

STATE BOARD OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES
Legislative Report Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Pilot Program Request
FY 2025-26

Request: For Action-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.

North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) & Division of Employment & Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD)
“Bridge to Success” An NCGA Sponsored Pilot Program
February 2026 Report

Foundation

In 2023, the NC General Assembly appropriated \$750,000 in non-recurring funds for an NC Community Colleges & Vocational Rehabilitation Pilot Program to assist students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) in achieving their goals of competitive integrated employment and mental health and wellness.

Section 6.11(a) reads, “The purpose of the program is to provide 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 Office (NCCCSO) 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 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	South Piedmont Community College
College of the Albermarle	Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College
Brunswick Community College	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 required multiple postings to find viable candidates.

Once hired, there has been consistent staff supporting Alamance Community College, Wilkes Community College, and Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College. Unfortunately, staff turnover and periods of significant vacancies existed at South Piedmont Community College, College of the Albemarle, and Brunswick Community College.

We currently have staff supporting 4 of the 6 colleges. A new case manager should begin at Brunswick Community College on March 2, 2026. EIPD has struggled to find staff for South Piedmont Community College. We are very excited to announce that someone will begin in that position on March 9, 2026.

Once hired, staff participate in intensive training to quickly onboard them. Training topics include I/DD and employment, VR services, and the parameters of the Bridge to Success Program. At this time, all hired B2S staff have completed the necessary training and are working onsite at the colleges and are actively serving students with I/DD. Monthly team meetings are held for case discussion and collaboration.

BRIDGE TO SUCCESS Participants as of 02/13/2026

	Current VR Applicants	Eligible and/or Receiving VR Services	Receiving Services, # Of Job Placements	Successful Closure w/ 90 Days Employment
Alamance CC	1	38	6	1
Asheville Buncombe Tech CC	1	27	3	0

Brunswick CC	0	5	2	0
College of the Albermarle	1	4	0	0
South Piedmont CC	0	0	0	0
Wilkes CC	2	13	0	0
TOTAL	5	87	11	1

Communication & Outreach:

The EIPD Bridge to Success case managers 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/prospective students and referral sources about:

- 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 referrals 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 the services needed. Other outreach activities include New Student Orientations & Resource/Transition Fairs to increase program referrals.

Ages of those referred/served:

Age range/years	Number of referred/served*
18-20	41
21-25	28
26-30	10
31-35	4
36-40	5
41-45	3
46-50	-
51-55	1
56-60	1
61-65	-
66-70	-

**One of the above cases has closed.*

I/DD Disability Types Served

100% of B2S participants have a diagnosis falling within the definition used for Intellectual and Developmental Disability. The diagnosis may be a primary or secondary condition.

The table below reflects the primary disability of individuals currently in eligible/active status, and the case that was closed successfully in employment.

Primary Disability	Number of Individuals
Intellectual Disability	19
Borderline Intellectual Functioning	2
Autism Spectrum Disorder	30
Cerebral Palsy	3
Other Congenital/Physical Disability	3
Specific Learning Disability	7
ADHD	10
Mental Health	6
Traumatic Brain Injury	2
Prader Willi	1
Epilepsy	2
Deaf/Hard of Hearing	1
Vision Impairment	1

Eligible individuals served may have additional secondary diagnoses that also result in impediments to employment. One individual may have multiple secondary diagnoses. Of the 88 individuals served (87 current, 1 closed successfully), 33 individuals had at least one secondary disability.

Significance of Disability

When an individual is determined to be eligible for services, a determination of the significance of disability is also made based on the impediments to employment in the following functional capacity areas: Communication, Interpersonal Skills, Mobility, Self-Direction, Self-Care, Work Skills, and Work Tolerance. Additional factors in this determination include the length of time expected to complete their Rehabilitation Program and/or the permanent need for Rehabilitation Technology, Personal Assistance Services, or Extended Services (ongoing support for Supported Employment).

- 68% of those served in B2S fall in the “Most Significant Disability Category” reflecting serious limitations in three or more functional capacity areas.
- 29% of those served fall in the “Significant Disability Category” reflecting serious limitations in one or two functional capacity areas.
- 3% of those served fall in the “Non-Significant Disability Category” where the limitations result in impediments to employment but are non-seriously limiting.

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

This information is provided at the earliest contact, referral or application. It is also reviewed again with the development of the Individualized Plan for Employment and at other times as needed within a guidance and counseling session.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services Provided to Present B2S Participants:

EIPD Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services planned to support 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)
- Internships
- Job Development/Placement Services
- Post Secondary Training/Community College training sponsorship
- Benefits Counseling in preparation for work
- Supported Employment/Project SEARCH
- Work Adjustment Services
- Related Transportation

Each Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) developed for a B2S participant reflects the services necessary to reach that individual's employment goal.

Job Placements:

Over the course of the last year, 11 job placements have occurred. Of those, one has reached successful case closure indicating that individual completed the services on the Individualized Plan for Employment and maintained employment for a minimum of 90 days.

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 their employment goal.

EIPD works with each person individually to provide services unique to them and their job goal.

Examples of Successful Case Collaborations through Bridge to Success:

Wilkes Community College

The Bridge to Success (B2S) case manager met a student in the Life and Work Skills Academy in January 2025. The student struggled in coursework in another field and expressed interest in childcare. The B2S case manager offered guidance and counseling to explore different training pathways to build on the skills learned through the Life and Work Skills Academy. The B2S case manager has found an apprenticeship program in partnership with the college that will enable the student to complete her childcare certificate with a paid internship opportunity to gain skills, preparing her to work in her career goal.

Alamance Community College

A student enrolled in adult education classes at ACC started with B2S in late 2024. He has continued to excel in his academic coursework but also expressed to the B2S case manager an interest in pursuing employment. The B2S counselor determined he would benefit from a job coach. Services were initiated to support him in the pursuit of employment while continuing classes at ACC. Through EIPD services, he obtained a part-time janitorial position that worked with his ACC schedule. He received initial job coaching support to learn and organize job tasks and to establish effective relationships with coworkers and supervisors. He has maintained his employment and is on track to reach a successful employment outcome with EIPD.

Asheville Buncombe Technical Community College

A student served through the Successful Occupational Achievement Readiness (SOAR) program was referred to B2S. He completed SOAR in August 2025. The B2S Case Manager referred him for Supported Employment services. In collaboration with EIPD, his supported employment provider helped him in securing a bussing position at a local restaurant. He began his employment in October 2025. The B2S case manager helped him connect with a tailored care manager to access other services he needs. This individual is also on track to reach a successful employment outcome with EIPD.

Summary

As we are near the end of the Memorandum of Agreement with NCCCS, it is evident that the partnership with the community colleges has had a positive impact. The Bridge to Success Case Managers all report strong relationships with their Access to Achievement counterparts and speak to the benefit of being on campus enabling students ease of access to their EIPD case managers for coordination of services and supports.