

VOCATIONAL EVALUATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS - THE VIRGINIA MODEL

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ABSTRACT

Because Virginia's Standards of Quality for Public Schools require that all high school graduates possess a marketable vocational skill or be prepared academically for college, the need for vocational assessment services for handicapped and disadvantaged students was recognized. During the 1979-80 school year, the Virginia Department of Education made funds available for the development of a model for regional comprehensive vocational evaluation services for the handicapped. This model was developed over a three-year period. At the conclusion of this period, the State made money available for the development of additional regional vocational evaluation centers following the Tidewater model. This model provides a hands-on, four-day evaluation using commercially and locally developed work samples. Work sample systems used across the State, depending on job markets, are: VIEWS, JEVS, Singer, Choice, Valpar, Prep Coats, and Project Discovery. This model concludes the evaluation process by preparing a narrative report which identifies the student's performance assets and limitations, work behaviors, and remedial services needed, if any, before entry into a vocational program or job. To date, the State of Virginia has established twenty-two (22) comprehensive vocational evaluation centers and has a goal of making the service available to every handicapped and disadvantaged student in the State. The Department of Education is also working with the Department of Rehabilitation to establish cooperative agreements for evaluation services.

Background

Over the past decade, Virginia educators have increased their attention to developing a systematic process that would provide secondary special education and disadvantaged students an opportunity to explore job areas utilizing a hands-on approach and vocational interest assessment. Provided with this type of information, students can then be appropriately placed into vocational education programs with a higher rate of success. Successful completion of vocational training is a criteria of the Virginia Standards of Quality that each student must be prepared for either higher education or the world of work.

In a report to Congress on the implementation of P.L. 94-142, it was indicated that nationally only six percent of all individualized educational plans, IEPs, prepared contained information on vocational goals. This deficit in the State of Virginia is in the process of being curtailed by the use of regional or local vocational assessment centers strategically located throughout the state.

The 1981-82 school year was designated by the State Department of Education as a planning year for the establishment of a systematic way to implement vocational evaluation centers across the state. During that planning year, four objectives were developed. The first objective was to plan and conduct a statewide conference enabling school administrators and others an opportunity to learn about vocational evaluation in secondary schools. The second objective was to organize a statewide task force that would plan and coordinate the services between State agencies and departments. The third goal was to form a technical assistance meeting involving the State Department of Special Education and the already established SECEP Vocational Evaluation Center.* This meeting was to prepare for the implementation of two pilot programs during the 1982-83 school year. The final objective for that planning year was to distribute requests for proposals (RFPs) to local educational agencies and Planning Districts involved in the regional technical assistance meeting.

*SECEP (Southeastern Cooperative Educational Programs) was a pilot regional vocational evaluation program that was funded by Federal ESEA Title IV-C monies. The SECEP program was housed at Crestwood Jr. High School in Chesapeake, Virginia, and serviced communities in Norfolk, Isle of Wight, Suffolk, Portsmouth, and South Hampton County.

The 1981-82 planning year proved to be very successful. To date, a total of 14 regional vocational assessment centers serving 53 school divisions has been awarded grants totalling \$612,502 and serving 2,975 students annually. In addition to the regional vocational assessment centers established through EHA Title VI-B funding, eight school-based vocational assessment programs serving 13 localities have been established using various local, state, and federal funding sources. At the present time, a total of 66 Virginia school divisions provides handicapped and disadvantaged students with comprehensive assessment services through 22 school-based evaluation centers.

A Plan for Expansion

It should be noted that Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984 requires that recipients of the "handicapped set-a-sides" provide vocational assessment services for handicapped students enrolled in vocational education. In addition, Virginia's Governor Gerald Baliles' "Agenda for Virginia's Schools, Colleges and Universities" highlighted the development of vocational assessment services for handicapped students in the public schools and established fiscal year 1986-87 as a target date for these services in the State. By 1988-89 the goal of the State is to have a network of regional vocational assessment services which are of high quality and equally available to all secondary level handicapped and disadvantaged students.

A Description of Services

Vocational assessment in Virginia has been developed as a two-phase process. The initial phase utilizes classroom centered techniques and existing student data to assist the handicapped student in selecting an appropriate vocational training option. The second phase of the vocational assessment process involves comprehensive vocational evaluation and uses assessment techniques such as work samples, vocational interest and aptitude tests, and behavioral observations in a controlled work setting.

Establishment of a Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation Center

Each center in the State has adopted CARF (Commission for Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) vocational evaluation standards for the establishment of their centers. Schools are not rehabilitative facilities and have chosen not to be CARF accredited but have used CARF guidelines to ensure quality and consistent services across the State. Each center has become unique in its own right due to the variety of job opportunities available in each locality.

General guidelines and procedures for establishing centers recommend that a survey be conducted to determine the job and training opportunities for that locality. Once the survey has been completed, the program coordinator or vocational evaluator is then prepared to select

relevant work sample equipment to meet the unique needs of the area.

In conjunction with the survey of training opportunities, a communication network between the evaluation center staff and school division personnel is imperative. Most centers request that the school superintendent from each school division designate one person to serve as a contact person. It is the responsibility of the contact person to coordinate referral information between each school and the evaluation center, to arrange transportation, and to disseminate vocational evaluation reports to appropriate personnel.

The Virginia Model of Comprehensive Vocational Evaluation

The Peninsula Area Cooperative Educational Services (PACES) Vocational Evaluation Center has adopted the Virginia State Model for Comprehensive Vocational Evaluations and will be used as an example of the evaluation process used in the State of Virginia.

The PACES vocational evaluation lasts two to four days and is dependent upon each student's individual needs. When the students arrive for their evaluations, they receive an orientation to the evaluation center which includes an explanation, an overview of the shop rules, and a tour of the center. Also, during this time the students are given a vocational interest test.

Upon completion of the orientation, each evaluator conducts an initial interview with his/her students on an individual basis. This allows the evaluator to establish rapport with each student and determine vocational interests. The students are encouraged to pick at least four occupational areas to explore while at the evaluation center. At the conclusion of the initial interview, the Individual Written Vocational Evaluation Plan, IWVEP, (Figure I) is developed. The IWVEP is composed of specific evaluation questions to be answered through the vocational evaluation process. For example, what are the students' achievement levels, tested interests, work behaviors, and job-seeking and keeping abilities? The students' four (or more) stated interests are also considered: Does the student have the abilities needed to become a welder, carpenter, electrician, etc.? Each vocational area is then divided into critical factors which include the individual aptitudes and work skills required for a particular occupation. Examples of critical factors assessed include the following: eye-hand coordination, finger dexterity, work speed, and bimanual coordination. The final step in developing the IWVEP is to determine the appropriate evaluation technique needed to assess the individual critical factors. Upon completion of the IWVEP, the student begins the hands-on portion of the evaluation.

The PACES Vocational Evaluation Center uses a variety of assessment techniques to complete the comprehensive evaluation process. Several types of work sample systems are used including Valpar, Views, Singer, Choice, and locally developed work samples. Currently, PACES has over 27 vocational areas for students to explore.

The work samples provide a realistic, hands-on experience for the student and an assessment of critical factors essential for success within a given occupational area.

While students are at the evaluation center, the evaluators continually record behavioral and performance observations. The Work Behavior Assessment is a critical factor in the evaluation process because it has become clear that the majority of students who fail vocational training programs do so because of inappropriate work behaviors and not because of lack of sufficient work skills. At the end of the week, the evaluator completes a Work Behavior Rating Form which allows he/she to note both positive and negative work-related behaviors that may have an affect on the student's ability to maintain competitive employment.

In addition to observational data, vocational counseling and feedback sessions occur to assist the student in better understanding his/her abilities and to provide additional employment and training information. At the conclusion of the evaluation, the evaluator, once again, sits down with the student to conduct an exit interview where they extensively discuss work behaviors, work performance, job interest, and training programs. The exit interview formulates the beginning of the final report and ensures that the student has an understanding, to the best of his/her ability, of what will be included in the vocational evaluation report.

Vocational Evaluation Report

The outcome of the PACES Vocational Evaluation is a comprehensive Vocational Evaluation Report. The report consists of four sections including 1) Referral Information and General Description, 2) Work Performance, 3) Work Behavior, and 4) Recommendations - Short and Long Term.

Section I of the evaluation report provides information concerning the referral source and an explanation of why the student was referred for a vocational evaluation. The first section also provides an overview of the student, initial impressions, pertinent medical information, and a summary of the student's work history.

Section II summarizes the student's work skills and interests during the evaluation. Significant positive factors in work performance are noted, as well as limitations that may affect the student's ability to succeed within a vocational training program or maintain competitive employment. Also included in this section are the results of standardized achievement testing, interest testing, and the student's stated interests during the initial and exit interviews. Preceding the conclusion of the Performance section are summary statements concerning results of the student's physical capacities and job seeking/keeping abilities. Section II concludes with a statement summarizing occupational areas in which the student has stated interest and has demonstrated potential for success.

Section III of the report summarizes positive work-related behaviors observed throughout the evaluation. Behaviors that may limit the student's ability to obtain and keep a job are also

documented along with a brief description of the context in which the behaviors occurred.

Section IV (Recommendations) becomes the outline for the student's future vocational programming. The recommendation section is divided into short and long-term vocational goals. The short-term recommendation section first identifies remedial services needed prior to entry into a vocational training program such as work adjustment, academic trade related classes, job-seeking training, or other services. Secondly, specific vocational training programs or placement opportunities are given. Alternatives are also provided in the event that a program is unavailable or interests change. The long-term recommendation section identifies first of all the level of employability expected and then specific examples of jobs with DOT (Dictionary of Occupational Titles) numbers.

Implementation of Report Recommendation by School Division

The final report is returned to the contact person who is responsible for disseminating the report to appropriate personnel that includes special education teachers, vocational teachers, guidance counselors, and school psychologists. The evaluators are available for consultation and staffing regarding the final report and training placement.

Follow-Up

The PACES evaluation center is currently in the process of developing a systematic process to follow students, once they have completed an evaluation, through vocational training and into job placement. A total of 56 students (28 disadvantaged and 28 special needs) evaluated by PACES were placed into the New Horizons Technical Center - North Campus during the 1985-86 school year. At the completion of the first semester, a remarkable 85% of those students who were recommended by PACES for direct placement into a specific vocational training program were passing with a "C" or better grade average. The 15% who were unsuccessful received a "D" or "F" at the end of the first semester and were identified by their instructors as having the ability to succeed in the class but having chronic absentee problems. Fifteen students were placed at the New Horizons Technical Center; even though, they had been identified as needing work adjustment or remedial services. Because formal work adjustment, at present, is unavailable within the schools served by PACES, these students were placed into vocational training programs identified by the evaluation as interest and ability potential contingent upon completion of remedial and/or work adjustment programs. At the end of the first semester 100% of these students had failed or dropped out of the vocational technical center. These preliminary studies clearly indicate the potential of vocational evaluation for identification of vocational skills, work behaviors, remedial services, work adjustment training, vocational training programs, and job placement.

PACES currently is seeking monies to develop and implement a model program for work adjustment in the State of Virginia.

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Figure I. Individual Written Vocational Evaluation Plan

HYPOTHESIS	CRITICAL FACTOR	PROCEDURE
1. What are achievement levels?	Spelling Arithmetic Reading	WRAT
2. What are tested interests?		CASE Vocational & Inventory
3. What are work behaviors?	HCD IH A St RUMT WM OIB CS P R SP RSA OTM VWE FT S T SS RA CSR PC D SR RCP	WBRF
4. What are job seeking and keeping skills?		JS/JK Job Application
5.		
6.		
7.		
8.		

Student Signature _____ Date _____

Evaluator _____ Date _____

Disposition/Rec. _____ Date _____

REFERENCES

Baliles, Gerald (1985). Agenda for Virginia's Schools, Colleges and Universities. Richmond, Virginia: Campaign Position Paper.

Vocational Evaluation and Work Adjustment Association and Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (1978). VEWAA-CARF Vocational evaluation and work adjustment standards with interpretive guidelines and VEWAA glossary. Menomonie, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin-Stout, Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute, Materials Development Center.