PHASE II
FINDINGS BRIEF #10
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Workforce Investment Act

Audience

Policy experts, state vocational rehabilitation agencies, workforce investment boards, students with disabilities and post-secondary institutions.

Issue

On July 1, 2000 the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) took affect, replacing the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). The overall purpose of WIA is to create an integrated workforce preparation and employment system that meets the needs of job seekers and those seeking to advance their careers, as well as the employment needs of the nation’s employers. The goal is to consolidate and improve employment, training, literacy, and vocational rehabilitation programs, meeting the needs of both individual job seekers and employers by providing job seekers with access to employment and training opportunities and linking employers to a pool of qualified applicants.

Under Title I of WIA, the workforce investment system provides the framework for delivery of workforce investment activities at the state and local levels to individuals who need those services. Congress and the U.S. Department of Labor have made it clear that persons with disabilities are among the people who are supposed to benefit from this restructuring. Under the new structure, programs included in the system must effectively serve individuals with disabilities, and the vocational rehabilitation program in the state must be an integral component of the workforce investment system. WIA incorporates seven key principles that are to guide the restructuring: universal access, flexibility, streamlining, empowerment, accountability, strategic planning and oversight and a youth emphasis.

This recent passage of federal policy could lead to changes in the manner in which students with disabilities are supported in post secondary education and other lifelong opportunities leading to subsequent employment. This brief will offer a first review of the new policy and conduct an analysis of those policy components that address the stated issue.

Research Question

What is the impact of WIA on how students with disabilities are supported in postsecondary education and other lifelong opportunities? The focus was specifically, in the areas of eligibility of training providers, representation on
local workforce investment boards, performance accountability and self-advocacy training for youth programs.

**Method**

This study examined both the WIA policy and a pilot implementation of the nine states that received grants to test implementation of WIA regulations. All information, including resources from Cornell University, available to computer based and on-line searches of electronic databases regarding the issue was analyzed.

**Significant Findings**

**Eligibility of Training Providers**

- Postsecondary institutions should be eligible to count as a training provider chosen through an Individual Training Accounts (ITA). Thus far, the statute does not specifically outline the criteria by which training providers are selected. There is a need for clarification of selection criteria to ensure that students with disabilities wanting to pursue higher education career goals are not denied this choice.

- WIA is quite clear on requiring that states develop procedures to ensure the policies relative to program quality and outcomes meet the objectives of the Act including one-stop centers and training providers. Kentucky, Texas and Vermont all have clear requirements outlined within their state plans. Texas stands out as to listing initial determination, state maintenance of the provider list, and the process for removing providers from the list. Vermont and Kentucky follow with similar detail, outlining requirements for providers to be eligible to provide services under WIA. Much of Florida’s eligibility requirements are framed within Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA), National Apprenticeship Act, and Florida Education and Training Information Program (FETPIP). All other private providers eligible for exemptions to ITA’s specified in WIA may also be included in the list. Florida insures that their Regional Workforce Development Boards will track outcomes.

- The Indiana State plan includes policies relating to Community Based Organizations (CBO), however, the description is rather brief. Indiana also includes eligibility found in Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1996 and the National Apprenticeship Act. The SCORECARD, a component of Louisiana Occupational Information System (LOIS), is the main means of the state to provide information on the performance of training providers. New Jersey assures that comprehensive performance information will be available on all their service providers at each of their one-stop centers. The Utah State plan mentions that the Utah State Office of Education’s Office of Rehabilitation will be tasked with approving training providers. It will develop a common application with requirements following WIA’s recommendations as well as those from the Office of Rehabilitation. Wisconsin has a plan on collecting data on the performance of training providers.

**Postsecondary and Disability Representation on Local Workforce Investment Boards (WIB)**

- Both representation of people with disabilities and that of postsecondary education institutions on state and local
Boards need to be insured. To ensure equal opportunity, self-determination and economic self-sufficiency - all key principles of federal disability policy - students with disabilities should be encouraged to strive for higher educational goals leading to high-end employment and lifelong learning. Thus, state and local Workforce Investment Boards should be directed to include representation of postsecondary education institutions.

- Postsecondary representation on local WIBs is more common. Five states, Indiana, Kentucky, Texas, Vermont, and Wisconsin all cite this type of representation. Indiana mentions “strong linkages” between academic occupational learning including organizations such as the Commission for Higher Education. The Kentucky plan states that the WIB will include postsecondary educational institutions, including representation of community colleges. The WIB in Texas has three voting members, one of who represents public postsecondary education. Vermont’s membership includes the president of the University of Vermont and a representative of Vermont’s independent colleges. Wisconsin’s core partners include postsecondary vocational educational organizations. The other states are not explicit in such representation.

- Florida and Texas are the two states that include disability representation for WIB members. Florida requires the regional board to include representatives from private educational institutions and community based organizations serving individuals with disabilities. Texas local boards must have representation of at least one member concerned with vocational rehabilitation and they are encouraged to designate that or another member to represent general disability related issues. Local boards are required to designate a staff person to work with clients with disabilities. The other implementation states make no mention of disability representation on WIBs.

**Performance Accountability**

- A key provision of the Workforce Investment Act is state and local accountability for the performance of the workforce system. Training providers and their programs must demonstrate successful performance and customer satisfaction to remain eligible to receive funds. For the adult program, state performance indicators include entry into employment, retention, earnings, and educational or occupational credentials. Local workforce investment areas are subject to the same indicators, in addition to additional indicators the Governor may select. Local performance indicators should therefore include both ‘career advancement’ and ‘improved quality of life’ to further the achievement of higher education goals and lifelong learning for students with disabilities.

- All of the state plans address systems to maintaining eligibility for service providers in compliance to WIA mandates. Florida, Indiana, Kentucky and Texas provide the respected state policies for training providers certification and customer satisfaction reports. Vermont and Louisiana incorporate a “scorecard” measurement system for evaluating potential providers. Wisconsin posts job seekers satisfaction surveys on the Job Net post-session survey, summarized monthly by Job Center and quarterly by WDA.

- Texas, Indiana, and Utah list areas in which providers must measure up in
order to receive certification and maintain certification. These states list each area of measure, Texas being most comprehensive and complete. These areas include retention rate, costs, percentages of completion and employment, wages, rate of licensure, degree, and certification.

Youth Programs: Self-Advocacy Training

- The WIA creates a Youth Council to serve the needs of low-income youth ages 14 to 21 who meet at least one of six barriers to employment (for example-youths with disabilities). The design framework for local youth programs must provide preparation for postsecondary education programs, among others, and provide linkages between academic and occupational learning. Disability awareness training is necessary for all training providers. For youth with disabilities, self-advocacy training is an essential component of, as well as pre-requisite for, academic and occupational learning. The outcome of such training would yield adults with disabilities able to understand their disability rights and advocacy needs in the workplace.
- All nine state plans mention areas of youth advocacy training. Indiana and Vermont itemize most specifically the various components involved with youth support. These areas include, but are not limited to life skills training self-esteem building, educational and career opportunities, and positive social behaviors.
- WIA requires states to provide activities and services that are directed to helping eligible youth to achieve academic and employment success. Yet, none of the remaining implementation states elaborate on the ways that they will fulfill this requirement. Utah furthers their plan in this area by ensuring that all youth participants will be receiving follow-up services for a minimum of 12 months.
- Florida, Texas and Vermont all cite WIA as their vehicle of allowing advocacy group participation (as described in the Wagner-Peyser Act). However, Florida, Kentucky, New Jersey, and Texas do not identify sources for accomplishing this. In contrast, Louisiana names various programs and agencies that are targeted to providing the necessary supports for youth. Texas cites many, already in existence, programs and agencies, Utah links closely with their State Office of Rehabilitation, and Wisconsin and Vermont focus on the value of the Youth Councils in addressing these needs.
- Kentucky and Wisconsin stand out as leaders in this section for increasing disability awareness. Kentucky’s state plan incorporates assurances that local boards, one-stop operators, and service providers will address these issues to staff and persons with disabilities. The Kentucky state plan mentions cross training, technical assistance, and outreach programs for persons with disabilities to ensure that many of the barriers to services and employment will be overcome. Wisconsin itemizes policies for special needs populations that include the necessary tools for universal access to core services.

Implications

With the information from this policy review, it is hoped that policy makers will make recommendations as to what can be done to improve WIA, if new policy wording or a change in the law is required, if further specifics in the
regulations are necessary or if a presidential directive to the field is necessary.

**Contact Information**

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