

Report to General Assembly

Act 192

**An Act Relating to
Service Planning for High School Graduates
with Developmental Disabilities**

Submitted by:

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In collaboration with

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January 2009

Introduction

This document is intended to serve as the Commissioners' response to the requirements set forth in ACT 192, an act that requires the Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living (DAIL) and the Department of Education (DOE) to work collaboratively to improve the transition of graduates with developmental disabilities from high school to adult developmental disabilities services. This report is specific to graduates who are determined eligible for DAIL services based on a two step determination process: (1) a determination of clinical eligibility (a person with developmental disability as defined by the state's Developmental Disabilities Act); and (2) meeting a funding priority for services.

This report will address:

- ❖ Current graduate transition structure and efforts already underway
- ❖ Data gathering for strategic planning
- ❖ Collaborative efforts between DAIL and DOE to improve the transition process for graduates with developmental disabilities.
- ❖ Projections of service need and cost of FY 2010 graduates
- ❖ Projections of anticipated needs and cost over four years

ACT 192

The commissioner of the department of disabilities, aging, and independent living shall work with the commissioner of the department of education to track the number of anticipated June graduates over a four-year period. The intent is that through this tracking system the administration and the general assembly will have information needed to anticipate annual funding requirements well in advance of the time funding needs to be made available. Additionally, the commissioners shall work to find ways to improve the transition of the June graduates from high school to the June grad program. In the submission of the developmental services program budget for fiscal year 2010, the department shall include a summary of the June Grad program that provides information on the number of individual served, the scope, length, annual cost of services provided, and information on if and how individuals in the June graduate program transition from this program to self sufficiency or alternate support programs.

Background

The Department of Disabilities, Aging and Independent Living, Division of Disability and Aging Services (DDAS) supports youth with developmental disabilities through a coordinated process with ten non-profit providers called designated agencies (DA). Each is a single organization designated by the Commissioner as the statutorily responsible entity for providing all services for eligible people with developmental disabilities in each geographic area of the state. This responsibility includes determining eligibility and ensuring a timely transition and intake for graduates.

Eligible graduates are students who meet the eligibility regulations in the *Division of Disability and Aging Services' (DDAS) Rules Implementing the Developmental*

Disabilities Act of 1996. In enacting the *Developmental Disabilities Act* (18 V.S.A. §8721, passed 1995) the Legislature evidenced its intention that developmental disabilities' services would be provided to some, but not all, of the state's citizens with developmental disabilities. This Act gives responsibility to DAIL for defining which individuals will have priority for funding and services through regulation and the State System of Care Plan.

Several clarifying points follow to help reduce common confusion about this graduate group.

- ❖ The *DDAS Graduate Fund* was developed because historically the legislative intent has been to use the fund to replace those services lost when exiting high school. High school graduates typically live at home but these young adults look to the developmental services system to provide the necessary supports to help them continue to learn new skills, live on their own, and obtain or maintain employment. Most graduates receive funding for community and employment services.
- ❖ Graduates must meet the same entrance criteria as all other adult applicants. Services are not an entitlement but are provided based on meeting a System of Care funding priority. Most graduates usually meet funding criteria.
- ❖ Graduates with developmental disabilities are referred to in the context of a "*June Graduate Program*." This categorization misleads because it can infer that a separate transitional program is available for graduates. In fact, once graduates reach adult age all are equal in the developmental services system. Graduates enter the adult system at their local DA where their services are developed, monitored, and changed over time according to level of need. Each agency strives to assist these new consumers to become as independent as possible.
- ❖ Identifying the graduates as a program has likely been confused with the *Graduate Survey*. This survey tool provides data on anticipated need and is used for fiscal management of the *High School Graduate Fund*, an appropriation for transitioning graduates. The survey captures the student count and the anticipated need two years prior to graduation.

DAIL and DOE Collaboration Efforts Already Underway

The Division of Disability and Aging Services (DDAS) has increased systems development activities to build regional transition capacity, increase youth worker expertise, and anticipate future need within each DA's region.

(1) Designated Agency Youth Transition Teams

DDAS has worked to provide guidance and technical assistance to the provider system. Starting in 2003, closer examination of local systems prompted DDAS to create training and professional development for staff at designated agencies. In conjunction with this training, DDAS urged each DA to organize personnel into teams, specifically assigned to facilitate the transition from school to adult services. Each agency created a specialized team to collaborate on a deeper interagency level. Teams include:

- Designated Agency Intake and Supported Employment Coordinators
- Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Counselors
- Special Education Case Managers

Outcome Achieved: All DAs now sustain a fully functional transition team that works in collaboration with regional Voc Rehab Transition Counselors, school districts, and participates in the DDAS Youth Transition Mentor Group. Each regional team has decreased barriers by creating interagency rapport and function.

(2) DDAS Youth Transition Mentor Group

To sustain the permanence of the developing regional transition infrastructure, DDAS convened a statewide interagency work group to sustain this initiative over the long term. Since 2004, representatives from the regional teams have convened quarterly as the *DDAS Youth Mentor Group* to improve local and statewide outcomes. By adhering to a professional development agenda consisting of on-going training, this work group has become a mentoring body that currently empowers regional teams. The overarching goal of this group is to reduce barriers between the adult services system and schools by reframing and increasing the developmental services role with families and schools. Much effort goes toward empowering teams to establish a spirit of cooperation between educators and adult service providers via increased reciprocity. This has increased the effectiveness of school and adult service teams. The Department of Education membership on the *DDAS Youth Mentor Group* has gone a long way to help achieve this objective. DOE provided trainings geared toward strengthening the link between schools and developmental services. The DOE participation helped to facilitate a paradigm shift in how the two sectors viewed one another, which resulted in increased understanding and cooperation. The Special Education Consultant's collaboration in launching this group has served as a role model to regional teams. DOE Consultants remain at the ready to serve the group's needs and provide professional development.

Outcomes Achieved: Due to the formation of regional teams and the development of the Mentor Group, designated agencies now have:

- ❖ Earlier involvement with students, families, and schools
- ❖ Stronger partnership with Voc Rehab's Transition Counselors

- ❖ Active involvement on the *Local Core Transition Teams*
- ❖ Increased participation in school IEP transition planning
- ❖ Improved employment rate for students prior to graduation
- ❖ Improved interagency involvement in the *DDAS Graduate Survey*
- ❖ Timelier identification and assessments of eligible graduates.

(3) DDAS Graduate Survey – data based strategic planning

In use since 2000, this forecasting tool captures annual service need and the count of graduates presumed to be eligible for developmental services. In conjunction with Special Educators and Voc Rehab Counselors, the agencies' Intake Coordinators are ultimately responsible for the completion of a *DDAS Graduate Survey* for each geographic area. DDAS receives and collates this data for statewide forecasting and fiscal planning.

DDAS has recently added a *Graduate tracking report* to track the outcome of all students who applied for developmental services. This enables DDAS to trend the scope of service provision and review outcomes after graduation. This process also helps to ensure that appropriate collaboration with Voc Rehab and other resources has occurred for students who are not eligible for developmental services.

Outcomes Achieved: DOE contributed significantly to the development of the survey project by securing participation of schools. In the early development of the survey, DOE consultants gave input that allowed a re-design of the process to ensure ease of participation by educators, and in turn increased participation. DOE consultants motivated school teams to participate in the survey by communicating its importance. DOE co-authored a cover letter with DAIL explaining the value of the survey to promote school participation. DOE continues to promote the *DDAS Graduate Survey* by advocating the importance of school involvement in this process and by being available to local teams as they work through the data gathering process. It is important to recognize that DDAS' survey process has been successful, in part, due to the support provided by DOE.

(4) Vocational Rehabilitation Youth Transition Counselor Involvement with Developmental Disabilities Services

Sixteen DAIL Voc Rehab Transition Counselors are responsible for working statewide with students who have disabilities. This starts four years prior to graduation with formal intake to Voc Rehab occurring 18 months prior to graduation. These Counselors cover almost every high school in Vermont and work closely with the designated agency transition team described earlier. They are imperative to the successful transition of students with developmental disabilities because as the first point of contact from the adult services sector, they often provide the liaison between schools and developmental services providers. A Voc Rehab Transition Counselor will often serve graduates who access developmental services whenever appropriate. Close coordination between these two divisions occurs in order to establish the role of each to function effectively on behalf of the student. Voc Rehab Transition Counselors have a good familiarity with developmental services, which enables them to function as a liaison between students and the designated agency transition team.

Voc Rehab Counselors have guided an initiative to re-invigorate each county's *Core Transition Teams*, a resource that provides an important link between educators and providers on behalf of transition. Their work to re-convene these teams has provided yet another venue for interagency collaboration on behalf of graduates with developmental disabilities.

Outcomes Achieved:

- ❖ Sustained Voc Rehab participation in the *DDAS Youth Transition Mentor Group* and in the *DDAS Graduate Survey*
- ❖ Increased opportunities with Designated Agencies to co-present to students, parents, and schools relative to students with developmental disabilities
- ❖ New service options in some parts of the state such as job clubs, career exploration, and job try-outs.
- ❖ Collaboration with designated agency employment staff to increase the employment rate of graduates
- ❖ Leadership and facilitation of the local *Core Transition Teams*

(5) Renewal of Interagency Agreement

In June of 2005, the Commissioner of Education and Secretary of AHS signed an agreement created with extensive involvement from both areas of government. The agreement promotes collaboration between the Department of Education and the Agency of Human Services (AHS) and its member departments to ensure that students with disabilities receive integrated services designed to help them reach their goals. Areas developed by the agreement that enhance collaboration for graduates with developmental disabilities are:

- ❖ State Interagency Team (SIT) formation that includes DDAS representation
- ❖ Local Interagency Teams (LIT) to include Voc Rehab representation and high level leaders from DDAS Designated Agencies
- ❖ Service Coordination by Voc Rehab Transition Counselors
- ❖ Early identification and follow along by schools, Voc Rehab, Core Transition Teams and DDAS Designated Agencies.

(6) Other Efforts to Date:

- ❖ Vermont Special Education regulation, known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA)* was re-authorized with changes in 2004. The DOE Special Education Consultants provided a roll out of training sessions for special educators and inter-agency partners. DOE responded specifically to the need of developmental services by providing a series of statewide trainings specific to the DDAS youth workers across the designated agencies.
- ❖ DOE Special Education consultants provide on-going technical assistance to Designated Agency teams and the transition planning process for individual students. Consultants facilitate situations requiring their specific expertise for students with developmental disabilities prior to or during the intake

process with the designated agency. The expertise that the DOE consultants bring to the developmental services system illustrates a level of very real and meaningful collaboration between DAIL and DOE on behalf of graduates with developmental disabilities.

- ❖ Technical assistance and training by DOE on the *Summary of Performance Document* and *the Transition Plan* has increased the knowledge base of developmental service youth workers and has illustrated to them how they can serve as a central resource to the student's educational team.

- ❖ DOE State Performance Plan
DOE is required to report annually on the progress of state education via indicators contained in the State Performance Plan (SPP). The *DOE Student Support Team* is responsible for the SPP in compliance with the IDEIA. Data collected by DOE this past year shows that 85 percent of 200 graduates surveyed were employed, had been employed during the year, or were in post-secondary education. This data suggest that the collaborative effort in transition planning may enhance outcomes. Indicators that will have relevance for students with developmental disabilities entering adult services are:
 - Tracking the number who have quality transition plans
 - Tracking the outcomes of students one year after graduation.

DAIL and DOE should engage in further discussion to determine how the DOE measures and tracking could benefit graduates with developmental disabilities.

(7) Post Graduation Community Inclusion

The student's Transition Plan prescribes that career or employment goals be addressed. In general, most students with developmental disabilities express a desire to join the Vermont workforce; a value shared by educators, adult service providers, employers, and the public at large. Over the past four years, a united effort among the Designated Agencies, schools, Voc Rehab, and families ensured that graduates have real opportunities to enter the workforce. DAIL and DOE have contributed to the regional effort by providing technical assistance to help teams with strategies to ensure graduate employment.

Outcome Achieved: Over the past four years, an average of 73 percent of all funded services was allocated to enable graduates to maintain employment across the Vermont workforce. The employment rate for graduates has been steadily increasing. (Source: DDAS Graduate Tracking Reports 2004-2008 as reported by the field).

<i>Percent of Graduates Employed at Graduation</i>	
2004	35 percent Baseline year
2006	52 percent
2007	57 percent
2008	53 percent

Projections

In estimating the future needs for services and the associated costs, several factors are considered:

1. Total number of Vermont high school graduates

The number of graduates increased from 2004 through 2007 when the highest number of students graduated (*data from the Vermont Department of Education*). However, projections indicate that the number of graduates will decrease nearly 16 percent in the next four years (*modified data from the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education*).

2. The percentage of graduates with developmental disabilities

National prevalence estimates suggest that 2.9 percent of the population have developmental disabilities.

3. Percentage of graduates who meet Vermont's eligibility criteria for developmental services funding

In recent years, this percentage has increased to nearly 1 percent.

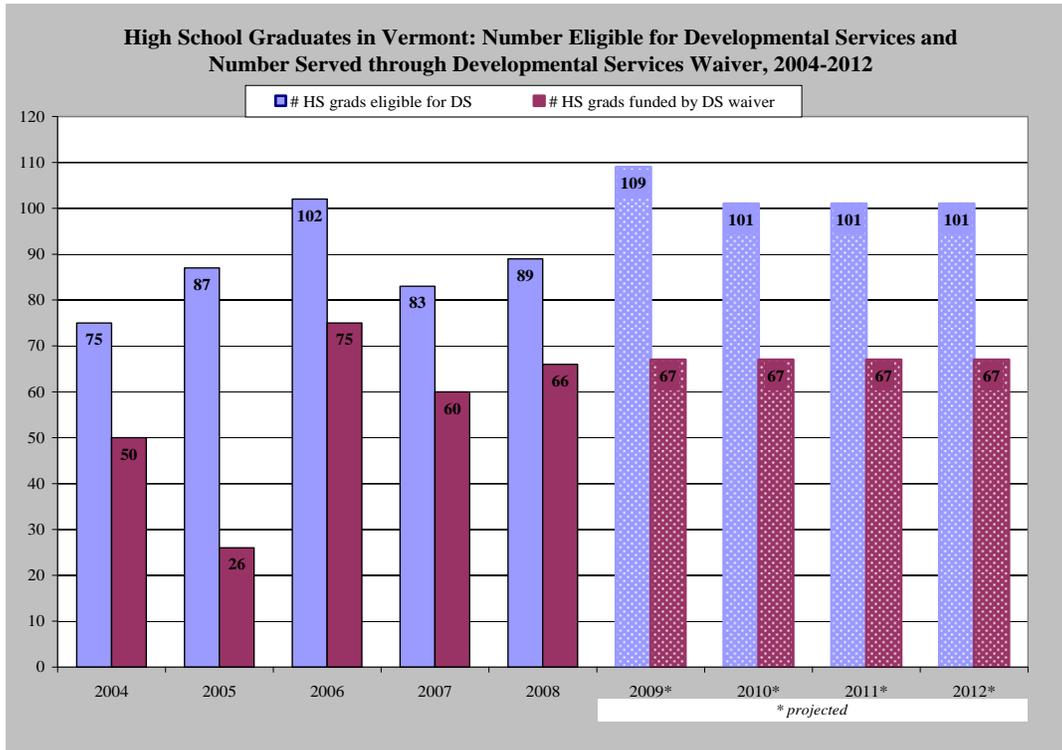
Together, these data suggest that the number of all graduates will decrease, but the number of graduates funded by developmental services will increase slightly assuming the prevalence rate remains the same. The table below summarizes the data with projections for future years

year	number of all graduates	est. number of graduates with developmental disabilities	number of graduates receiving DS waiver funding
2004	7667	222	50
2005	7584	220	26
2006	7787	226	75
2007	7890	229	60
2008*	7828	227	66
2009*	7614	221	67
2010*	7228	210	67
2011*	6855	199	67
2012*	6643	193	67

*estimated

Graduates who meet System of Care funding priority and receive services compared to the number of applicants with developmental disabilities not eligible for funded services.

Note: Annually, about 10 to 15 graduates who are not funded by developmental services receive employment services through less intensive supports provided by the Voc Rehab supported employment grants.



Anticipated Scope, Length of Services, and Self Sufficiency

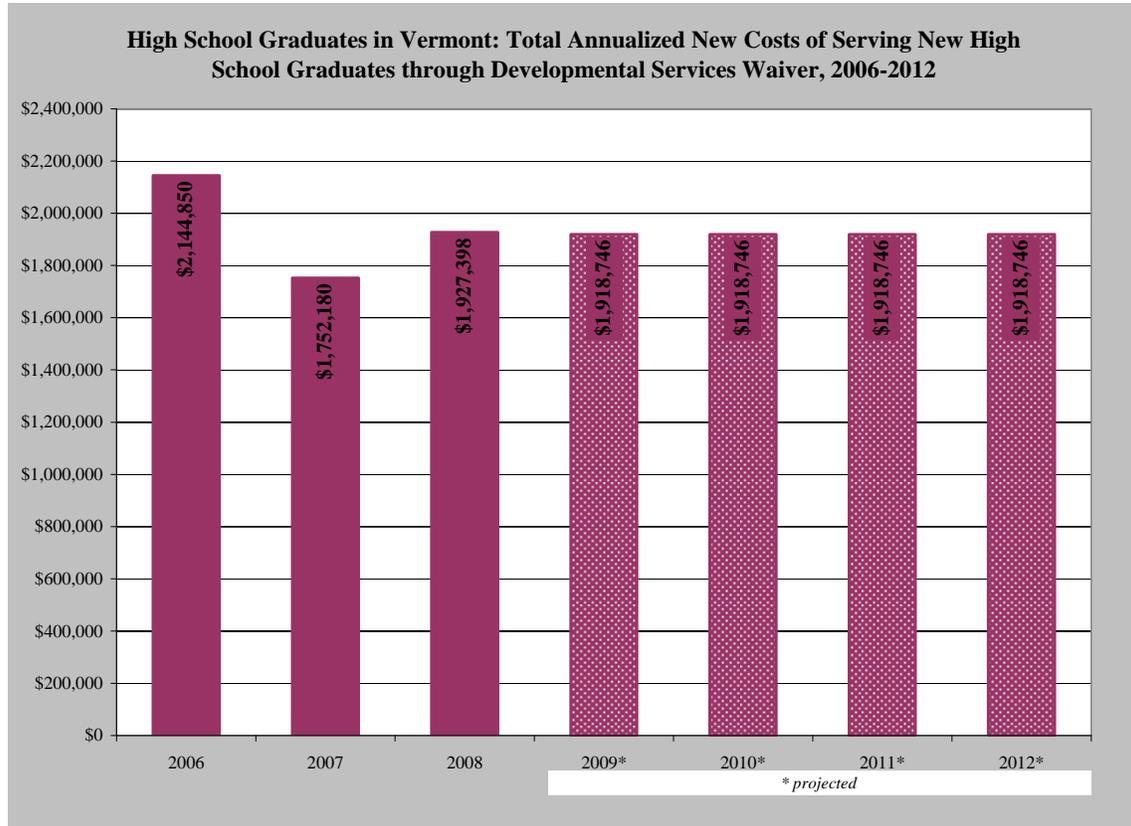
About 10 to 15 graduates who have milder disabilities are able to attain self-sufficiency each year through Voc Rehab grants that provide short-term services for about six months. Most graduates are funded for developmental services community and employment services. These more intensive supports are needed for the longer term although the goal of self-sufficiency is always advanced for every graduate. It is important to note that DDAS and the DAs believe that all people should and can contribute to Vermont’s workforce *regardless* of severity of developmental disability. Vermont is known as a national leader in connecting people with the most significant disabilities to a livelihood and the community of work. Graduates with developmental disabilities often require some level of on-going support but often make gains in self-sufficiency over time. Requirements are built into each individual service plan for assessment of service needs and to re-align supports to meet need as effectively and efficiently as possible. This process occurs at least annually and more often as needs change.

These percentages represent services provided per category based on averages over the past four years.

Employment supports - 73% Community supports - 45% Respite supports - 28%
(Source:DDAS Medicaid Waiver Spreadsheets 2005 to 2008)

Projected Cost for Graduates 2009 through 2012

An annual cost projection of \$1,918,746 has been calculated based on the past three-year average of \$28,638 per graduate.



Conclusion

In response to a legislative directive, this report reviews the collaborative effort between the Department of Disabilities, Aging, and Independent Living and the Department of Education on behalf of high school graduates with developmental disabilities.

DAIL and DOE, along with their community partners, have worked since 2003 on systems level initiatives designed to increase positive practices in youth transition from high school at the local interagency level. The unified approach has influenced the effectiveness of local teams that are accountable for the transition of graduates with developmental disabilities. While tangible improvements have resulted, there is still more to be done to ensure that a statewide infrastructure is secured through intentional system change.

Continuous improvement to the current partnership, coupled with on-going assessment and technical assistance of designated agencies and their partners can ensure this happens.

DOE and DAIL will continue to collaborate to ensure permanence and quality improvement for the future. Areas of future development of the regional teams will include, communication and information exchange between education and developmental services; workforce development of youth workers; and student centered technical assistance.

Areas of new collaboration will include utilization of the DOE State Performance Plan relative to developmental services; DOE input on future improvements to the DDAS Graduate Survey tool and process; and sharing data sources that may provide cross benefit to both sectors.