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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM
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ADDRESSEES: STATE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION AGENCIES
STATE REHABILITATION COUNCILS
CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

SUBJECT: Transition Programs & Services: High School/High Tech &
Vocational Rehabilitation

CONTENT: In the last several years, programs and services for transition-age youth with disabilities have come to the forefront. The purpose of this information memorandum is to provide State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies information about one such transition program--the High School/High Tech (HS/HT) Program.

The HS/HT Program is a comprehensive transition program that uses a variety of activities and innovative approaches to expose transition-age youth with disabilities (ages 14 to 24) to careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (referred to as the STEM careers) and other technology-based professions. It also encourages such youth to pursue postsecondary education and training.

HS/HT programs are designed to reduce the likelihood that young people with disabilities will drop out of school, increase their chances of graduating from high school with a regular diploma, increase their participation in postsecondary education, and improve their chances of getting and keeping a job after graduation.

Program Overview

The HS/HT program was created as a means of improving postsecondary outcomes for transition-age youth with disabilities. Among other strategies, the program achieves its objectives by maintaining high expectations, exposing youth to high-growth industries, facilitating youth development and leadership, and encouraging the involvement of family members and caring adults.

HS/HT is designed to address the needs of transition-age youth (ages 14 to 24) with all types of disabilities. HS/HT is a year-round program that provides a sequential

progression of activities that are both age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate. Activities may be conducted in school, after school, on weekends, and during the summer.

HS/HT incorporates a variety of activities addressing the full range of needs identified in the *Guideposts for Success*, a framework that the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) produced, with funds from the U.S. Department of Labor, after examining nearly three decades of research, demonstrations, and promising practices, including the experiences of HS/HT programs. *Guideposts for Success* can be downloaded free of charge from NCWD/Y's website at http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&_Publications/guideposts/

The *Guideposts* establish a set of guiding principles (e.g., high expectations, equality of opportunity, self-determination, etc.) and identify the content of a comprehensive transition program that includes the array of services, supports, and activities needed by all youth to succeed in transitioning from high school to adult life. The framework also identifies the additional services and supports that youth with disabilities need to successfully transition to adulthood. The *Guideposts* provide a statement of principles, a direction that will lead to better outcomes for all youth, and a method for organizing policy and practice.

The *Guideposts*, which constitute the key design features of today's HS/HT program, are divided into five content areas.

1. **School-Based Preparatory Experiences** include the activities and services undertaken in collaboration with the youth's educational program, such as: participating in academic programs based on clear state standards; using program options based on universal design of school and work; participating in community-based learning experiences; and, receiving support from and by highly qualified staff. HS/HT activities under this *Guidepost* are conducted in environments where youth feel accepted and nurtured, and are designed to facilitate academic pursuits in support of and exposure to the STEM careers.
2. **Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences** include a range of activities that expose students with disabilities to the STEM careers and support participation in on-the-job experiences. These experiences include vocational exploration, career assessments, industry site visits, job shadowing, internships (paid and unpaid), entrepreneurial ventures, and paid employment (full or part time). Whatever the activity, HS/HT programs work with participating students to review the lessons learned in these activities to help the youth make the connection between what is being learned in the HS/HT program and what is expected in the world of work.
3. **Youth Development and Leadership** activities help young people become self-sufficient and productive members of society. The activities and services include the following: developing relationships with supportive adults, developing independent decision-making skills, engaging in service learning opportunities, and learning self-determination and self-advocacy skills. Each of these elements is also interwoven and fostered throughout all of the *Guideposts*.

4. **Connecting Activities** are aimed at helping youth with disabilities connect to the services and supports that will assist them as they transition to the next phase in life with the ultimate goal of engaging in employment that will provide for economic self-sufficiency. Connecting activities help students access outside services, supports, and activities. For example, tutoring, mentoring, and providing access to transportation and assistive technology are all important connecting activities. A particular emphasis is placed on helping HS/HT youth explore and connect with organizations involved in postsecondary education and the STEM careers.
5. **Family Involvement and Support** activities focus on the involvement of parents, family members, and other caring adults to promote the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth with disabilities, which ultimately translates into better post-school outcomes. The activities and services under this *Guidepost* include having parents and caring adults take an active role in transition planning, and ensuring that adults have knowledge of a youth's rights and responsibilities under various disability-related laws.

The History and Evolution of HS/HT

The HS/HT program has a rich and long history. In 1983, business executives and local leaders in Los Angeles, California became interested in reaching out to students in the early stages of their education to expose them to the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in jobs related to science and technology. With the leadership of the Atlantic Richfield Company, and the support of the Los Angeles Unified School District, America's first intervention program designed to promote training for science and technology jobs among youth with disabilities was established.

In 1986, the program was adopted by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD). Building upon the mission of PCEPD and the strong public/private partnership that began in Los Angeles, HS/HT program leaders developed relationships with businesses, education and nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. These relationships helped HS/HT grow and expand across the country.

In the 1990s, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) supported the expansion of HS/HT through grants to establish projects in California, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Ohio, and Texas.

In the late 1990s, HS/HT grew rapidly. During this time, the initiative's focus shifted from sites with local leadership to sites united by state leadership. The state-based model, first initiated in Georgia, provided HS/HT sites access to the state-controlled resources they needed to develop and sustain their operations.

In 2000, PCEPD was dissolved and aspects of its work were incorporated into the newly created sub-cabinet level policy agency, the Office of Disability Employment Policy

(ODEP) within the U.S. Department of Labor. Some of PCEPD's programs, including HS/HT, became part of ODEP's demonstration initiatives.

Through funding local HS/HT projects, ODEP learned that truly expanding HS/HT would require the commitment of a state-level entity to provide technical assistance and coordinate programs throughout the state. As a result, ODEP awarded grants to a number of states to develop the state infrastructure necessary to support the statewide expansion of HS/HT.

In addition to movement towards a state infrastructure, HS/HT programs also evolved in other areas. The program moved from primarily serving youth with learning disabilities to serving youth with all types of disabilities. It also evolved from a one-year program that sponsored mostly after-school activities, to a year-round multi-year program that incorporated a series of developmentally appropriate and progressive activities conducted in school, after school, on the weekends, and during the summer. Another change was the expansion of program activities from primarily work-based learning experiences (e.g., exposure to different types of high-tech careers and participation in industry site visits, job shadowing experiences and internships) to a much wider range of activities that includes, for example, tutoring, computer training, youth leadership and development activities. Connecting students to community resources became another important part of HS/HT. Thus, HS/HT evolved into a comprehensive program of transition services grounded in NCWD/Youth's *Guideposts for Success*.

Examples of HS/HT Partnerships in Several States

Of the nine states that have established a state infrastructure for HS/HT, the State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency houses the program in six states (Delaware, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio and South Carolina) and has been an active partner in two others (Florida and Oklahoma). Sections 103(a)(15) and 103(b)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, authorizes the VR agencies to engage in transition services for students with disabilities.

Georgia was one of the first states to receive a grant from ODEP to establish a state infrastructure for HS/HT. When this ODEP grant ended in 2004, HS/HT became a permanent program within the Georgia Department of Labor under the direction of the Division of Rehabilitation Services. HS/HT has continued to grow in Georgia and is now being implemented in 22 geographic locations throughout Georgia, serving approximately 425 students in 45 high schools and one community-based organization.

In **Colorado**, the Business Leadership Network (BLN) was the recipient of the ODEP-funded HS/HT grant. With the BLN connection, Colorado HS/HT was able to place a strong emphasis on work-based learning experiences, with monthly site visits to different high-tech industries and many opportunities for paid summer internships. During the third year of the grant, Colorado HS/HT had expanded to four district sites that were serving youth from 33 schools. When the ODEP funding was terminated two years early, the Colorado HS/HT program sought support from the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). The HS/HT program's connection to the BLN has provided some

minimal funding that has allowed the program to continue operation in four localities and provided services to 116 youth with disabilities during the FY 2006-07 school year.

In **Delaware**, the ODEP-funded HS/HT grant was awarded to the Delaware Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR). When DVR received notice of the termination of the ODEP grant two years early, DVR began providing significant in-kind support to HS/HT to provide time to explore different options for sustaining the program beyond the ODEP grant. The HS/HT program applied to become a non-profit 501 C-3 organization, "Steps to Success." Although the application was approved and "Steps to Success" was established, the organization was not successful in securing outside funding in time to continue the HS/HT program beyond the no-cost extension period for the ODEP grant.

In **Florida**, The Able Trust, the Governor's Alliance for Employment of Citizens with Disabilities, was the recipient of the ODEP-funded HS/HT grant. Over time, the collaboration between HS/HT and the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) has evolved into a strong partnership that is promoting the expansion of HS/HT throughout the state and to special populations such as incarcerated youth with disabilities. The Florida State Legislature has appropriated \$500,000 for DVR for three consecutive years to expand HS/HT to additional sites throughout the state. In addition, DVR provided one time funding for FY 2008 to assist in the support of 14 local HS/HT sites operating through six Independent Living Centers. Even though the ODEP grant was terminated two years early due to a cut in ODEP's federal appropriation, Florida HS/HT continues to expand with support from the State Legislature, DVR, and the Able Trust. Florida HS/HT is currently operating in 33 localities in 31 of 67 counties and enrolled 1,050 students this past school year. There is a waiting list of eight new counties who are interested in implementing HS/HT.

In **Maryland**, the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) was the recipient of the ODEP-funded HS/HT grant. The Director of DORS has seen the value of the *Guideposts for Success* to the extent that DORS has incorporated many aspects of the *Guideposts* into the interagency agreement established between DORS and the State Department of Education and into local interagency agreements established between local school districts and district DORS offices. Aspects of the *Guideposts* have also been incorporated into the policies and procedures that DORS has established for its Transition Coordinators, and are being incorporated into some of the purchase of services agreements between DORS and private service providers. Maryland HS/HT is currently operating five local sites and serving approximately 70 students with disabilities.

Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) and the Michigan Commission for the Blind (MCB) within the Michigan Department of Labor & Economic Growth partnered with the Michigan Department of Education/Office of Special Education & Early Intervention Services to apply for the ODEP grant. MRS served as the recipient of the ODEP-funded HS/HT grant, which is referred to as MiConnections. From the onset of the grant, ODEP funding covered the costs of a full-time state coordinator, a clerical position and two part-time MiConnections' consultant positions to provide technical assistance and support to developing HS/HT sites throughout the state. MRS housed the project and both MRS and

MCB provided supplemental in-kind support, including program evaluation services. When the ODEP grant was terminated two years early, MRS and MCB provided funding to enable MiConnections to continue operations while the HS/HT state coordinator and the state partners explored options for sustaining the program in future years. Currently, MiConnections is operating six local HS/HT sites and approximately 300 students with disabilities have participated in the program to date.

In **Ohio**, the Rehabilitation Services Commission (RSC) was the recipient of the ODEP-funded HS/HT grant. HS/HT has been implemented for four years through the Governor's Council on People with Disabilities (GCPD) which is housed at RSC. When RSC received word that the 5-year ODEP grant for HS/HT would be terminated two years early, RSC agreed to increase its support for GCPD so that HS/HT could be continued for one more year, giving GCPD and RSC time to explore alternative sources of funding to sustain HS/HT beyond FY 2007. In October 2007, the HS/HT program in Ohio will be part of RSC's Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation and Bureau of Services for the Visually Impaired transition programs. The program will be operated through the Bureaus using case service funds. Currently, Ohio HS/HT is operating three local sites with a total of 37 students enrolled in the program at these sites. The Ohio HS/HT program also operates an HS/HT Electronic Club where students and local HS/HT coordinators meet via computer conferencing to speak with professionals in science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and medicine.

In **Oklahoma**, the recipient of the HS/HT grant from ODEP was the Bethany School District and the program is implemented through a non-profit organization called Tech-Now, Inc. The ODEP funds were used to continue operating the Oklahoma HS/HT program which was originally established under a five-year grant from the Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council. As the value inherent in a collaborative partnership between Tech-Now and the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) became evident, Tech-Now was approved as a DRS vendor and a fee-for-services contract was signed whereby DRS pays Tech-Now a fee per session for each VR-eligible student who participates in HS/HT. Tech-Now has also been successful in getting funding from the National Science Foundation to establish the HS/HT program model within six middle schools in Oklahoma. Tech-Now is currently operating 34 local HS/HT sites which served 253 students during the 2006-07 school year. Over the last three years, Tech-Now has served a total of 720 students.

The **South Carolina** Vocational Rehabilitation Department (SCVRD) is the first VR agency to move forward and implement HS/HT on a statewide basis without receiving a grant from any source outside of the state. A source of funding, combined with SCVRD funds, for five HS/HT sites in South Carolina is a grant from the Department of Commerce which houses the WIA youth-related program. This grant funding ended June 30, 2007. All but one of the 10 local HS/HT sites in South Carolina are operated out of area SCVRD offices. The one exception is the site that is housed in a career technology school. SCVRD HS/HT has expanded quickly with the goal of having a program and an HS/HT Employment Specialist housed in all 16 area SCVRD offices and/or sub-offices in the near future.

Demonstrated Results

HS/HT has been shown to reduce the dropout rate for youth with disabilities and to increase their participation in postsecondary education and employment, thereby enhancing their prospects for economic self-sufficiency. In August 2006, cumulative data was collected on the outcomes of HS/HT students in the nine states with state infrastructures. Of the 3,500 students who had participated in HS/HT, only 12 had dropped out of school. This is particularly impressive given that the national drop out rate for this population runs about 30 percent. Of the approximately 2,800 students participating in HS/HT in the seven states operating under ODEP grants, 789 students had exited the program and 752 of those had graduated from high school. Of the participating students who graduated from high school, a total of 540 went on to further education. Additionally, 897 of these 2,800 students were involved in some type of “formal” work-based experience (e.g., internships-paid and unpaid, part-time employment and full-time employment).

At the time this data was collected, HS/HT was operating in 135 local sites in these nine states, involving a total of 351 schools. According to recent reports, the number of students being served, the number of local sites in operation, and the number of schools participating in HS/HT continue to increase.

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) presents this information about the HS/HT program as one possible strategy for assisting youth with disabilities in transitioning from secondary educational settings to post-school outcomes including postsecondary education and employment. RSA encourages other State VR agencies to contact colleagues in those agencies who have found the HS/HT effective if such a program is of interest.

For Further Information

To learn more about the HS/HT program, the *Guideposts for Success*, and NCWD/Youth, visit: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>

If you are interested in learning more about a particular HS/HT program or contacting a program directly, check out their web sites below.

Colorado HS/HT: www.coloradohsht.com

Florida State HS/HT: <http://www.abletrust.org/hsht/>

Georgia HS/HT: <http://www.vocrehabga.org/hsht/index.htm>

Maryland HS/HT: <http://www.marylandhsht.org/hsht>

Michigan – MiConnections: www.miconnections.org

Ohio HS/HT: <http://www.ohsht.org>

Oklahoma – Tech-Now, Inc.: www.tech-now.biz

South Carolina HS/HT: http://www.scvrd.net/i_hsht.html

If you are interested in learning about how the National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (NASET) used these same five content areas to develop a parallel framework of standards and indicators for use by schools and other agencies, including VR, in assessing the comprehensiveness of transition programs and services, visit NASET's web site at: <http://www.nasetalliance.org/>.

Edward Anthony, Ph.D.
Delegated the authority to perform
the functions of the Commissioner for
Rehabilitation Services Administration

cc: Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation
National Council of State Agencies for the Blind