



Issue BRIEF

Frank Martin

Postsecondary Education Services for Students in the Vermont Linking Learning to Careers Program

The Rehabilitation Services Administration awarded five-year grants to state VR agencies to identify, implement, and evaluate evidence-based practices for providing work-based learning in integrated settings for transition-age youth with disabilities. State VR agencies in five states received awards: California, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Vermont. Mathematica is evaluating the Maryland and Vermont demonstrations. See the issue brief “Roadmap for Change—Linking Learning to Careers Program” for more information about the Vermont LLC program’s design, services, and evaluation.

The Vermont Linking Learning to Careers (LLC) program is a five-year statewide initiative designed by Vermont’s Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). The program, which began enrolling students in July 2017, is intended to improve the employment and postsecondary educational outcomes of high school students who have disabilities. LLC uses a team-based approach and provides enhanced services on top of the usual services that eligible high school students typically receive from schools and state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies.

One of these enhanced services is additional postsecondary education assistance from dedicated LLC staff and the Community College of Vermont (CCV), a primary partner for the program. CCV has 12 campuses across the state (closely aligned with DVR’s 12 district offices), thus enabling students who are enrolled in LLC to access the college’s offerings.

This brief describes LLC’s postsecondary education services.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Postsecondary education refers to any specialized post-high school education or training, such as two-year or four-year colleges and vocational, business, or technical schools. Students who enroll in postsecondary education typically focus on knowledge and skills related to their future career goals. Similar to their peers without disabilities, many high school students with disabilities have postsecondary education goals and can benefit from counseling or education services—such as assistance with college applications or financial aid, college readiness training, academic mentoring, or reasonable accommodations—to help them reach their goals. LLC offers enhanced postsecondary education options for students in the program in addition to what they could receive through usual services (Table 1).

COUNSELING ON POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 requires all state VR agencies to provide pre-employment transition services to eligible youth, including counseling on postsecondary education. Counseling on postsecondary education commonly involves exploration of education and training programs and opportunities, guidance on financial aid, and training to access resources available through the adult disability service system.

Since LLC started, it has provided 62 percent of its 441 students with counseling on postsecondary education (Table 2). Students receiving usual VR services can also access this counseling service, but LLC differs in an important way. The program uses a team-based approach led by dedicated LLC staff to coordinate and provide pre-employment transition services. LLC staff assess

each LLC student’s readiness for college coursework and refer students to a regional CCV campus for postsecondary education services and academic courses, as appropriate. Students receiving usual VR services cannot access this intensive, team-based assistance.

ENHANCED EXPOSURE TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES

LLC students who are interested in postsecondary education at CCV can join information sessions and college tours and receive counseling to learn about courses and accessibility issues addressed by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

LLC also piloted a mentoring program with a small group of LLC students. The mentors were work study students at CCV who shared their stories about transitioning to postsecondary

education, discussed career goals, and helped LLC students navigate their work-based learning experiences. LLC designed and offers these services to support high school students interested in gaining postsecondary education experience and encourages students to attend who might not otherwise consider college. Students receiving usual VR services can access CCV information sessions and resources on their own, but they do not take part in the mentoring program.

According to LLC staff, these information, counseling, and mentoring services can demystify the college process for students and make postsecondary education seem more accessible and attainable. Since the start of LLC, 19 percent of LLC students have received one or more of these in-person postsecondary education experiences. These experiences are more in-depth than basic counseling and college exploration services.

Service type	LLC services	Usual services
Counseling on post-secondary education	High school and college students with disabilities can receive a range of individual or group counseling services, including guidance on college courses, career options, and occupational training programs. Services may include help with the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and advising on postsecondary education disability programs and services. Students do not have to be eligible for VR to receive these services. The LLC team’s career consultant coordinates service delivery as part of enhanced services.	The usual services are the same as for LLC students. The VR transition counselor coordinates the services.
Enhanced exposure to postsecondary education opportunities	LLC students can join information sessions and college tours and receive application assistance, tutoring, and mentoring at CCV. CCV and LLC staff coordinate service delivery as part of enhanced services.	VR clients can join information sessions and college tours and receive application assistance and tutoring at CCV.
Dual-enrollment courses	LLC students can apply for a voucher to take four dual-enrollment courses.	Any high school junior or senior in Vermont can apply for a voucher to take two dual-enrollment courses.
LLC-contracted course	LLC students can take a special field-based course established and paid for by LLC. The course focuses on exploring careers, working in professional environments, and setting employment goals.	This course is not offered outside of LLC.
Introduction to College and Careers course	LLC students can take a free, noncredit course that explores career and college planning. Students develop individualized plans and identify future career goals. LLC students can also take a four-hour precourse module on self-advocacy.	VR clients can take a free, noncredit course that explores career and college planning. Students develop individualized plans and identify future career goals.

Table 1. LLC’s postsecondary education services versus usual services

DUAL-ENROLLMENT COURSES

In Vermont, all high school juniors and seniors are eligible for the state’s dual-enrollment education program. Dual enrollment enables students to take college-level courses that support their goals and interests. Participating institutions include four-year colleges and universities, two-year community colleges, a culinary institute, and a technical college. Students can receive vouchers to cover the tuition for two courses worth up to four credits at participating institutions. LLC raised this number to four courses, which can include noncredit college preparation courses, for its students. One in 10 LLC students (8 percent) have started a dual-enrollment course, with most using the vouchers at CCV for courses in English composition or math.

LLC-CONTRACTED COURSE

LLC contracted with CCV to provide a college course exclusively for LLC students. This field-based course, titled Exploratory Workplace Experience, consists of 15 class hours on working in professional environments and 80 hours in a work-based learning experience. Seven percent of LLC students have taken the course,

and students in only 5 of the program’s 12 district offices have enrolled. The low numbers of participants might be due to two factors. First, CCV campuses can only offer the course if enough LLC students are interested in taking it. Second, some CCV campuses are small and do not have the staff to offer the course, making it unavailable to students who live in areas served by those campuses.

INTRODUCTION TO COLLEGE AND CAREERS COURSE

Introduction to College and Careers (ICC) is a noncredit course intended to orient students to college and prepare them for postsecondary education. The course includes content on self-advocacy and time management. Although students receiving usual VR services can enroll in ICC, LLC students who enroll receive a supplemental, one-week, four-hour precourse module on self-advocacy. This supplement teaches students about the different ways that the Americans with Disabilities Act is applied in high school versus college and the nuances of navigating adult service systems. Since the program’s start, 3 percent of LLC students have taken the ICC course.

Service	Percentage of LLC students who used the service
Counseling on postsecondary education	62.4%
Enhanced exposure to postsecondary education opportunities	18.8%
Dual-enrollment courses	8.4%
LLC-contracted course	6.6%
Introduction to College and Careers course	3.2%

Source: DVR administrative data through May 5, 2020 (sample size = 441).
 Note: LLC-contracted course services were not available in a few DVR districts.

Table 2. LLC student use of the program’s postsecondary education services

SUMMARY

LLC’s enhanced services related to postsecondary education are more numerous and intense and involve more team-based coordination than the usual services available to students in Vermont. As part of its enhanced services, LLC

gives students the chance to take part in four dual-enrollment courses, one-on-one mentoring, an exclusive college course at CCV, and precourse modules on self-advocacy. These services may be particularly valuable to LLC students who had not considered attending college before their involvement in LLC.

Although most LLC students received counseling on postsecondary education, fewer took part in other opportunities. Reasons for the lower take-up, according to LLC staff, include the busy academic and extracurricular schedules of students and their hesitation to take high school and college courses simultaneously. As students enter their last year of high school and prepare to graduate, they might take greater advantage of these services.

DISCLOSURE INFORMATION

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