

**STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES**  
**Legislative Report Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Pilot Program Request**  
**FY 2024-25**

**Request:** The State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC) is requested to approve the Legislative Report for the Vocational Rehabilitation Pilot Program.

**Background:** The General Assembly has established evaluation criteria for the Vocational Rehabilitation Pilot Program. Each year that funds are expended during the Program, the State Board of Community Colleges, in consultation with the Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (formerly the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation), must report on the Program's impact on participants. This report must include information on the mental health and well-being of participants and their job placements.

**Rationale:** Reviewing and evaluating the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Pilot Program is essential for ensuring its continued success. This current report includes detailed information on the amount of grant funds disbursed and the number of eligible students who received funds, categorized by academic year and program of study.

**Contact(s):**

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# **Report to the North Carolina General Assembly**

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Pilot Program**

**Legislative Requirement**

**Session Law 2023-134, House Bill 259, Section 6.11**

Due March 15, 2025

Submitted by the State Board of Community Colleges, in conjunction with the Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities Division of the Department of Health and Human Services.

**VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PILOT PROGRAM**

In 2023, the General Assembly appropriated \$750,000.00 in non-recurring funds for a Vocational Rehabilitation Pilot Program. Section 6.11(a) reads, “The purpose of the Program is to provide support services to community college students with intellectual and developmental disabilities to help students reach their goals for employment and independence without duplicating the existing vocational support network.”

Section 6.11(b) reads, “Use of Funds; Selection. – Community colleges may apply to the State Board of Community Colleges to participate in the Program. The State Board, in consultation with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services of the Department of Health and Human Services (DVR), shall select community colleges to participate in the Program. As part of the Program, the Community Colleges System Office shall contract with DVR to place student counselors at selected community colleges in the State.”

In compliance with Section 6.11.(c), the State Board of Community Colleges reports, in consultation with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, shall report on the impact of the Program on participants, including at least the following information:

- (1) The mental health and well-being of participants.
- (2) Job placements of participants.

**Summary of Activities**

From March 2024-June 2024, joint planning occurred between leadership staff at NC Community College System (NCCCS) and NC Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD), formerly Vocational Rehabilitation. A Memorandum of Understanding was developed and signed on 05/29/2024. This collaborative program was named **The Bridge to Success (B2S) Program** indicating the intention to offer a bridge of services from the student’s post-secondary education and their employment goal.

Information pertaining to the B2S program can be found at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/divisions/employment-and-independence-people-disabilities/bridge-success>, a website developed through this partnership to spread the word of this new opportunity for community college students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) for services and supports leading to employment.

The community colleges to participate in the project were selected according to need and budgetary constraints. The six community colleges chosen to participate in the **Bridge to Success Program** are:

Alamance Community College	Brunswick Community College
Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College	South Piedmont Community College
College of the Albermarle	Wilkes Community College

NC EIPD initially posted openings for B2S Case Managers to work on site at each college in early July 2024 through Temporary Solutions. Some locations have required multiple postings to find viable candidates. At the time of this report, all the designated colleges hired staff with the exception of South Piedmont Community College and Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College who have struggled to get qualified applicants. After some discussion with the colleges, it is felt that the need in these rural areas is profound, so program leaders are restructuring to try to attract more applicants

rather than moving the positions to different colleges.

The hired B2S Case Managers participated in intensive training to quickly onboard them regarding I/DD and employment, VR services, and the parameters of the Bridge to Success Program. At this time, all hired B2S Case Managers have completed the necessary training and working onsite at the colleges and are actively serving students with I/DD.

**BRIDGE TO SUCCESS Participants as of 02/20/2025**

	<b>Mental Health Information &amp; EIPD Referral*</b>	<b>Current VR Applicants</b>	<b>Eligible and/or Receiving VR Services</b>	<b>Now In Job Placement Services</b>	<b>B2S Participants- VR Applicants/ Clients</b>
<b>Alamance Community College</b>	31	5	24	2	29
<b>College of the Albermarle</b>	2	2			2
<b>Brunswick Community College</b>	8	5	2	1	7
<b>Wilkes Community College</b>	2	1			1
<b>TOTAL B2S PARTICIPANTS</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>39</b>

*\*The Mental Health Information and EIPD Referral column includes one new referral, VR applicants/participants and 3 closed cases.*

**Communication & Outreach:**

The EIPD Bridge to Success Case Managers each have offices at their respective community colleges and work very closely with the staff there. They have provided and continue to provide individual and/or group outreach activities to inform community college staff and students about various departments of

- Mental health resources and supports available
- The B2S program and the connected services through EIPD
- Information and direct support in applying for VR services
- Assistance and support in developing an Individualized Plan for Employment for all eligible students with I/DD
- They also provide direct services and referral to appropriate service providers and resource professionals when needed.

The B2S Case Managers also work closely with the Access to Achievement Coordinator at the respective colleges to ensure students have ready access to services needed. Other outreach activities include involvement in a Community Stakeholder event, New Student Orientations, and Resource Fairs to increase program referrals.

**Ages of those referred/served:**

Age range/years	Number of referred/served*
18-20	20
21-25	12
26-30	3
31-35	2
36-40	1
41-45	0
46-50	1
51-55	2
56-60	1
61-65	0
66-70	1

\*Three of the above cases have closed.

**I/DD Disability Types Served**

100% of B2S participants fall within the definition used for Intellectual and Developmental Disability. Of those individuals currently served as an EIPD vocational rehabilitation client, either in eligibility status or under an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), the following table reflects the Primary diagnoses coded for eligibility purposes:

Primary Disability	Number of individuals
Intellectual Disability	9
Autism Spectrum Disorder	6
Cerebral Palsy	2
Other Congenital/Physical Disability	4
Developmental/Learning Disability	5

Eligible individuals served may have additional secondary diagnoses that also result in impediments to employment. One individual may have multiple secondary diagnoses.

Secondary Disability	Number of individuals
Intellectual Disability	3
Developmental/Learning Disability	7
Mental Health	9
Autism Spectrum Disorder	2
Epilepsy	1

**Mental Health & Wellbeing:**

100% of Bridge to Success participants have been provided with information regarding mental health resources, including those at the community college and in their local community. In addition to introducing the B2S students to their community college campus mental health resources, the B2S Case Managers have shared resources such as:

- 988 Suicide Crisis Line
- Statewide Peer Warmline

- Member Recipient and Behavioral Crisis Line for their respective Tailored Plan/Managed Care Organization/Local Management Entity under NC Division of MH/DD/SUS
- EIPD VR program sponsored mental health services

**Vocational Rehabilitation Services Provided to Present B2S Participants:**

EIPD Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services initiated/provided to Bridge to Success participants thus far have included:

- Mental Health resource sharing and treatment sponsorship where appropriate
- Assistance with the Application for VR Services
- Vocational Guidance & Counseling including development of an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)
- Job Development Services
- Post Secondary Training/Community College training sponsorship
- Benefits Counseling in preparation for work
- Supported Employment
- Related Transportation

All VR services are designed to help the B2S participants reach their goals of competitive integrated employment.

**Job Placements:**

To date, there have been no job placements although job development services have been initiated for 3 individuals. The number and variety of VR services required to reach an employment goal will vary for every individual. It is not uncommon that VR clients with the most significant disabilities might require 1-2 years of direct services and training to achieve the employment goal. However, EIPD works with each person individually to provide services unique to them and their job goal.

**Success:**

Program managers have heard from numerous students, community college staff and Access to Achievement Staff about the benefit of having EIPD staff on campus. They have had success in reaching out to students with I/DD on the campuses and have assisted them in applying for EIPD services and beginning to pursue their employment goals. EIPD has struggled to hire for two of the colleges located in more remote areas, but we are hoping to have those staff in place soon.

B2S Staff are working collaboratively with the Access to Achievement program to maximize services to students with I/DD wherever possible. B2S is serving 41 community college students with I/DD who are now able to receive VR program services at their schools and have the support they need to be successful in reaching their goal of employment.

The Bridge to Success Program is off to a great start and we look forward to serving many more students in 2025!

**Goals**

The Bridge to Success Program has as its overall goal to reach 100% of students with I/DD to provide mental health information and referral and to provide information and assistance to apply and receive services from the VR program in support of their vocational goal. We are in the process of collecting data on exact numbers of students with I/DD at each college in order to properly set future goals and align strategies for success.