3.17 TRANSITION PROGRAM (Secondary Education)

MDRS has been actively involved in working with eligible secondary school students with disabilities since 1962. The Agency has a commitment to provide a comprehensive program of services that will enable students with disabilities to make a seamless transition from school to work. In order to effectively meet the needs of these students, the Agency maintains a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE). The Agency assigns VR Counselors to work with specific high schools to provide transition services in accordance with the following federal laws:

- Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended;
- The Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act, as amended; and,
- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended.

3.17.1 AGREEMENT OF COOPERATION

In addition to the MOU with MDE, the Agency maintains individualized agreements between the local school districts and vocational rehabilitation offices. These agreements define referral procedures and the roles of the school and VR staff in the provision of transition services that are specific and tailored to the unique situation of each school and VR district.

Each VR Transition Counselor is responsible for developing and maintaining an agreement between the Agency and local school district. A copy of the form to be used for this agreement may be obtained from the State Coordinator for Transition Services. The form includes instructions and has been designed to assist in the development of the agreements locally.

Pages 1 and 2 of the form are generic (standard contract language). The VR Counselor will photocopy these pages and use them exactly as they are written with the name of the school district typed on the blank line.

Page 3 should begin with item number 10 (the Agency and (school district) further agree to the following procedures:). The VR Transition Counselor and local school district personnel should jointly develop this section. The form includes examples which are provided as guidelines only to assist in the preparation of the individualized local agreement. The agreement should specify which agency is responsible for various activities; it can be as specific as needed. For example, the names of individuals who will be responsible for various tasks may be named, or they may be referred to by job titles instead. In individualizing these agreements, it will become apparent that there are several ways to handle referrals, etc. The form should be individualized according

to the procedures that are established between the VR Transition Counselor and local school district personnel.) If services are being provided at one of the Agency's CRP's the Facility Manager should be involved in developing and sign off on the school agreement. It is desirable to have a representative from the school accompany students to the CRP to assist with supervision, discipline, and instruction when possible. It is also required that schools provide transportation to the CRP for students. This should be kept in mind when negotiating the Transition Agreements between the Agency and local schools. Section 10 may contain as many pages as needed, however, number subsequent pages in sequence.

The signature page may be photocopied and filled in (include the page number at the top in the sequence in which it occurs).

The agreement may be developed with either an individual school or a school district that may include more than one school. However MDE has requested that the Superintendent of the local school district sign the agreement. A copy of the agreement may be given to the local schools if appropriate.

The VR District Manager should approve and sign the original agreement. The VR District Office should keep the original agreement and provide copies to the School or School District and MDRS State Office (mail to the attention of the State Coordinator for Transition Services).

The agreement should be reviewed annually and updated if needed.

3.17.2 IDENTIFICATION OF SECONDARY STUDENTS

At the time a student is placed on roll, the information is entered into AACE, MDRS' caseload computer system, to allow students to be tracked throughout the rehabilitation process. In order for these students to be tracked successfully, it is critical that counselors complete the fields on the "Special Programs" and "Personal Information" pages in AACE, which will indicate this is a transition case. When students leave the school system they continue to be enrolled in the VR system until such time that the individual is successfully rehabilitated or until their case is closed for reasons other than successfully rehabilitated.

3.17.3 TRANSITION PLANNING

Transition planning activities may include: (a) IEP development, (b) vocational/career counseling and guidance, (c) sharing information about the availability of VR services to individuals or groups, (d) receiving referral information, (e) meeting with students and their parents and/or representatives for the purpose of initiating intake procedures and explaining services, (f)

evaluation and assessment, (g) career exploration services, (h) job search skills, (i) consultation and technical assistance, and (j) any other appropriate activities to assist the school or the student in preparing students for transition from secondary to post-secondary school training or work.

Counselors may choose to open cases on students while they are in the second semester of the junior year, as appropriate, to ensure completion of all intake and evaluation procedures so that planned services may begin in a timely manner in the student's final school year.

MDRS will provide services to eligible students with disabilities who are seniors, age 18 or older, and/or in their final year in the school system. As outlined in the local agreements, no VR services will be provided if there are:

- comparable benefits for the provision of these services, or
- funds available through the school district's resources (including application for grant funding) for the provision of services agreed upon between the school district and the VR Transition Counselor.

In planning transition services for students, the IPE for a student determined to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services must be developed and approved (i.e., agreed to and signed by the individual/representative and the counselor) before the student leaves the school setting and as early as possible during the transition planning process._The vocational component of the student's IEP should be monitored by the counselor to ensure collaboration with the school district on his/her IPE with respect to vocational goals and objectives. A copy of the student's IEP should be placed in the VR client file for that student.

Once the student leaves the school system, it becomes the full responsibility of the VR Transition Counselor to continue to provide services necessary to further prepare the individual for work and/or provide job development and placement in permanent employment that satisfies the goals and objectives of the IPE.

3.17.4 SCHOOL-BASED TRANSITION SERVICES

Career Exploration and Employability Skills Program (CEESP)

The VR Transition Counselor will work together with the classroom teacher to implement a career exploration curriculum for students with disabilities including students who are participating in an occupational diploma course of study. It is not mandatory that the student be a VR client to participate in CEESP, however, if the student is a VR client, the student will need a vocational assessment to aid in the development of the IPE.

The VR Transition Counselor is prepared to teach the CEESP curriculum and will do so as agreed upon with school personnel. In addition to being prepared to teach the CEESP curriculum, the Counselor will provide the classroom teacher with information, technical assistance, and/or CEESP curriculum materials as needed and requested.

The VR Transition Counselor who supervises the student in the CEESP should document the student's progress in AACE case notes. Case notes should show progress in various areas of performance as described on the student's IPE. The VR Transition Counselor should provide the classroom teacher a report of the student's participation and progress in the CEESP on a regular basis.

TRANSITION SPECIALIST PROGRAM – MDRS and the local school district may enter into a Cooperative Agreement to jointly fund a Transition Specialist position to ensure a smoother transition of services between the school and VR. The Transition Specialist will provide services to selected secondary students with disabilities who are (a) in their exiting year of school, (b) in transition from school to work and community and, (c) eligible for vocational rehabilitation services. The addition of school-based transition services is intended to add a component to the overall school and rehabilitation service continuum, not supplant any existing employment-related or other services which are potentially appropriate for a particular student (any service the school is already responsible for providing). The Transition Specialist will not serve students who with or without modifications can benefit from existing school programs (career/technical and educational training programs, vocational education, etc.). The intended target student populations for receipt of services from the Transition Specialist are students who are (1) in their exiting year of school, (2) clients of vocational rehabilitation, and (3) require services that are more intensive.

The Transition Specialist will develop permanent jobs for students within the community and will provide temporary job-related support activities that are necessary to obtain and maintain employment. The Transition Specialist will coordinate all activities with, and provide monthly reports to the VR Transition Counselor as well as school personnel. The VR Counselor will provide program coordination and technical assistance as needed by the Transition Specialist, as well as providing oversight of the agreement for the position with the school.

3.17.5 EVALUATION AND TRAINING

REGULAR VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL TRAINING - Only a small percentage of students with disabilities have an opportunity to participate in regular Vocational-Technical Programs (welding, auto mechanics, auto body repair, etc.). Some schools will allow a student to participate in vocational training/work-related activities the entire school day. In this case, if a student is in a Vo-Tech program and the school staff will allow him/her to participate in a CRP program the remainder of the day, that would probably be the most ideal, and VR should support this action. Some schools, however, require all students to attend academic classes at least one-half day.

In this case, if a student is in a Vo-Tech Program, the VR counselor should never offer them an option to choose CRP services instead of Vo-Tech.

VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT – An appropriate vocational assessment should precede any type of Agency-sponsored training if the VR counselor determines it to be necessary. The counselor is to review existing assessment reports when available. The school, individual and/or the family of the individual, or his/her representative may provide existing data. This existing information may include prior evaluations, assessments, and other documentation that address questions regarding eligibility and the vocational rehabilitation needs of the individual.

When appropriate, the counselor may obtain a preliminary assessment and/or a comprehensive assessment. The individual's vocational strengths and weaknesses will be identified so that the training can be planned on the IPE to address those needs. Students within accessible distance of a local community rehabilitation program (CRP), such as AbilityWorks, may undergo this assessment there or the local AbilityWorks' vocational evaluation staff may go to the school to conduct the assessment.

WORK EVALUATION/JOB READINESS TRAINING – Counselors should inform school personnel that the CRP may provide up to a 6 week work evaluation. It may begin in the second semester of a student's senior/final school year. Exceptions may be made to bring some students in during the first semester of the student's senior/final school year, such as there being too many students for the CRP to bring in at once. Job Readiness training may be planned and provided for each student individually as needed and appropriate and based on the availability of openings at the CRP.

Due to U. S. Department of Labor (DOL) Wage and Hour regulations, an appropriate vocational assessment is needed prior to an individual receiving Work Evaluation/Job Readiness Training at an AbilityWorks, Goodwill, or any other CRP. In order to show DOL that the individual is eligible for coverage under the CRP's Sub-minimum Wage Certificate, the assessment must specifically relate to how the person's disability impairs his/her productivity on work assignments to be used during the time the student is in the CRP. Should the prior assessment not specifically address this issue, a new vocational assessment will need to be obtained prior to entrance into Work Evaluation/Job Readiness Training. Everyone being served at an AbilityWorks is covered by Workers' Compensation during the time they are on payroll.

> **NOTE: The VR Transition Counselor should communicate regularly with the AbilityWorks Facility Manager to keep him/her informed of the number of potential referrals and be advised of the availability of work. Counselors should not make promises of any CRP services to students without reasonable assurances that the CRP will be accessible. (Accessible means access to transportation by the school, presence of sufficient CRP staff to**

provide adequate supervision, and availability of adequate amount and appropriate types of contract work.)

ON-THE-JOB TRAINING (OJT) - OJT may be developed occasionally with a student who is in the last few weeks or months of their school program. (Refer to Section 3.11.4) There is always an employee/employer relationship in an OJT program. The VR Transition Counselor and the employer (trainer) agree upon a fee that the Agency will pay for the training (usually on an hourly basis). It is the employer's responsibility to pay wages, taxes, Workers' Compensation, etc. on the client the same as with any other employee.

OTHER WORK/TRAINING ACTIVITIES - There may be other types of work/training activities in which students have opportunities to participate. The counselor should encourage students to participate in all such experiences available to them during their school program. As with all other training programs provided to students, once they leave the school system, it becomes the full responsibility of the VR Transition Counselor to provide services necessary to prepare the individual for work and/or provide job development and placement in permanent employment that satisfies the goals and objectives of the IPE.

3.17.6 OCCUPATIONAL DIPLOMA

In accordance with Senate Bill No. 2578 of the Mississippi Legislative Session of 2001, MDE developed criteria for an occupational diploma for students with disabilities. This diploma option expands the opportunities available for special education students to the following:

- academic course of study aimed at obtaining a regular high school diploma,
- occupational course of study aimed at obtaining an occupational diploma,
- graduation Certificate as specified by Mississippi Code 37-16-11, or
- general Education Equivalency Certificate (GED)

Students choosing to participate in the occupational course of study must have 20 course credits, career/technical requirements, and an approved portfolio containing a collection of evidence of the student's knowledge, skills, and abilities related to the occupational core curriculum. The primary postgraduate goal for these students is competitive employment.

The career/technical requirements consist of 540 hours of successful, paid employment ***OR*** successful completion of a two (2) year career/technical (Vocational) program. This requirement, which will consist of work experience, job shadowing, pre-vocational experiences, etc., will be completed within the realm of the educational system. Therefore, job readiness training services provided through VR are not deemed appropriate for students enrolled in the Occupational Diploma track. If there are other services (such as vocational counseling and guidance, CEESP and jointly sponsored Transition Specialist services) needed to assist a student on this diploma track, the VR Transition Counselor may provide appropriate services in order to serve the student.

A student with a disability may also be eligible for VR services, including Job Readiness training, after completing the requirements for the Occupational Diploma. An example of this situation would be the case of an eligible student with a disability completing the 2-year vocational-tech program before their exiting year is complete. In this instance, the VR counselor should enroll the student and proceed with services during the exiting year and after, if appropriate.