

BRINGING EMPLOYMENT FIRST TO SCALE

Pushing the Integrated Employment Agenda: A Case Study of Oklahoma's High-Performing Employment System

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Key Findings
from the RRTC
on Advancing
Employment

Read this brief to learn about the factors that contribute to the effectiveness of Oklahoma's success in achieving integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD across three state systems: IDD, vocational rehabilitation (VR), and education.

Introduction

This brief summarizes data collected from key informants in Oklahoma about the state's efforts to support integrated employment for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). It highlights features that contribute to the effectiveness of Oklahoma in achieving integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD. The contributions of three state systems are described: IDD, vocational rehabilitation (VR), and education. Presentation of these features is organized by the seven elements of the High-Performing States Employment Framework. These elements have been found to be important in achieving higher rates of competitive integrated employment outcomes for people with IDD.

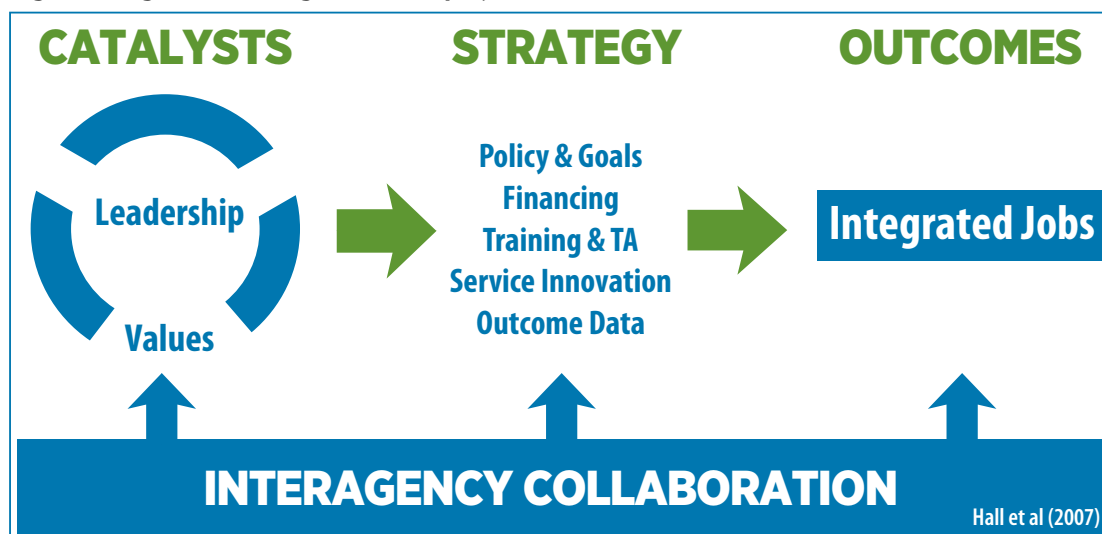
The large variation in employment participation across state IDD agencies suggests that examining state agency policy and practice is vital for understanding employment outcomes. The High-Performing States Employment Framework (Figure 1) was developed over ten years ago from research that considered common strategies and approaches across state IDD agencies with high levels of integrated employment outcomes, and identifies seven elements that support the goals of community inclusion and integrated employment (Hall et al., 2007).

Given the increasing emphasis on a cross-systems focus and interagency collaboration, this model is evolving to encompass the systems' interactions, relationships, and partnerships that characterize high-performing states. Building on this foundation, project staff and partners in this research are exploring the relationships between state strategy and employment outcomes.

Methods

In 2015, researchers at the Institute for Community Inclusion's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Advancing Employment for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities developed the State Employment System Performance Composite Indicator. The indicator was developed using data representing employment outcomes for state IDD agencies, state VR agencies, and state public education systems. The composite indicator represents an overall state employment system performance ranking (Smith, n.d.).

Figure 1. High Performing States Employment Framework



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This study used the results of the indicator to identify states with higher-ranking employment systems. The ten states with the highest composite scores in 2013, in ranked order, were Maryland, New Hampshire, Vermont, Oregon, Washington, Iowa, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Colorado, and Delaware. To understand what interagency policies and practices are being implemented in states with relatively high rankings in integrated employment, and to contribute to the evolution of the High-Performing States Employment Framework, case study research has been conducted in three states: Iowa, Maryland, and Oklahoma. Oklahoma was selected as a case study state because it achieved the highest IDD agency sub-score in the composite indicator analysis and because it has been a leader in supporting individuals in the IDD system to obtain integrated employment for more than 20 years (Winsor et al., 2019).

Due to Oklahoma's IDD agency receiving the highest IDD agency sub-score of any state, this agency is the focus of this brief. However, the contributions of the state VR and education agencies are also described. Data was collected from a wide variety of sources, including publicly available policy and practice documents from the state IDD, VR, and education agencies; expert interviews with past and current technical assistance providers and state agency staff members; and key informant interviews with state agency staff in formal positions of leadership within the Oklahoma Department of Human Services Developmental Disabilities Services (DDS), Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS), Oklahoma State Department of Education Special Education Services (OSDE-SES), Oklahoma Transition Council (OTC), and Oklahoma Community-Based Providers (OCP).

Strategic Goals, Policies, and Operating Practices

State and local agencies' goals and operating policies require and support competitive integrated employment and postsecondary education as the first and preferred options in planning and service delivery for youth and working-age adults with IDD.

The foundation of Oklahoma's IDD agency policy and practice related to integrated employment services was formed by the Homeward Bound v. Hissom Memorial Center class action lawsuit. Filed

in 1985 on behalf of individuals with IDD living at the state Hissom Memorial Center, this lawsuit was pivotal in shifting Oklahoma's public system of services for individuals with IDD from an institution-based system to a community- and home-based system. In the Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law for this lawsuit, Judge James Ellison identified the provision of employment services as one of the service elements critical to upholding plaintiffs' Constitutional and statutory rights. The 1989 Consent Decree stated, "The Department of Human Services will provide values-based employment services for Hissom class members that are responsive to individual needs through a coordinated delivery system" (Homeward Bound, Inc., et al. v. Hissom Memorial Center, et al., 1987, 38-39).

Oklahoma used the outcomes of the lawsuit to develop policy and practice that prioritize integrated employment for individuals with IDD through the state's Medicaid Home and Community-Based Waivers as well as through state-funded integrated employment services for individuals with IDD 16 years of age or older who are not eligible to participate in the waiver-funded services.

Employment-related services and supports are well defined in state revised policy, and the overall goal of services funded by DDS is full-time employment in the community at the prevailing wage. The state's regulations for DDS employment services prioritize competitive integrated employment. The overarching philosophy and system infrastructure are intended to reduce reliance on public supports.

"The optimum goal is full-time employment at prevailing wage in business or industry at an occupation of the service recipient's choice with natural supports. If prevailing wage is not available, then employment is at minimum wage with or without paid supports..." (Okla. Admin. Code § 340:100-17-2)

Case managers have a key role in the person-centered planning process, including developing a plan to obtain and maintain employment. With an average caseload of 29, case managers are responsible for helping to build the individual service plan and working with their provider to help the individual reach their outcomes as outlined in the plan. If individuals are not employed in a job in the community, their service plan must contain action

steps to support the individual toward competitive integrated employment and a plan for how the barriers will be addressed. As part of the development of the plan of care, the case manager is a conduit for sharing information with individuals and families about state policy expectations related to employment.

Employment staff in Oklahoma shared that the “service authorization review process is a key component of our system that makes our system click.” Case managers review service and outcome documentation from providers. Based upon progress towards service goals and outcomes, case managers can make changes to the service array to better meet each individual’s goals.

In 2002, DDS implemented an objective review process for individual service plans. State plan of care reviewers examine each plan at least annually and make suggestions to case managers. Reviewers are looking for whether the plan of care contains specific information about why the service is being requested and how it will contribute to the individual’s goals. Long-time IDD agency staff noted the importance of the person-centered planning process.

“We had to ensure that it was happening...The policy structure, but the other thing that is so important is monitoring and quality assurance. Those are the three top key things within a state, and you’re going to hear that when you talk about the plan of care reviewers coming in here. When you have a service [monitoring] structure, [which] is making sure you’re implementing that service [planning] structure.”

The reviewers do not make changes directly to the individual plans of care or individual service planning meetings. Instead suggestions are conveyed through phone, email, or in-person meetings with small groups of case managers. Small group meetings are particularly useful to address common areas for improvement and to troubleshoot issues.

In 2012, DDS deepened its commitment by adopting an Employment First focus. To achieve this, DDS led a cross-agency workgroup focused on identifying priority areas for systems change. The group met regularly to weigh different options, analyze the state’s current performance against target goals, and determine which of the top priorities could and should

be realistically addressed.

More recently, DDS made major revisions to the state’s individual planning process and individual plan document. DDS used a Lean/Six Sigma Green Belt project to guide the revisions, focusing efforts on improvements to ensure individuals had ample opportunities to achieve competitive integrated employment. In Oklahoma, individuals are guided through a person-centered assessment, which can inform ideas for which jobs to pursue. If an individual is not employed in a competitive integrated job, or their current job does not meet their preferences or abilities, the process prompts the team to identify a pathway with opportunities to overcome the obstacles. This pathway is reflected through an outcome and/or action steps in the individual plan.

DDS policy and practice provided a strong foundation for the state VR and education agencies to engage in actions to help individuals with IDD to prioritize integrated employment. Specific contributions of these agencies are highlighted throughout the brief.

Funding

Funding strategies prioritize and support competitive integrated employment and postsecondary education for transitioning youth and working-age young adults with IDD.

Oklahoma’s IDD agency rate structure has been in place for many years and is viewed within the state as an important tool to encourage supported employment services. The focus on an outcome-based service evolved from the monitoring of the implementation of the Hissom class lawsuit settlement. Court monitors noted that providers could bill for supported employment services but that the system had no process for verifying that an employment outcome that met the individual’s goals had been achieved. Instead, the fee-for-service system was used to monitor and count staff actions.

This led to the decision to develop an outcome-based contract that is based upon providers being paid for the number of hours individuals are working in the community. Initially based upon requirements for members of the lawsuit, Oklahoma chose to extend the focus on performance management and outcomes for all service recipients. In 1995, the state adopted an outcome-based system.

Oklahoma's IDD system uses long-term job coaching payments to the provider based upon the number of hours worked by the individual as opposed to hours of direct support received, and developed rates that would prioritize integrated employment over other day and employment services (Butterworth, Hall, Freeze, Hoff, & Winsor, 2008). The funding system and rate provides a steady and reliable income source for employment service providers and maintains a flexible resource base for responsive support. It also provides a stable follow-along resource and a pathway to fading supports.

Higher rates are offered for community-based rather than facility-based services and for individual employment supports versus group employment supports. The ability to bill for individual and group employment supports based upon the hours that the individual works as opposed to the number of hours of direct job support provides another financial incentive for integrated employment services. Additionally, the up-front costs of employment assessment and job development are funded at a much higher rate than other employment services. Lastly, enhanced rates are available for individuals who require additional supports to be successful in community employment. Enhanced rates are available for individuals due to behavior issues, a visual impairment that requires additional support or medical services, mobility support, and personal care needs.

Through the case management process each service recipient's individual plan is designed to allow the use of multiple services in the achievement of this goal. An individual can receive wrap-around community-based non-work services for the periods of the day they are not working.

All individuals seeking competitive employment must first be referred to the Department of Rehabilitation Services for VR services. If the individual is eligible for VR services, VR will fund the costs of initial placement. DDS has a joint agreement with VR to provide follow-along for individuals achieving job stabilization as a result of VR services. If there are no providers available, or if the milestone system does not meet the individual's needs, the individual can go directly to DDS to access waiver services. After achieving the milestones through VR services, the individual can receive stabilization through DDS waiver services if ongoing supports are needed.

Performance Measurement and Data Management

Data on service delivery and employment outcomes for youth and working-age adults with IDD are shared by state agencies, and are used to track progress and support state agencies and policy makers in developing policies and procedures.

DDS has had a long-term focus on using data to monitor policy implementation and set goals for improvement. State IDD agency staff pay attention to how Oklahoma's employment services and outcomes compare to other states. There is a commitment to improving Oklahoma's performance and a desire to be the national leader in the percentage of individuals with IDD working in the community.

DDS has made significant investments in the collection and use of employment data. Data are collected through DDS' case management system and focus on wages earned, hours worked, whether benefits are earned, and the type of job obtained.

In 2014, the agency began working to increase public awareness of employment outcome data. The intent is for stakeholders to have access to information that can help to guide policy and practice changes and to communicate that employment is the valued outcome for individuals with IDD in Oklahoma. The distribution process includes annual reports sent to all area managers to share with local teams, with follow-up from state level DDS staff to ensure the information is being used to make needed changes at the ground level.

Additionally, DDS has worked to streamline the data collection process and increase accuracy and reliability of the data collected. Improvements in the data collection process have allowed DDS to observe the impact of policy changes. During the first data collection period (spanning six months in 2016), DDS documented an 18% increase in the number of people in facility-based services who have had new experiences in their local community. The agency was able to link these changes to an increase in training and technical support to providers and case managers.

DRS and the OSDE-SES are also invested in the use of data to support employment for people with IDD. Staff from DDS and the DRS have a commitment to shared goals around data, including using data to

make stronger strategic and programmatic decisions; support quality management efforts at the state, area, and local levels; increase expectations for higher wages and individual independence; and share the data with the state legislature, businesses, state staff, individuals, families, providers, and potential future funding sources.

Program staff from the DDS and DRS, as well as their legal teams, have used an interagency agreement to lay out the parameters of the data that is shared and guidelines to ensure confidentiality. A long-term cross-agency desire has been to develop a combined data system, sharing information such as what system is providing which types of vocational services.

In response to the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Oklahoma's VR agency is developing a process to contact clients one year post closure into employment. This helps determine if the individual is still employed, and if so, if they're at the same job, how much they're earning, and if they've been promoted. It also helps identify people who are now unemployed and determine how long after closure they lost their job.

OSDE-SES staff noted the importance of Indicator 13 (transition services) and Indicator 14 (post-school employment and postsecondary education outcome) data. Oklahoma uses a computerized Individual Education Plan system. This system is beginning to be used to qualitatively examine a sample of transition goals, postsecondary goals, and transition services. OSDE-SES also makes available to local school districts an Indicator 13 self-assessment. Local special education teams can complete the self-assessment and use it to identify areas for improvement.

Currently, on an annual basis, the Indicator 14 response rate varies. This makes it difficult for OSDE-SES to identify areas of progress or use the data to inform policy and practice development. In an effort to improve the response rate, the state is identifying ways to improve contact information. Using a small advisory group, they are also obtaining input from some school districts. One group whose outcomes are more easily known to the OSDE-SES is Project SEARCH participants. Youth who participated in Project SEARCH in Oklahoma have been found more likely to access competitive employment.

Interagency Collaboration and Partnership

There is a shared statewide intra- and interagency responsibility and authority for coordinating services and achieving competitive integrated employment of youth and working-age adults with IDD. This collaboration draws on the participation of a broad consortium of stakeholders across the state. Collaborating public agencies should at a minimum include state and local education, VR, workforce, IDD and Medicaid agencies.

Several key interagency activities have helped to influence integrated employment outcomes for individuals with IDD in Oklahoma. These include the collaboration between DDS and VR, collaboration between DDS and community rehabilitation providers, and the Oklahoma Transition Council (OTC).

DDS and DRS were both located within the Oklahoma Department of Human Services at the time of the Hissom lawsuit and worked together to design employment services for members of the lawsuit class. In 1993, after much of the new system of employment services was designed, DRS moved out of the DHS and became an independent agency. More recently, DDS and DRS have worked collaboratively to facilitate integrated employment. A formal memorandum of agreement between DDS and DRS details how the two entities work together and separately on the administration of employment services to people with IDD. The memorandum of agreement is focused on providing cost-efficient services with minimum overlap of agency responsibilities and maximum use of each agency's resources, and it outlines both joint and individual agency responsibilities (Memorandum of Agreement, 2018).

Additionally, DDS and DRS central office administrators meet monthly to troubleshoot cross-system issues and identify providers needing support in implementing requirements. One third of the agencies that contract with DDS to provide employment services are also contracted to provide DRS services. This dual DDS/DRS certification allows for a seamless administration of DDS and DRS services.

The passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) strengthened DDS and

DRS collaboration and led to the joint development of new supported employment services and ongoing supports. Implemented in 2016, these include new DRS services available to people with significant disabilities, with DDS continuing to provide ongoing longer-term supports for individuals with IDD. Viewed by stakeholders as a significant change in the state, these intensive services improve options for those who may need additional assistance securing employment.

The collaborative relationship is reported to be particularly strong in the administration of sequenced services to transition-age youth with IDD participating in DRS-funded services, including the Project SEARCH program. The WIOA requirement for DRS to provide career counseling for individuals age 24 and younger has had a significant impact on the number of individuals in this age group seeking competitive employment.

The Oklahoma OSDE-SES has recently deepened its focus on collaborative relationships with other state agencies. Bolstered by the expectations outlined in WIOA, DRS and the OSDE-SES are working closely together to prepare and transition students with disabilities to competitive integrated employment. Oklahoma's public education system has a strong focus on local control. In the provision of services for transition-age youth with disabilities, this has meant that DRS engagement in schools is negotiated on a district-by-district basis, making it difficult to bring practices to scale across the state. For example, of Oklahoma's 550 school districts, about half contract with DRS to provide services to their students.

Interviewees from both DDS and Oklahoma Community-Based Providers Inc., a statewide association of organizations that provide services to individuals with IDD, reported a close and collaborative relationship in development of policy related to employment services for individuals with IDD. Beginning in 1987, DDS worked closely with the state provider association in drafting policy that prioritized employment. During this process, the association solicited and represented the concerns of constituent agencies.

The OTC was founded in 2004 to ensure that professionals who work with transition-age youth and their families have the resources they need to improve transition education, planning, and services for students with disabilities. Original OTC partners included staff of the Oklahoma Department of Education, DDS, the University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma CareerTech, and Tech-Now, Inc.

While not a formal state agency, the OTC has expanded to 34 members. Members now include staff from DRS, the Oklahoma Parent Center, several local school districts, the Oklahoma Autism Network, the Oklahoma Family Network, Able Tech of Oklahoma State University, the Dale Rogers Training Center, Tribal VR, Cornell University, the Oklahoma Disability Law Center, the Oklahoma Developmental Disabilities Council, Sonner Success, Child Welfare Services of the Oklahoma Department of Human Services, Oklahoma's Office of Juvenile Affairs, and the Down Syndrome Association of Central Oklahoma.

The OTC meets monthly to accomplish specific objectives. It has created 35 area transition teams, administered annual statewide training institutes, produced webinars on transition topics, and created a planning tool to help local transition teams develop annual plans to improve transition services and outcomes. The OTC has also facilitated new collaborative activities, including a MOU between DHS Child Welfare Services and DRS and a pilot in two areas of the state to ensure that youth in foster care are accessing VR services.

Several of the people we interviewed indicated that constrained resources have been an obstacle to interagency collaboration for transition-age youth. For example, the long waiting list for Medicaid waivers services means that DDS long-term services and supports may not be readily available once a job has been obtained through DRS-funded services. Another factor that impacts interagency collaboration is the ability of local school districts to collaborate with DRS. In many communities there is a shortage of special educators to both meet with DRS counselors and fulfill other educational expectations for students.

Leadership

Leadership is defined as taking responsibility for the transition of youth and young adults with IDD from high school to competitive integrated employment or postsecondary education, and for working-age adults with IDD from non-integrated employment services to competitive integrated employment. Leadership is dispersed through the state, regional, and local agencies that play a role in the transition and employment of these groups.

Since the closure of Hissom, leadership at DDS has had an unwavering commitment to integrated employment. In addition to a dedicated Program Supervisor of Employment Services within DDS, Oklahoma has benefited from the experience and knowledge of long-term case managers, many of whom have prioritized employment for more than 20 years. These case managers are noted for their depth of understanding regarding the importance of employment in the life of individuals with IDD. “They support it and get out there and train new case managers as they’re coming on,” reported a DDS staff member.

The formation of Oklahoma’s Transition Council is another example of value-based leadership in advancement of competitive integrated employment. This 14 year-old council, which administers a well-attended annual statewide institute on transition, is not mandated by any authority, is not owned by any particular agency or organization, and is not the outcome of a request for proposals. A leader in the state’s education field noted it was formed by a “core group of people who were really passionate about seeing something happen, and we... made it happen.”

Capacity Building

There is a sustained and significant investment in education, training, and technical assistance to support statewide goals regarding the transition of youth and young adults with IDD from school to postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment, and for working-age adults with IDD from non-integrated employment services to competitive integrated employment. These investments are targeted at the staff of state agencies, schools and providers, youth and young adults, their families, and employers.

Oklahoma has made use of wide-ranging capacity-building activities. Activities have occurred within individual state agencies but also collaboratively across agencies. Examples of collaborative capacity building include:

The Departments of Education and Rehabilitative Services have together sought the assistance of the Workforce Innovation National Technical Assistance Center to bring their Memorandum of Understanding into compliance with WIOA. Individuals in these agencies also sought the assistance of the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center in establishing the Oklahoma Transition Council and its Transition Institute.

DRS and DDS have collaborated to develop trainings for DRS program managers. These training efforts ensure local staff and DRS counselors are more educated about individuals with IDD and can support them in reaching employment goals.

In March 2018, DDS sponsored a case management symposium on supporting individuals’ employment outcomes. Keynote and breakout sessions provided opportunities for group discussion on the impact of national influences, overcoming roadblocks using person-centered planning tools, and creating unique employment pathways. DRS presented on new WIOA requirements, and partners from the Oklahoma Work Incentives Planning and Assistance Project shared information on work incentives. A total of 145 case managers and case management supervisors attended the event, along with state staff from DDS.

Individual agency capacity-building efforts were evident at all three state agencies. Each agency pointed to its own efforts to bring in experts external to Oklahoma to support evidence-based and best practices. For example DRS obtained support from Cornell University and the National Research Center for Career and Technical Education in the area of customized employment; OSDE-SES has contracted with the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). State education agency staff have also attended the NTACT capacity-building institute as a component of overall efforts to improve state special education processes and outcomes, and DDS has participated in the State Employment Leadership Network since 2011.

DDS has an on-boarding process for new case managers that includes policy, shadowing, and discussion of values relating to the employment of individuals with IDD. Also, DDS area managers provide training to case manager supervisors. These supervisors select front-line case managers to receive training on policy and procedure related to employment. Many of the DDS plan of care reviewers, who provide quality assurance around the implementation of policy pertaining to the employment, were initially case managers. The plan of care reviewers receive training on policy and can choose to participate in other relevant training opportunities.

Similar to DDS, DRS has an onboarding academy for new employees, which includes information on serving individuals with IDD. DRS has also brought other organizations in, including the Oklahoma Association of People Supporting Employment First, to provide training to its staff on job development.

Capacity-building efforts are also directed towards the broader stakeholder community. Efforts have been directed towards service providers, families, school districts, and organizations that support the transition from school to work.

Both DDS and DRS provide required training for their providers. While DDS allows agencies that contract with both themselves and DRS to elect the DRS training in lieu of its own, DRS requires these dually certified providers to participate in its required training. DDS area managers and program field representatives provide trainings and technical support on employment-related policy and procedure to agencies that hold contracts with DDS.

DRS has a required training for newly hired employment consultants that extends through the first year of employment. The two agencies have also hosted joint training sessions across the state for service providers. This activity heightens awareness of the employment service system and emphasizes an active partnership between the two systems. Offering consistent responses aligned with a clear “employment for all” goal has ensured that more stakeholders understand how to help people reach their potential. The outcome has been that the field become aware of the equal commitment of both agencies to helping those with IDD reach and sustain employment goals.

DDS has been working for several years to provide focused information and training to case managers and service provider organizations on community inclusion and employment outcome expectations. These efforts are centered on ensuring that every individual with IDD has increased opportunities for community engagement. In 2017, DDS began a quality assurance process to make sure that providers are identifying barriers to employment in individual service plans. The process began with face-to-face discussions with providers and documentation checks to confirm that all individual plans were identifying a pathway to employment.

The process revealed a big shift, showing that providers are now asking how to help individuals achieve greater community engagement and gain new employment experiences, rather than saying, “It’s not going to happen.” Technical assistance and one-on-one strategizing with these staff is creating more team-based commitment to achieving the goal of all individuals becoming engaged in their community.

The independence of Oklahoma school districts from the state OSDE-SES means that offers of training are one of the key strategies for influencing local districts’ delivery of employment-related educational and transition services. The OSDE-SES offers trainings to local school districts on transitioning students with IDD to employment and often contracts with the University of Oklahoma’s Zarrow Center for Learning and Enrichment to support these efforts. OSDE-SES also reaches out to school districts with offers of training on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Oklahoma Departments of Education and Rehabilitation Services, WIOA mandates, and how the OSDE-SES can assist with their implementation.

OSDE-SES has identified topical areas that local school districts can focus on to build their knowledge and skills. Topics include customized employment, WIOA Section 511 requirements, soft skills development, and documenting school-based activities that support positive post-school outcomes.

Each year since 2004, the OTC has provided a statewide Transition Institute: an intensive, affordable training and professional development institute on transition of students with disabilities. Total

attendance has grown from 200 to 600 participants, about 60% of whom are special education teachers and directors, and about 20–30% DRS staff and counselors. Initially bringing in experts from outside of the state, the institutes have increasingly featured local presenters. The OTC has also been developing free webinars on transition and provides support to local transition teams.

The capacity building of families has occurred through DDS contracts with Oklahoma's Family Network, a nonprofit agency that provides information and support to families on how to participate in their child's IEP development at school. The University of Oklahoma's Sooner Success program provides employment- and transition-related resources to families.

DDS staff have provided information on how to improve the individual planning process and help students develop a path to employment. A statewide presentation on communicating with youth and families also included information on DDS pre-employment services and the importance of fostering independence in transition-age youth. The presentation reinforced state-level policy and how local counterparts are responsible for key implementation strategies to support such youth.

Additional capacity-building efforts around competitive integrated employment in the state include the University of Oklahoma's provision of technical assistance to all Project SEARCH sites within Oklahoma and customized training opportunities offered to organizations and schools by the Developmental Disabilities Council of Oklahoma.

Services and Service Innovation

State agencies create opportunities for schools, providers, youth, and working-age adults with IDD and their families to use best practices and creatively develop supports for transitioning to postsecondary education and competitive employment.

Based upon analysis of data gathered through this project, Oklahoma's employment system has developed a culture of innovation to improve employment outcomes for individuals with IDD. It was one of the first state IDD agencies to prioritize

employment in the community as an outcome and to develop expectations for the number of hours an individual should be working or receiving employment services. Additionally, DDS was the first state IDD agency to pay for long-term job coaching services based upon the number of hours an individual is working in the community.

DDS has continued to invest in innovative practices. In 2014, the agency released a revised individual plan format and implementation guidelines for both residential and non-residential services to reflect an expanded employment section. The new individual plan process is being used for all home and community-based waiver services. The new section of the individual plan better illustrates using the planning process as a pathway to employment. It shows whether someone is working toward competitive, integrated employment or would like to pursue different career goals.

As Oklahoma works to implement the HCBS Final Rule (2014), DDS has developed a tool to assess service settings' compliance with quality standards. Case managers are tasked with completing the documentation, evaluating the settings, and communicating to DDS if every setting accessed by individuals they support meets the standards in the rule. The assessment has helped to inform state agency staff about how local issues are inhibiting individuals' access to full community integration and inclusion. It also supports case managers to identify unique individualized solutions to these barriers.

OTC has been deliberate in creating infrastructure to support a creative use of best practices at the local level for transition-age youth with IDD. Council goals include increasing professionals' knowledge and team capacity, organizing and holding regional meetings where local teams develop annual plans to improve transition systems, organizing and holding personnel development activities, and providing technical assistance to regional teams.

Conclusion

The High-Performing States Employment Framework provides context to the factors that permit state IDD, VR, and education agencies to support a high percentage of individuals with IDD in employment. The description of policies and practices that occur within and across state agencies in Oklahoma provides valuable information to support the implementation of federal and state laws and initiatives to improve the economic outcomes of individuals with IDD.

Preliminary findings from the Oklahoma case study suggest that there is a longitudinal component to the state's success that depends on state government stakeholders, the service provider community, and the advocacy community. Additional findings suggest that state agency policy and practices that concretely facilitate employment in the community have been of key importance in building an Employment First culture. The findings from Oklahoma illustrate that systems change is a commitment that requires a long-term dedication to reframing how services are designed to support individuals to obtain their goals.

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