based on the physical, emotional, environmental, and psychological demands of a specific work environment. This includes such activities as: maintaining performance on the job regardless of changes in environment such as cold and heat, demonstrating the strength and endurance to perform the job in question, and working the schedule typical of other employees in the same job;

6. interpersonal skills — the ability of an individual to establish and maintain appropriate relationships with other individuals in the work place. This includes such activities as: engaging in necessary work-related communications, demonstrating behavior that is appropriate and acceptable in the work environment, cooperating with others in a team setting, and showing understanding and tact in dealing with others; and

7. communication — the ability to convey and receive information efficiently and effectively. This includes such activities as: hearing and understanding ordinary spoken language; making one's self understood in ordinary conversation; writing or printing short notes and communications; and reading and correctly interpreting short notes, signs, and instructions.

b) A serious limitation to a functional capacity shall exist when the rehabilitation counselor determines that the customer, because of his or her disability, has functional limitations in performing the major components of the activity or activities listed in subsections (a)(1) through (7) or needs accommodation to perform the activity.

c) The rehabilitation counselor shall use the criteria of consistency and substantiality when evaluating the degree of limitation to functional capacity. Consistency means that the individual's disability always or almost always limits the individual's functioning. Substantiality means the individual's disability has a major, significant impact on functioning and that the individual cannot perform the activity or finds it very difficult to perform the activity.

B. The justification for the order.

Illinois DRS has operated under an order of selection since 1979. Illinois changed its order of selection policy in April 2013. The overall purpose of the policy is to reflect the priorities of the agency and provide for an equitable distribution of resources to individuals with most significant disabilities. For both FFY2018 and FFY2019 DRS projects that all available funds, program income and carryover, will be expended on individuals in the open categories of the order of selection policy. DRS does not expect to have sufficient funds to serve additional individuals in the closed category of the order of selection.

C. The service and outcome goals.

In PY2020 DRS expects to serve 39,315 individuals. It is expected that the total number will be distributed as follows: persons with a most significant disability: 19,895; persons with a very significant disability: 15,930; and persons with a significant disability: 3,490. No individuals in the person with a disability category will be served. For PY2020 DRS expects to achieve 5,750 rehabilitated closures. It is expected that the total number will be distributed as follows:

persons with a most significant disability: 2,655; persons with a very significant disability: 2,550; and persons with a significant disability: 545. No outcomes are projected for individuals in the person with a disability category.

D. The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.

The time period for the goals described above includes Program Year 2020, beginning July 1, 2020 and ending June 30, 2021.

For PY2018 the achievement of outcome goals is projected as follows. For persons with a most significant disability, 530 are expected to achieve an outcome within 12 months of beginning services; 665 within 18 months; 930 within 18 months; and 530 within 30 months. For persons with a very significant disability, 640 are expected to achieve an outcome within 12 months of beginning services; 890 within 18 months; 765 within 18 months; and 255 within 30 months. For persons with a significant disability, 190 are expected to achieve an outcome within 12 months of beginning services; 190 within 18 months; 110 within 18 months; and 55 within 30 months. No outcomes are projected for individuals in the person with a disability category.

No outcomes are projected for individuals in the person with a disability category.

E. How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities; and

The DRS order of selection policy establishes priority for individuals with a most significant disability. Presently this is one of three categories of the order of selection policy now open for service. Financial estimates allow for services to individuals in all three categories to take place through PY2020. Consistent with longstanding policy, if financial circumstances change, other categories of the order of selection policy will be closed to services until only the most significant category remains open, at which time all new cases will be individuals in that category. It is not anticipated that such financial circumstances will arise as no similar situation has taken place in more than a decade. However, the policy in place is sufficient to ensure that individuals in the most significant disability category will have priority going forward in such an event.

2. If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

DRS does not plan to implement an exemption to the order of selection process based on specific service needs in order to retain employment.

n. Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds.

1. Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services.

While funding related to Title VI-B is uncertain at present, DRS provides the following projections for use of those funds. For PY2020, the Supported Employment Program (SEP) has set forth the following goals using Title VI, Part B funds.

1. Serve customers recently placed into supported employment in a manner consistent with federal regulations, with an emphasis on moving as many individuals as possible into natural supports at the conclusion of ongoing support services.
2. Continue to expand the scope of those who receive services to include persons who are deaf-blind, persons with traumatic brain injuries, persons who are mentally ill, persons with significant hearing impairments and other persons with the most significant disabilities.
3. Develop new mechanisms for funding paid extended services, including cooperative agreements with other state agencies and local units of government.
4. Evaluate the most effective means of achieving employment outcomes for individuals traditionally served in supported employment services.
5. Ensure that no less than 50 percent of the Title VI Part B grant funds are used for long—term support services to youth with disabilities. For PY2020, DRS will serve and employ 125 persons in supported employment utilizing Title VI Part B funds. In the most recent state fiscal year, DRS served 105 individuals in supported employment using Title VI Part B funds and an additional 1,217 using other funds.

2. Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including:

A. the provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and

DRS has developed a contract monitoring mechanism to ensure that Title VI Part B funds are available to youth with disabilities and that at least 50 percent of grant funds are available to individuals in that category. In addition, a reporting system has been developed to ensure that no individual participates in services funded with Title VI part B funds for longer than 48 months. Activities to be carried out for individuals receiving extended services include provision of ongoing support services at the job site or at another location, facilitation of natural supports at the job site, and regular contact with employers and other individuals supporting the worker in order to reinforce and stabilize the job placement. Other supports will be made available as needed, including assistive technology where appropriate. Extended services will be available to youth with a most significant disability for up to 48 months or until such time that the individual reaches age 25 and no longer meets the definition of "youth with a disability".

B. how the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities. DRS has also worked with the state developmental disabilities agency and the state mental health agency to explore funding options for youth with the most significant disabilities who may exhaust support services utilizing Title VI Part B funds. It is expected that most individuals in that category will be eligible for services funded through one of the Medicaid waivers operated by those agencies. The Illinois Employment First effort is a mechanism to support additional cooperation between VR funded and Medicaid waiver funded employment programs for people with most significant disabilities. DRS and the state agency serving individuals with intellectual disabilities have reached an agreement to facilitate referrals of individuals requiring longer term paid supports. DRS is also committed to continuing expansion of customized employment services as an option for youth with the most significant disabilities. DRS hopes to be able to build on experience from recent pilot projects for customized employment for individuals with intellectual disabilities. Ongoing discussions with the state developmental disabilities agency on include exploring options for customized employment projects.

o. State's Strategies

Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):

1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.

DRS plans to use multiple strategies to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities in the course of this plan. The three primary strategies are as follows:

a. Significantly increased outreach and support for potential VR customers to increase referrals to the program. In PY2020 DRS will implement the Access Equity project. The purpose of the project is to substantially increase outreach efforts to persons with disabilities in targeted communities, particularly those of minority persons with disabilities and those whose primary language is other than English. DRS plans to establish contracts with multiple vendors that have established roots in these communities, and which have the resources to identify potential VR customers and connect them to DRS. In addition, the vendor agencies will provide ongoing support to VR customers throughout their participation in the program, connecting them to various community resources and government benefits that will enable their ongoing involvement in VR services. The idea is not only to provide information about the DRS VR program, but to support individuals who may not otherwise initiate an application to VR.

DRS also plans to continue the Community Partnership Initiative, which was established in 2018 and has proven successful in reaching out to over 7,000 persons with disabilities. While the initiative is only active for part of the year, the relationships established with the partner agencies have proven beneficial in expanding awareness of the VR program.

b. Continued development of a business engagement strategy to meet employer needs and create addition job opportunities for VR customers. In 2019 DRS established a workforce development unit (WDU) to significant increase the capacity to provide services to businesses. A key step was creating a new job classification of business services consultant. This job was designed to focus more on communication skills and business-related experience than on skills or experience relating to rehabilitation. Of the first six consultants hired, none had backgrounds in rehabilitation counseling. The WDU also includes three staff classified as employment resource specialists. This is a legacy job classification more closely aligned with a counseling background. All WDU staff have received in-person and online training focused on communicating with businesses, presenting the case for VR services, working with large corporate employers, as well as training in how to promote disability awareness to employers. A centralized data base has been developed to track employer contacts and relate those efforts to hiring of DRS customers. Each staff person has assignments to one or more local workforce development area and is charged with coordinating with the local business services team.

c. Encourage post-secondary education opportunities to help VR customers obtain full-time work and higher earnings. Completion of a post-secondary degree is an important factor in attaining a self-sufficient level of earnings. In PY2018 VR customers closed successfully after participating in post-secondary education had average annual earnings of \$24,210 compared to other successful closures from the program, who earned \$16,938 on average. Customers completing a university program earned an average of \$29,601 per year while community college completers earned \$21,862 on average. DRS believes that the VR program should do as much as possible to promote post-secondary education to assist customers in achieving better jobs that pay higher wages.

Since 2010 DRS has operated the Community College Initiative, which provides financial incentives to customers wishing to attend a 2-year program. In that time the number of customers attending community college programs has increased by 122 percent. In 2020 DRS intends to modify its financial participation rule to provide a more supportive framework for VR customers from families with median earnings who wish to attend a university program with DRS support. A detailed analysis of the existing financial participation rule shows that many individuals are not able to receive DRS financial assistance although their family income is near the median level for the state. A modification in this policy will enable more VR customers to attend university programs and achieve an employment outcome with good earnings and benefits.

DRS will continue to work with the Talent Acquisition Program (TAP) coordinated by CSAVR. This is a cooperative effort of many state VR agencies to promote professional level employment for VR customers. While there are many internet sites that serve to connect applicants and employers, TAP is the only site that focuses on employment people with disabilities. Participating employers are aware that the applicant has a disability but this has proven to be a benefit in establishing communication between the parties. DRS also works with the National Employment Team (The NET). This program helps employers operating on a national or multi-state basis connect with VR programs in each state, facilitating referrals of applicants. While the NET is not focused on professional-level employment, the structure of most large corporate employers involves many such jobs in states where they operate.

2. How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.

DRS recognizes the importance of assistive technology services in meeting the needs of individuals with disabilities. It is the intention of DRS to provide a broad range of AT services at all stages of the rehabilitation process, and to make the services available on a statewide basis. Toward this end, DRS provides training to staff on AT services, both at the initial staff training and on an ongoing basis. DRS employs technology specialists and arranges for contractual staff to be available to work with VR counselors to identify customer needs, locate AT providers, write plans and provide AT services. Staff are available to provide on-site consultation with VR counselors as well as on—site evaluation of customer needs.

DRS also has a central office purchasing specialist that works one-on-one with VR counselors to arrange purchasing of AT equipment and maximize use of VR funds. DRS also works closely with the Illinois Assistive Technology Project (the state AT grant recipient) to educate people with disabilities about AT products and services as well as demonstrate products that may be of use to individuals with disabilities. DRS initiated the loan to own program for distribution of assistive technology equipment in order to provide necessary devices to VR customers in a timely fashion. This effort involves making larger purchases of frequently used assistive technology devices and transferring them to a customer as needed, rather than initiating a separate purchase for each individual. This has significantly reduced the amount of time required to deliver assistive technology equipment to customers, enabling them to move forward with their service plan sooner.

The technology team is also working closely with Blind Services staff to test assisted vision devices known as AIRA that promote safe travel and community integration. This is an exciting new development in assistive technology and DRS will soon be implementing a test of the technology.

3. The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program.

DRS recognizes that many groups do not have access to the VR program to the same degree as others. DRS has a number of strategies to address these needs and improve access. Individuals with disabilities who are minorities are served by DRS at a rate that reflects their proportion of the state population. However, it is acknowledged that minority individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, face additional barriers to employment and access to the labor market. DRS works with community providers that have a strong connection to particular minority communities, including the African-American, Latino and Asian communities. Providers in these communities provide services in a culturally appropriate manner and have access to employment both within minority communities as well as in the general labor market. Recent expansion of contractual services with providers representing the Asian communities in the Chicago area have been particularly successful in increasing employment for that population. DRS also makes its services available to non-English speakers, both through employment of bilingual staff and through a translation service.

The Access Equity project described above is designed to improve access to the VR program for individuals in various communities throughout Illinois. It is expected that the vendors contracted for this project will represent racial and ethnic groups that might be considered underserved by the VR program. The addition level of outreach and a higher level of support are intended to make sure that more applicants come to the program and that more of those individuals remain in the program and achieve positive results.

DRS employs specialist staff for services to deaf-blind individuals, a low-incidence disability with a high need for vocational assistance. DRS specialists work in consultation with VR counselors to provide services to deaf-blind customers, including training and job placement. In recent years

DRS has worked closely with Helen Keller National Center, the primary resource in the US for deaf-blind services. This has included staff training and presentations as well as utilizing HKNC expertise in designing training environments for deaf-blind individuals served by DRS. DRS is currently working with HKNC to develop support services for deaf-blind individuals to increase their opportunities for sustaining competitive integrate employment. DRS works closely with the Illinois Advisory Board on Deaf-Blindness, a consumer group focused on improving service access for deaf-blind individuals.

An assessment of staff training needs identified a strong need for training in the medical aspects of disability for VR counselors and supervisors. DRS has developed an arrangement with an external online training entity to provide training on medical aspects as well as other topics such as low-incidence disabilities of interest to rehabilitation counselors.

DRS continues in its efforts to implement a system of individual placement and support services (IPS) programs, also known as evidence—based supported employment programs, for individuals with serious mental illness. The IPS model is designed to provide employment services that are tailored to the specific needs of this population, which have traditionally been underserved by VR programs nationally. This has been a major undertaking involving extensive cooperation with the DHS Division of Mental Health, community providers, and university consultants. Fidelity reviews have proven to be a very strong tool for improving and shaping IPS services at the service provider level.

4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).

DRS is committed to improvement and expansion of services to students and youth with disabilities, building upon its existing strong level of support for that age group. For example, in the previous state fiscal year 63.4 percent of all persons served in the DRS VR program began receiving services prior to age 21, as were 49.8 percent of persons achieving a competitive employment outcome. Although this represents a high level of involvement, there is still room for improvement and achievement of greater levels of effectiveness.

While a variety of pre-employment transition services are being provided through existing arrangements with third party providers, DRS initiated the Fast Track Transition program as an option for pre-employment transition services outside the framework of the longstanding STEP effort. This program works with 22 vendor agencies across the state, including 20 centers for independent living. The target population is students aged 14 and 15 that have not typically participated in STEP services. As of January 2020 over 1,000 students were participating in the Fast Track program. DRS anticipates continued expansion of this program in subsequent years depending on provider interest.

DRS intends to work with community rehabilitation programs and local school systems to establish a method for connecting students exiting high school with CRP services. Both CRP and school personnel report difficulties making referrals and establishing services soon after a student leaves school. The greater the time lapse after leaving school, the less likely that a student will become engaged with a community provider. Recent provider input suggests that individuals likely to benefit from supported employment services are particularly impacted by the need to arrange post-school services quickly. DRS will continue working with community partners to explore options relating to this issue.

5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State.

Illinois has a well-developed network of community rehabilitation programs across the state, as well as an active trade association for those organizations. DRS does not believe that new community rehabilitation programs need to be developed at this time. DRS remains in contact with these organizations through ongoing discussions with the Facility Advisory Council, which has a rotating membership of program directors, who meet regularly with DRS administrators. The program manager for contracts as well as the bureau chief for field services attends meetings.

DRS also has specific liaison relationships between VR counselors and community rehabilitation programs in their service area. In addition, DRS has project officers who monitor contracts with community rehabilitation programs and are very knowledgeable regarding the service capacity of the agencies and the needs of their customers. These organizational arrangements provide a high level of communication about service needs as they relate to community rehabilitation programs.

DRS believes that community rehabilitation program agencies will continue to play an important part in the overall system of services in Illinois. DRS anticipates that the overall percentage of outcomes associated with CRPs will remain relatively stable, and that an increase in employment outcomes overall will mean an increase in employment outcomes associated with CRPs.

6. Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA.

Increased median earnings. DRS is following three main strategies to increase median earnings. The first is to increase the number of individuals enrolled in university and community college programs. These individuals have higher earnings than those with less education. A second strategy is to identify individuals with work experience who may benefit from return-to-work services through the VR program. DRS has one community provider contract that focuses on return-to-work and it has higher than average earnings for the individuals it serves. The third strategy is expanded participation in the CSAVR Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP). Each of these approaches is designed to identify individuals with higher expected earnings and gradually increase the proportion of these individuals served by DRS.

Increased employment retention. Employment retention is a function of an appropriate match between the job and the individual, as well as a satisfactory level of earnings. Full time work is associated with a higher level of employment retention than is part time work. Consequently, DRS counselors are encouraged to emphasize full time work to the greatest extent possible for VR customers. Also as noted above, DRS is attempting to increase enrollment in university and community college programs. Individuals with that level of education are much more likely to engage in full time employment. Increased achievement of postsecondary education credentials. DRS is engaged in an effort to expand enrollment in university and community college programs. To improve data quality, DRS has made modifications to its online case management system. These changes will result in improved tracking of measurable skill gains and achievement of degrees and credentials by customers pursuing postsecondary training.

7. Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities.

DRS will use a localized strategy for assisting other components of the workforce system in working effectively with persons with disabilities. As noted elsewhere, DRS staff serve as members of local workforce boards and have the capacity to focus attention on disability—related issues. DRS also continues a high level of participation in state and local efforts to promote service integration within the workforce system. Concerns specifically related to program accessibility will be addressed at the local level with support from the DRS central office rehabilitation technology unit. In addition to local staff resources

DRS will reach out to independent living centers in responding to accessibility concerns. DRS will also work with its Title I agency to provide training to both DRS and local workforce staff on disability issues through webinars and other mechanisms. DRS will also pursue a strategy of expanding methods of communication, including electronic and computer connections, between DRS offices and local workforce centers. DRS has been involved with ongoing efforts through the state workforce board to create a system for electronic exchange of information between workforce partner agencies at the state and local level.

8. How the agency's strategies will be used to:

A. [achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;](#)

The goals established in this plan are consistent with DRS needs assessment activities described in this plan. The goals are closely aligned to WIOA reporting requirements, focusing on employment retention and earnings, essential objectives of the VR program. The strategies described in this plan are focused on making progress toward those goals. DRS believes that the focus on employment, earnings and educational achievement are consistent with the needs of people with disabilities throughout the state.

B. [support innovation and expansion activities; and](#)

DRS continues to solicit suggestions from staff and stakeholders about service needs that can be the focus of innovation and expansion activities. In the fall of 2019 DRS management conducted seven community forums around the state that were attended by over 300 provider agency representatives. One aspect of the forums was soliciting input for innovation and

expansion options for the VR program. The input received from these meetings is under review at this time. DRS has encouraged the IPS program system in its efforts to reach out to other disability populations, including persons with intellectual disabilities and persons with autism. Research suggests that the IPS model has benefits that are likely to benefit a variety of individuals with disabilities. DRS has also expanded its presence on social media as a means of promoting the VR program to potential customers.

C. overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program. The major barrier to participation in the vocational rehabilitation and supported employment program for individuals with disabilities concerns access to services. Because these programs are targeted at individuals with disabilities, there is no general barrier to participation on the basis of disability status. Rather, specific barriers arise when an individual is unable to participate in a program or communicate his or her needs to program staff. DRS provides a variety of access methods to individuals with disabilities, including the use of Braille and large print, sign language, computer assisted real time captioning and other specialized assistive technology. All DRS office locations are physically accessible, as are all program locations and public meeting sites. Individuals who do not speak English are provided with translation services in order to participate in the vocational rehabilitation program. Every effort is made to eliminate these types of barriers to participation.

The Access Equity project described above is intended to address these concerns directly. The involvement of community-based agencies with substantial ties to the local population has the potential to greatly reduce communication concerns and improve ongoing program participation for VR applicants.

p. Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals

Describe:

1. An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.

Goal 1: Competitive Integrated Employment Outcomes DRS has revised the goals in this section based on current performance levels. DRS plans to increase the number of competitive integrated employment outcomes achieved each year, beginning with 5,600 in PY2017, then 5,950 in PY2018 and 6,300 in PY2019.

Results: This goal was not achieved. In terms of annual competitive integrated employment outcomes, DRS has fallen short of the expected levels of performance. In the last four fiscal years (July 1 2015 to June 30 2019) DRS has achieved 5,538, 4,990, 5,169 and 5,114 competitive employment outcomes. In large part this is due to difficulty filling staff vacancies in some parts of the state.

Goal 2: Median Earnings Two Quarters After Program Exit The best estimate of current performance is median quarterly earnings of \$2,343. DRS plans to increase the median earnings achieved by individuals exiting the VR program to \$2,460 in PY2016, \$2,595 in PY2017, \$2,750 in PY2018 and \$2,930 in PY2019.

Results: This goal was not achieved. For the two most recent fiscal years, the median earnings at the second quarter after exit were \$2,185 and \$2,206.

Goal 3: Employment Retention at Two Quarters After Program Exit The best estimate of current performance is 49.1 percent for all persons exiting the VR program. DRS plans to increase the employment retention percentage to 52.5 in PY2016, 55.0 in PY2017, 57.5 in PY2018 and 60.0 in PY2019.

Results: This goal was not achieved. For the most recent fiscal year, 50.1 percent of persons exiting the program were employed two quarters after exit.

Goal 4: Employment Retention at Four Quarters After Program Exit The best estimate of current performance is 45.7 percent for all persons exiting the VR program. DRS plans to increase the employment retention percentage to 48.0 in PY2016, 50.0 in PY2017, 52.5 in PY2018 and 55.0 in PY2019.

Results: This goal was not achieved. For the most recent fiscal year, 46.6 percent of persons exiting the program were employed four quarters after exit.

Goal 5: Educational Achievement This measure includes all program participants who earn a secondary diploma, post—secondary degree or other credential while participating in the program of within one year after program exit. The best estimate of current performance is

5,050 individuals meeting this criterion, with 4,250 completing a secondary diploma, 600 earning a post—secondary degree and 200 earning some other type of credential. DRS plans to increase the number of people making educational achievements to 5,260 in PY2016, 5,470 in PY2017, 5,680 in PY2018 and 5,900 in PY2019.

Results: This goal was not achieved. The estimates used in establishing the goals proved not to be an accurate reflection of program achievement. In the most recent fiscal year (ending June 30, 2019) a total of 4,902 high school students graduated with a diploma and 392 post-secondary education students graduated with a degree (155 university students and 255 community college students). The combined total of 5,294 represents significant achievement for the students involved but as a total it is less than the stated goal for the year.

Goal 6: Post-Secondary Training Skill Gains This measure includes all program participants who are engaged in post-secondary training leading to a degree or credential and who are making measurable skills gains during the program year. The best estimate of current performance is 2,500 individuals meeting this criterion. DRS plans to increase the number of people achieving measurable skills gains in postsecondary training to 2,650 in PY2016, 2,800 in PY2017, 2,950 in PY2018 and 3,150 in PY2019.

Results: This goal was not achieved. DRS initially experienced difficulty in reporting measurable skill gains due to technical problems and inconsistent communication with staff. DRS has shown progress in measurable skill gains for post-secondary education students. In PY2017 a total of 1,038 measurable skill gains were reported for 664 students enrolled in post-secondary education. After subsequent staff training notable improvements were seen the following year. In PY2018 a total of 4,125 measurable skill gains were reported for 2,217 post-secondary students.

Goal 7: Students with Disabilities Exiting Into Postsecondary Training This is a measure of the number of students with disabilities who graduate from high school and enter post—secondary training programs within the first year after leaving school. The best estimate of current performance is that about 4,000 students exit DRS STEP services each year and about 700 enter post—secondary training. DRS plans to increase the number of students participating in post—secondary training to 750 in PY2016, 825 in PY2017, 900 in PY2018 and 1,000 in PY2019.

Results: This goal was not achieved, in part due to inaccurate estimates made in establishing the goal. While DRS has around 3,500 VR customers engaged in post-secondary education programs in a typical year, the number going directly from high school to post-secondary training is lower than estimated. A total of 5,138 students graduated high school after participation in DRS transition services in 2018. Within the next year 760 or 15 percent were enrolled in a post-secondary education program (548 in community college, 124 in a university and 18 in a technical institute).

Goal 8: Establish a Business Engagement Team within DRS In PY2016 DRS plans to establish a business engagement team, consisting of employment resource specialists, rehabilitation counselors and field office supervisors. The team will establish new relationships with at least 20 employers and achieve 50 employment outcomes for VR customers at those businesses. DRS will work in conjunction with the Job Driven VR Technical Assistance Center to develop a

business engagement strategy and provide training to participating staff to increase the effectiveness of their engagement with employers. This goal has been extended for the next two program years, with 50 new business engagements and 100 employment outcomes anticipated in PY2018 and 65 new business engagements and 125 employment outcomes in PY2019.

Results: This goal has achieved partial success. The business engagement team consisting primarily of VR counselors continues to function, and it has been joined by the staff of the recently formed workforce development unit. As a combined team they continue to enter data on business engagements into a central data base. The level of success has not been as high as expected. In the most recent state fiscal year (ending June 30, 2019) DRS made initial contacts with 107 businesses and had follow-up contacts with 58 businesses contacted in previous years. A total of 51 VR customers associated with targeted businesses achieved competitive outcomes during the fiscal year, far below the expected number of 125. The projected figure for the current year is that 90 individuals will achieve a successful VR closure, so while goals were not met there continues to be improvement in performance.

Goal 9: Continue Expansion of Innovative Program Options In PY2018 and PY2019 DRS plans to continue expansion of several innovative program options which have been evaluated following a set of pilot projects. These include customized employment services, individual placement and support (IPS) services for diverse populations, and Project Search sites. Evaluation of the pilot projects suggests that the majority of the projects have performed at a level sufficient to justify ongoing support through DRS VR funds.

Results: This goal was partially achieved. DRS continues to operate Project Search sites with continued success, but has not been able to expand the number of providers due to limited provider interest. IPS programs have expanded the range of individuals served but DRS has not developed separately funded projects for those populations to date. Customized employment projects begun as pilots continue but are funded as supported employment contracts due to inconsistent documentation of customized employment principles.

Goal 10: Expand Performance Funding DRS has converted many of its community contracts to a performance basis in the last four years. DRS plans to continue to process of converting contracts for job placement and supported employment to a performance basis, achieving a level of 90 percent performance—based contracts with community vendors in PY2018 and 95 percent in PY2019.

Results: This goal was achieved. In the most recent state fiscal year (ending June 30, 2019) a total of 98 percent of job placement and supported employment contracts issued by DRS were performance based.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.

To some degree performance in PY2018 was limited by staff vacancies and having a cohort of relatively new staff. For a time the hiring capability of the VR program was limited by factors within state government external to the program. In addition, transfers of counselors from the

VR program to the expanding DRS home services program created a higher than usual number of VR counselor vacancies.

2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:

A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.

The goal for PY2018, was to serve and employ 125 persons in supported employment utilizing Title VI Part B funds. This goal was achieved. In that year DRS served 1,230 individuals in supported employment, with 234 served using Title VI Part B funds and 996 served using other funds. DRS believes that addition outreach efforts will contribute to success in achieving supported employment goals in the coming program years.

B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.

DRS has spent the last few years studying the supported employment issue and implementing changes to the contracting and funding structure behind the program. It is clear that DRS and at least some providers had different perspectives on the purpose and intent of the supported employment program. DRS efforts to ensure that supported employment services were targeted only to those for whom the service is appropriate resulted in a drop in total persons served. Since 2015 the number of individuals receiving supported employment services has remained consistent and DRS looks to build on that increase in the coming program years. The new performance-based contracting system is designed to align the interests of DRS, the provider and the customer so that individuals begin employment and receive appropriate supports that are gradually decreased until the individual achieves optimal independence. In addition, DRS is working with the state developmental disabilities agency to facilitate referrals of individuals likely to benefit from VR-funded supported employment services. Another major factor is that as Illinois increases its efforts to phase out reliance on subminimum wage the need for supported employment increases.

3. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.

Employment Retention: Data for individuals exiting the program (either successfully or unsuccessfully) in 2018 show that 54.4 percent were employed during the second quarter after program exit. In addition, 43.5 percent of individuals exiting the program were employed during the fourth quarter after program exit.

Median earnings two quarters after program exit. Data for individuals exiting the program in 2018 showed median earnings of \$2,887 two quarters after program exit. This is higher than the figure of \$2,343 identified a year earlier.

Educational achievement. In the most recent fiscal year (ending June 30, 2019) a total of 4,902 high school students graduated with a diploma and 392 post-secondary education students graduated with a degree (155 university students and 255 community college students).

Measurable Skill Gains. In PY2018 a total of 4,125 measurable skill gains were reported for 2,217 students enrolled in post-secondary education.

4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized.

DRS has initiated several innovation and expansion activities since the previous plan. The development of the Fast Track Transition program to provide pre-employment transition services to potentially eligible students with disabilities represents a significant service expansion in the area of transition. The focus is on serving younger (14- and 15-year-old) students that have not typically been served in Illinois. As of January 2020, there were over 1,000 students in the program. DRS also has initiated an arrangement with the National Federation for the Blind to provide pre-employment transition services to students who are blind or visually impaired. DRS believes that the expertise of this national organization will be of great benefit to the students who participate. DRS also implemented the Community Partnership Initiative. This program involved over 120 community-based organizations, including faith-based organizations, fraternal organizations and community groups. Community partners were engaged to identify potential VR customers in their community and deliver presentations on the DRS VR program and provide information on how to apply. Since September 2018 over 1,000 presentations have been made to over 7,000 individuals with disabilities and family members to provide information and education about DRS services.

q. Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services.

Include the following:

1. The quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.

In the last several years DRS has seen a reduction in the total number of persons served in supported employment, although the current trend is toward increased participation. There was a decrease of 25 percent in the number of persons receiving supported employment services through DRS from 2012 to 2014. The number of persons served has increased by 8 percent from 2015 to 2017 and has remained at roughly the same level since that time at about 1,250 individuals. However, since 2017 the number of individuals receiving supported employment that were subsequently closed as successful employment outcomes dropped from 298 to 187, a decrease of 112 or 37.5 percent. DRS continues to explore options to identify individuals that are likely to benefit from supported employment services to reverse this trend.

In 2017 DRS implemented a new performance-based contracting system for supported employment. This was developed in conjunction with provider representatives, and increased the effective payment rate by 16 percent. The goal is to ensure that individuals become employed and receive necessary supports that are gradually reduced over time to achieve maximum independent functioning on the job. While the new contract format has maintained the overall number of persons served, the lack of effectiveness in achieving successful outcomes for supported employment participants is a concern.

In 2019 DRS completed a new working agreement the state developmental disabilities agency to increase referrals to the DRS supported employment program. This includes outreach to DD system case management entities in developing referrals to DRS supported employment. DRS is also committed to dedicating substantial resources to provision of supported employment services to youth with disabilities. For many years DRS has supplemented the Title VI Part B grant funds with VR grant funds for supported employment contracts. For most providers there was no distinction between the contracts based on funding. In 2015 DRS began utilization of Title VI Part B funds for supported employment customers younger than age 25, as well as more closely tracking the total number of months of supported employment services. Current data indicates that about 30 percent of individuals participating in supported employment are younger than age 25.

2. The timing of transition to extended services.

For several years DRS has not had access to state general revenue funds to provide long-term extended services for individuals completing time-limited supported employment services, whether using Title VI Part B funds or Title I funds. DRS has focused on developing natural supports in the workplace as a form of unpaid extended services for individuals completing supported employment services. Completion of the program is defined as reduction of paid on-the-job supports to the minimum possible level. DRS is in the process of completing a new

agreement with the state DD agency which provides that individuals completing VR supported employment will be able to receive ongoing support through the DD agency. DRS also expects that many individuals currently on the waiting list for DD waiver services will apply for DRS supported employment services.

For youth with a most significant disability DRS utilizes available funds to provide extended services for a period of up to 48 months or until such time as the individual turns age 25 and no longer meets the definition of "youth with a disability".

Certifications

Name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate **Division of Rehabilitation Services**

Name of designated State agency **Illinois Department of Human Services**

Full Name of Authorized Representative: **Grace B. Hou**

Title of Authorized Representative: **Secretary, Department of Human Services**

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. The **designated State agency or designated State unit (as appropriate) listed above** is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by WIOA*, and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act.** **Yes**
2. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the **designated State agency listed above** agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under section 111 of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan; **Yes**
3. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency agrees to operate and administer the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan*, the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations, policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;** **Yes**
4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; **Yes**
5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement. **Yes**
6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law. **Yes**
7. The **Authorized Representative listed above** has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement; **Yes**

8. The **Authorized Representative listed above** has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services; **Yes**

9. The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement. **Yes**