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OFFICE *of the* GOVERNOR

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LOUISIANA
EMPLOYMENT FIRST
REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past 15 years, the national Employment First movement has advocated for employment of people with disabilities by public systems and programs that assist and support them. Currently 33 states, including Louisiana, have an Employment First statement. In June 2011, the Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) issued an official position statement on Employment First:

“Employment will be the primary outcome for all persons receiving OCDD services who are of working age. Employment is characterized by typical jobs with competitive compensation that are fully integrated into the workplace. “i

This report is an important step in moving this policy forward and expanding the scope of Louisiana’s employment first policy beyond individuals with developmental disabilities. With the urging of advocacy groups, and under the leadership of the Governor’s Advisory Council on Disability Affairs, an Employment First Workgroup was formed in January 2017, with the responsibility of developing a report to the Governor with recommendations for moving forward on a cross-disability Employment First effort. The workgroup held monthly meetings from February to June 2017 to get input across various constituencies which has been incorporated into this report. This report summarizes a set of comprehensive recommendations that will advance Louisiana’s Employment First goals.

Since June 2017, the Employment First Work Group has continued to meet as a forum for continued collaboration and impetus for continued implementation. This report also highlights specific initiatives undertaken since June 2017 and proposed work for the coming year.

LOUISIANA EMPLOYMENT FIRST REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The lack of workforce participation by individuals with disabilities is a major issue in Louisiana. In the state, of the 372,000 working age adults with disabilities, only 33% participate in the labor force compared to 73% in the general population. For individuals with more significant disabilities, the workforce participation rate is even lower.ⁱⁱ In addition, many of the citizens with disabilities who have jobs are underemployed, working part-time at low wages. The issue of lack of employment of individuals with disabilities in Louisiana mirrors similar challenges across the United States. The end result is that individuals with disabilities are more likely to be poor, living at the economic margins, with high reliance on public benefits to meet their needs. The impact on individual lives is significant in terms of quality of life and unfulfilled potential. However, the impact on society is also significant including the typical socio-economic impacts of individuals living in poverty (poor housing conditions, health, etc.), high demand on public benefit programs, and a major portion of the population that is not available to respond to the workforce needs of local businesses.

The question for Louisiana is “Can we do better?” The answer is clearly “Yes!” The last two decades have seen major progress in terms of recognizing unemployment of people with disabilities as a major societal issue, with a variety of initiatives here in Louisiana and across the country. Policy and practice advances, combined with a culture that increasingly fully includes and welcomes those with disabilities as part of overall embracing of diversity, has created the basis for significant increases in employment for individuals with disabilities.

Individuals with disabilities succeed in jobs and careers for the same reasons as anyone else: quality education and training, work experience at an early age, good career planning, use of personal and professional networks for connections and support, and most importantly, a good match between the individual and the job in terms of both work skills and personality. For individuals with significant disabilities, the major difference is that these processes sometimes need to be more thoughtful and deliberate, and the nature of their disability may require various accommodations and modifications, as well as access to ongoing professional supports. It has been shown quite clearly on an individual basis that individuals in Louisiana with even the most significant disabilities are capable of working successfully, with a combination of planning, creativity, successful employer engagement, use of technology and accommodations, and provision of ongoing supports. What is now needed is to make these individual successes more consistent across Louisiana, via a systematic and comprehensive effort that will result in major increases in the percentage of citizens with disabilities who are successfully employed. The end result will not only be more individuals who are economically empowered and able to maximize their self-sufficiency, but also a society that fully includes individuals with disabilities and takes full advantage of all their gifts and talents.

NATIONAL CONTEXT FOR EMPLOYMENT FIRST

Efforts in Louisiana are reflective of a variety of national initiatives to increase workforce participation and employment of individuals with disabilities. The following summarizes a number of these initiatives and the role of Louisiana within them.

National Employment First Efforts

It is important to recognize that the efforts in Louisiana are part of larger national efforts to advance employment of individuals with disabilities. Thirty-three states have an official Employment First policy (based on legislation, policy directive, etc.). Seventeen states have passed legislation stating that integrated employment is preferred over other service options. The other sixteen, including Louisiana, have a policy directive, executive order, or similar official policy statement, but not legislation. Twelve state policies, including Louisiana, are specific to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The other twenty-one are cross-disability.ⁱⁱⁱ The impact of these policies has varied. In some cases, it has either been the catalyst for or part of a comprehensive systems change effort to increase employment outcomes. In other cases, states have developed policies, but have done little in terms of making that policy a reality.

USDOJ

Over the last several years, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) has undertaken measures in numerous states, requiring states to take actions to fully comply with the integration mandate of the Americans with Disabilities and the Supreme Court's 1999 Olmstead decision.^{iv} In some cases, these agreements have been part of broad settlement agreements, while in others (e.g., Rhode Island and Oregon), the settlement agreements have focused specifically on employment and day services. These agreements have required states to shift resources and build capacity to assist more individuals to become successfully employed, and reduce reliance on facility-based services. In December 2016, Louisiana received a [findings letter](#) from DOJ, stating that the state is in violation of Title II of the ADA because of unnecessary reliance on nursing facilities to serve individuals with serious mental illness. In its findings letter, DOJ specifically noted the state's poor performance in providing supported employment services to individuals with serious mental illness.^v

In October 2016, DOJ issued Statement of the Department of Justice on Application of the Integration Mandate of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Olmstead v. L.C. to State and Local Governments' Employment Service Systems for Individuals with Disabilities.^{vi} This document outlines the various criteria DOJ will use in terms of determining whether publicly funded services are abiding by the requirements for integration under the ADA and Olmstead, and can also be utilized by states as a guide to best practices and employment.

CMS Settings Rule

In January 2014, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) issued [the final settings rule](#), with new requirements for services and settings supported by Medicaid funds. The rule stated that the setting must be integrated in and support full access of

individuals to the greater community, including opportunities to seek employment and work in competitive integrated settings, engage in community life, control personal resources, and receive services in the community, to the same degree of access as individuals not receiving Medicaid HCBS. States are required to transition services to comply with this new rule by 2021.^{vii} Given the extensive amount of Medicaid funds used to provide services to individuals with disabilities, including employment and day services, the impact of the settings rule is significant, and is in support of overall efforts for increasing employment. Each state is required to submit a transition plan to CMS, detailing how it will comply with the final settings rule. [Louisiana's plan](#) received initial approval from CMS in March 2017.^{viii} Consistent with this plan, Louisiana will terminate waiver funding for individuals receiving subminimum wage as of March 2020.

WIOA

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was passed by Congress in 2014. WIOA replaced the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, and consists of four titles: Title I – The Workforce Development System; Title II – Adult Education and Literacy; Title III – Wagner-Peyser; and Title IV – Vocational Rehabilitation. An overall theme of this legislation is to advance employment and career opportunities for individuals with barriers to employment, including those with disabilities.

WIOA places new requirements on the general workforce system that serves all individuals in terms of responsiveness to the needs of individuals with disabilities, makes the public Vocational Rehabilitation system (Louisiana Workforce Commission's Louisiana Rehabilitation Services - LRS) one of four core workforce programs, and makes significant changes regarding LRS. Among these changes are a stronger definition for a successful employment outcome under LRS, "competitive integrated employment"; new requirements for LRS regarding students with disabilities transitioning to employment (Pre-Employment Transition Services); and, new restrictions on the use of subminimum wage. WIOA also sent a clear message about the capabilities of individuals with disabilities, in line with Employment First.

As noted in the preamble to the draft WIOA regulations:

"The foundation of the Vocational Rehabilitation program is the principle that individuals with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities, are capable of achieving high quality, competitive integrated employment when provided the necessary skills and supports."

The preamble also stated:

"Congress makes clear that youth with significant disabilities must be given every opportunity to receive the services necessary to ensure the maximum potential to achieve competitive integrated employment."^{ix}

States also are required to ensure that young people, before transitioning into subminimum wage employment, have received pre-employment transition services that

expose them to the opportunities and value of competitive integrated employment. States are also required to set aside at least 15% of their federal vocational rehabilitation funding to provide "pre-employment transition services" to students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services."

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services is providing pre-employment transition services through contracts with vendors throughout the State. Some of these vendors are local departments of education. Through provider training and monitoring, OCDD has been working to ensure compliance with the Section 511 requirements that any students transitioning to subminimum wage facilities have received pre-employment transition services that encourage them to consider competitive integrated employment instead of facility based supports.

More generally, the intent of the WIOA legislation is to "foster better alignment of Federal investments in job training, to integrate service delivery across programs and improve efficiency in service delivery, and to ensure that the workforce system is job-driven and matches employers with skilled individuals."

In order to accomplish this, WIOA requires States to plan across core programs and include this planning process in the Unified or Combined State Plans. The intent is "to promote a shared understanding of the workforce needs within each State and fosters development of more comprehensive and integrated approaches, such as career pathways and sector strategies, for addressing the needs of businesses and workers." As an additional assurance that this necessary collaboration will occur, WIOA requires States and local agencies as well as other collaborators to enhance coordination and collaboration to revitalize and be a more responsive service delivery.

In the Governor's Combined State Plan for the State of Louisiana (July 1, 2018-June 30, 2020), Louisiana outlines a four-year workforce development strategy for all Louisiana citizens and industry. The Louisiana Combined State Plan partner programs are—

- Career and technical education programs authorized under the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (20 U.S.C. 2301 et seq.)
- Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program (42 U.S.C. 601 et seq.)
- Employment and Training Programs under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (Programs authorized under section 6(d)(4) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(d)(4)))
- Work programs authorized under section 6(o) of the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008 (7 U.S.C. 2015(o))
- Trade Adjustment Assistance for Workers Programs (Activities authorized under chapter 2 of Title II of the Trade Act of 1974 (19 U.S.C. 2271 et seq.))

- Jobs for Veterans State Grants Program (Programs authorized under 38, U.S.C. 4100 et. seq.)
- Unemployment Insurance Programs (Programs authorized under State unemployment compensation laws in accordance with applicable Federal law)
- Senior Community Service Employment Program (Programs authorized under Title V of the Older Americans Act of 1965 (42 U.S.C. 3056 et seq.))
- Employment and training activities carried out by the Department of Housing and Urban Development
 - Community Services Block Grant Program (Employment and training activities carried out under the Community Services Block Grant Act (42 U.S.C. 9901 et seq.))*
 - Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Program (Programs authorized under section 212 of the Second Chance Act of 2007 (42 U.S.C. 17532)).

It is through established partnerships and collaboration between and among these “partner programs” that Louisiana can plan to meet the emerging demands of industry labor needs such as being equipped and able to respond to the highest growth occupation, according to the state’s projections that will occur in the medical field (projections estimate the Health Care and Social Assistance Industry growing by 41,446 through 2024). Individuals with disabilities are among those who should benefit from these emerging partnerships.

Louisiana’s State plan also specifically offers an analysis of the current level of integration of services for individuals with disabilities within the workforce system, and sets goals for ensuring accessibility and advancing employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.

NGA Better Bottom Line

The National Governor’s Association *Better Bottom Line* initiative was a yearlong initiative focused on the “employment challenges that affect individuals with intellectual and other significant disabilities and the role that both state government and business can play in facilitating and advancing opportunities for these individuals to be gainfully employed in the competitive labor market.” This effort helped call attention to the national scope of the lack of participation in the workforce by people with disabilities, and efforts that states can undertake to improve employment outcomes.

LOUISIANA SERVICE SYSTEM

There are a number of agencies available to Louisiana's citizens with disabilities needing assistance with their employment needs. The following summarizes the various agencies that fund and provide employment services, and agencies that also serve in related support roles.

Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD)

The Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities (OCDD) provides a broad range of services for individuals with developmental disabilities, including employment services and supports. OCDD funding supports individuals in both individual and group/enclave employment. The vast majority of funding for OCDD is provided via Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). Services are coordinated via [10 regional Human Service Districts or Local Government Entities](#). With an annual day and employment services budget of approximately \$34 million, OCDD serves approximately 5,000 individuals. Sixty-eight percent of these individuals are served in facility-based services, with 32% served in integrated individual and group employment services. There are approximately 1,700 individuals on the waiting list for OCDD day and employment services.^x

Office of Behavioral Health (OBH)

The Office of Behavioral Health (OBH) provides statewide authority and accountability for all behavioral health care for Louisiana citizens. The mission of OBH is to lead the effort to build and provide a comprehensive integrated, person-centered system of prevention and treatment services that promote recovery and resilience for all citizens of Louisiana.

The OBH services are designed to address the priority populations of:

- Adults with serious mental illness.
- Children and youth with serious emotional/behavioral issues and their families.
- Adults and adolescents with substance use/addictive disorders including compulsive gambling and tobacco.
- Persons with co-occurring disorders.
- HIV populations.
- Pregnant women and women with dependent children.
- Persons in need of forensic-related mental health treatment.

The OBH assures public behavioral health services are accessible, family-driven, have a positive impact, are culturally and clinically competent, and are delivered in partnership with all stakeholders including those who assist with maintaining and sustaining employment.

The OBH services are supported by federal grants, statutory dedicated funds, and state general funds, which provide for ongoing efforts to establish partnerships and to create an integrated system of care to enhance access to services, while controlling costs and monitoring quality. Overall, OBH plays a significant role in helping those with behavioral

health needs by managing services provided to citizens of Louisiana with health needs and challenges.

At present, employment activities are not a Medicaid-reimbursable service for individuals with behavioral health conditions. While OBH continues to explore opportunities for the integration of Supported Employment as a service option through Medicaid, they encourage the implementation of employment activities utilizing other funding sources such as Mental Health Block Grant (MHBG) dollars. In point, several LGEs utilize MHBG funding to implement employment programs. In addition, service recipients may access employment services offered through the Office of Workforce Development and Louisiana Rehabilitation Services.

Louisiana Workforce Commission (LWC) Office of Workforce Development – General Workforce Services

LWC has oversight of a full array of services to assist individuals and businesses with their workforce needs. This includes the Office of Workforce Development, which has oversight of Louisiana Rehabilitation Services (LRS) specifically for individuals with disabilities, as well as the general workforce services available to any individual needing employment assistance. General workforce services available to all job seekers needing assistance are provided both online and in-person, with primary in-person access via the state’s Career Solutions Centers (approximately 60 locations statewide). Via the workforce system’s Wagner-Peyser funded labor exchange services, per the most recent data, 18,600 of the individuals served were identified as having a disability (4.6% of all individuals served).^{xi}

LRS is the state’s public vocational rehabilitation program, authorized under the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), and assists persons with disabilities in their desire to obtain or maintain employment and/or achieve independence in their communities by providing rehabilitation services and working cooperatively with business and other community resources. LRS currently has approximately 12,000 individuals receiving services, closing approximately 3,700 cases per year, 2,400 of which are successfully closed into employment. For the Vocational Rehabilitation Program administered by LRS, the state contributes 21.3% of funding and the federal government contributes 78.7%. In FY 2016, total funding for Vocational Rehabilitation Program was \$45.5 million.

Under WIOA, the state’s Workforce Investment Council serves as the state workforce development board (SWDB). Louisiana is split into eight (8) workforce regions, and 15 Local Workforce Development Areas of which has its own workforce development board. The state receives three types of WIOA funding which are administered primarily by the local workforce development boards. For FY 2017, these allocations are as follows:

- Adult - \$15.2 million
- Dislocated Worker - \$15.6 million
- Youth - \$15.9 million

Under WIOA, individuals with disabilities are considered to be among those with barriers to employment, and can access services funded via these WIOA funds.

Department of Education and Local Educational Agencies

The Louisiana Department of Education (LDE) has the responsibility to provide education management, education policy, and accountability for the state's elementary and secondary education system through Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and public schools. Together, the LDE and LEAs are committed to ensuring ALL students, including students with disabilities, are prepared for successful lives beyond the K-12 system. This vision for all students extends beyond achieving ambitious goals and mastering rigorous academic standards. Ultimately, the goal is to prepare students with the skills they will need to achieve success as they transition to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living.

As of February 2017, approximately 721,200 students were being served in Louisiana schools. Nearly 12 percent were students with disabilities per the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Additionally, approximately six percent students were being served with Individualized Accommodation Plans (IAPs) under the provisions of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

Research has identified key predictors of post school success for students with disabilities. One predictor is the student leaving high school with a diploma. Most employment opportunities require a minimal of a high school diploma. Tremendous progress has been made in the rate of students with disabilities earning high school diplomas. In 2005, almost 14 percent of Louisiana students with disabilities exited high school with a diploma. By 2014, this number had more than tripled to approximately 43 percent. Nationally, in 2014, 63 percent of students with disabilities exited with a high school diploma, 20 percent higher than Louisiana's rate. While remarkable headway has been made, there is still more work to do to ensure all students have opportunities for post-secondary success.

In 2014, Louisiana implemented significant changes to diploma pathways for all students including students with disabilities. With the introduction of the [Jump Start career and technical education program](#) (2014), the [alternate pathways to a diploma for students eligible for Act 833 \(2014\)](#), and the diploma pathway for those assessed on an alternate assessment, all students with disabilities now have a path to a diploma that will prepare them for life-long learning, independence, and employment.

Another predictor of success includes community experiences, occupational courses, and work-based learning experiences. The Jump Start pathway allows students to focus their high school experiences on vocational/career training while earning credits toward a diploma. Likewise, the alternate pathway to a diploma for our students on alternate assessment provides a vocational, career focused path. Graduation requirements of these pathways include career courses and community based work-based learning experiences based on student interest. Thus several research based key predictors of success are embedded within these pathways leading to a diploma.

To support implementation of these diploma pathways, the LDE launched a [first-of-its-kind grant](#), funded by the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), for six

LEAs to create partnerships to increase opportunities for students with disabilities assessed on an alternate assessment. These partnerships will identify, build and implement vocational training and community work-based learning programs on community college and university campuses. .

Partnerships and programs will serve as models for additional program development and statewide expansion. Additionally, along with LDE, partners will work in state and regional teams to create guidance for other schools systems to use for creating and expanding effective programs across all ages and grades for this population of students.

Programs are scheduled to launch in the 2018-2019 school year. Guidance documents will be issued the summer of 2018.

Social Security Administration

Many individuals with disabilities receive cash benefits from the Social Security Administration, via either Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Childhood Disability Benefits (CDB) (also known as Disabled Adult Child (DAC), Disabled Widowers Benefits (DWB), and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Individuals on SSI typically receive health care via Medicaid, and individuals on SSDI, CDB/DAC and DWB typically receive health care via Medicare. Social Security has a number of work incentive programs [PB2] to encourage individuals with disabilities to pursue employment, including Ticket to Work, Student Earned Income Exclusion, Plans for Achieving Self Support, Impairment Related Work Expenses, Trial Work Period, gradual benefit reduction and Employer Subsidy and Special Conditions. Additionally, Medicaid and Medicare offer work incentives such as 1619(b), the Medicaid Waiver Spend-Down, the Extended Period of Medicare Coverage and Medicare Savings Programs. The Social Security Administration funds the state's two Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) programs (Louisiana Benefits Planning Services at LSUHSC Human Development Center, and the Advocacy Center of Louisiana), which provide benefits counseling to Social Security beneficiaries in an effort to encourage them to go to work. WIPA projects are funded by the Social Security Administration (SSA) in every state to provide information and benefits planning to enable beneficiaries with disabilities to make informed choices about work. WIPA projects hire, train and certify Community Work Incentives Coordinators (CWICs) who work with individuals receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and/or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to provide in-depth counseling about benefits and the effect of work on those benefits.

Individuals in Louisiana receiving Social Security disability benefits, between ages of 18-64[i]

- SSDI: 141,922
- SSI: 112,852
- Both SSI and SSDI: 30,128

All WIPA services are free of charge. There is never a cost to the beneficiary for services provided under a WIPA project.

Medicaid

The state's Medicaid program funds health coverage for many individuals with disabilities, as well as a variety of home and community based services. Among available home and community based services are employment-related assistance and supports, including ongoing post-placement supports, offered through waiver programs.

Louisiana's Medicaid Match Rate for 2017 is 64% - the federal government pays 64 cents out of every \$1.00 of Louisiana's standard Medicaid expenses, with the state responsible for the remainder (some Medicaid expenses require a lower state match).

The Advocacy Center of Louisiana

The Advocacy Center of Louisiana (AC) is the protection and advocacy (P&A) program for Louisiana. Each state has a P&A agency that protects the legal rights of individuals with disabilities. The Advocacy Center provides 6 types of assistance: a) information and referral; b) legal assistance; c) systems advocacy; d) outreach and training; e) legislative information and education; f) investigations of abuse and neglect.

Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council

Each state has a Developmental Disabilities (DD) Council. DD Councils are made up of voluntary members, with paid staff to support the Council's activities. By law, the majority of members on DD Councils must have a developmental disability or be a family member to a person with developmental disability. DD Councils focus on creating programs and advocating policy that empowers individuals with developmental disabilities that allows them to participate as an equal member of society. The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council leads and promotes advocacy, capacity building, and systemic change to improve the quality of life for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

LSU Human Development Center

The Human Development Center (HDC) at Louisiana State University is the state's University Center of Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Education, Research and Service (UCEDD), part of a national network of 67 UCEDDs. The mission of the Human Development Center (HDC) is to provide leadership and innovation in interdisciplinary education, community service, research, and to disseminate information to strengthen and increase the capacity of local communities to support and include individuals with disabilities and their families in all aspects of life in the community. HDC provides a variety of training and technical assistance services.

Service Providers

Louisiana has a network of private non-profit organizations that provide a variety of services and supports to individuals with disabilities, primarily through contracts with various state agencies, as well as educational agencies, and other funding sources. These agencies provide intensive assistance to individuals with disabilities, including providing assistance with employment needs, such as placement planning, job development, and provision of post-placement supports. Service providers vary in size, types of services, and populations served. Some of these providers, typically referred to as *community rehabilitation programs* (CRPs), focus exclusively on employment services, while others

may provide a full range of day and employment services that also included sheltered workshops, non-work facility based day programs, community-based non-work programs, etc. Some agencies that provide day and employment services also provide other services including residential services. In addition to community rehabilitation providers, there are a variety of other organizations that assist and support individuals with disabilities with employment-related needs, including support coordination, assistive technology, etc.

Additionally, the state has four Centers for Independent Living, consumer-controlled, community-based, cross-disability, nonresidential private nonprofit agencies, providing an array of independent living services, authorized by the federal Rehabilitation Act. Centers for Independent Living offer at a minimum, the following core services: a) information & referral; b) independent living skills training; c) individual and systems advocacy; d) peer counseling; e) transition assistance from nursing homes and other institutions to community-based residences; f) assisting individuals to avoid institutional placement; g) transition of youth with significant disabilities after completion of secondary education to postsecondary life.

LOUISIANA DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT BY THE NUMBERS

	Louisiana	U.S.
<i>Disability Population</i>		
% of population with disabilities ^{xii}	14.9%	12.6%
<i>Employment</i>		
% of general population age 18-64 employed ^{xiii}	73.0%	76.0%
% of individuals age 18-64 with disabilities employed ^{xiv}	33.0%	34.9%
Employment Gap between those with and without disabilities ^{xv}	40.0%	41.1%
<i>Poverty^{xvi}</i>		
% of individuals with disabilities living in poverty	30%	27.1%
Poverty Gap: difference between those with and without disabilities	14.2%	14.8%
<i>Service System</i>		
Public Vocational Rehabilitation – Rehabilitation Rate ^{xvii}	64.0%	56.5%
Developmental Disability System - % employed ^{xviii}	15%	17%
Developmental Disability System - % not working that would like a job in the community ^{xix}	49%	41%
Community Mental Health System - % employed ^{xx}	18.0%	24.5%
General Workforce Development System - % of customers with disabilities ^{xxi}	4.6%	3.7%

The data tells us that, 30% of IWD live in poverty, 14.2 % represent the poverty gap, and 49% of individuals with IDD indicate that they would like to work yet only 15% are actually employed. Based on this data, LA needs to initiate a strategic plan that identifies the “next steps” to ameliorate the situation.

OPPORTUNITIES

There are a number of opportunities that are helping to serve as catalysts for advancing employment and an Employment First effort in Louisiana.

1. The national efforts outlined above and the role of Louisiana within them provides strong impetus for Louisiana to consider a long-term strategic effort to increase the workforce participation of individuals with disabilities.
2. As part of Louisiana's Home and Community Based Services Transition Plan, OCDD will no longer allow payment of subminimum wage as of 2020, which will serve as a catalyst for improved employment outcomes.
3. OCDD has an existing Employment First statement, which the state can build on in a cross-disability fashion. OCDD must engage in policy and planning to take this EF policy to the next level. This policy was first introduced in June 2011 yet the data from then to now shows little, if any improvement in employment access.
4. Louisiana's unemployment rate is in a downward trend, with increasing labor shortages and need for skilled workers. This increase on the "demand side" opens up opportunities for individuals who have not traditionally been in the labor force. This fact evidences the need for an increase in opportunities for IWD to access existing employment training programs offered to the general workforce and job seekers.
5. A strategic effort to advance employment of citizens with disabilities in Louisiana will result in reduced reliance on public benefits and services, and increased tax revenues from individuals going to work, and other positive ripple effects to the economy of Louisiana. The legislature must be made aware of the need for IWD to access employment in order to change their individual economic outlook. According to a Cost Benefit Analysis of the Louisiana Rehabilitation Vocational Rehabilitation Program Fiscal Years 2009-2013 conducted by D. Davis, Ph.D. and K. Goidel, Ph.D., Louisiana State University, for every \$1 spend on vocational rehabilitation services, the return on investment is \$16.99 calculated out five years. Additionally, over a 5 year period, the closed cases with employment from 2009 to 2013 generated an estimated \$65 million in state and local taxes.

CHALLENGES

There are a number of major challenges that Louisiana faces in expanding employment for its citizens with disabilities. The following is a summary of some of these challenges.

Insufficient resources

Insufficient resources to provide necessary supports and assistance are an ongoing challenge. A major issue is a lack of state funding which results in the inability of Louisiana to draw down federal funding to provide employment services and supports. As a result, Louisiana is struggling to maintain the services it has to assist individuals with disabilities to succeed in employment, and is leaving significant federal funds “on the table”.

- **LRS Match Issue**

For every \$3.69 in federal funds, the state must come up with a \$1 match. LRS has a federal allotment of \$53 million per year. LRS currently draws down approximately \$33 million per year. This lack of match is undermining the ability of LRS to meet the employment needs of Louisiana citizens with disabilities. Essentially LRS has only 2/3 of its potential resources. With approximately \$5 million of additional funds in state appropriations LRS could draw down its full federal allotment, and operate at full capacity. Currently LRS cannot provide services to new consumers and must put all eligible consumers on a deferred waiting list, which among other things, increases pressure on Medicaid waiver funded services. In addition, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) mandates that 15% of the federal vocational rehabilitation funds be spent on Pre-Employment Transition Services for students with disabilities transitioning from school to postsecondary education programs and employment.

- **Medicaid Match Issue**

Louisiana has a match rate for Medicaid of 64% (i.e., for every dollar of Medicaid expenditures, the federal government provides 64 cents and Louisiana provides 36 cents). Many employment services and supports for individuals with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual and developmental disabilities are funded by Medicaid.

- Approximately 15,000 people are currently on the waiting list for Medicaid waiver services under the NOW Waiver (13 year waiting list).
- Approximately 1,700 individuals are on the waiting list for Supports waiver.

Additional state funding of Medicaid would allow OCDD to draw down additional federal funds, and reduce the waiting list for services.

Culture of employment

There is too often a lack of expectation of employment of individuals with disabilities. This lack of expectation can be found among individuals with disabilities, their families, support coordinators, educators, and policymakers. Expectation provides people with something to look forward to - an anticipation for something in the future. Knowing that other people have expectations of you supports self-confidence about your future.

Further, the lack of an expectation of employment is evidenced in state systems and individualized programs. A focus on segregated programs and disability (opposed to ability) restricts the ambition and accomplishment of the individuals the system is intended to support. Regardless of policy and programmatic improvements implemented, little progress will be actualized in employing individuals with disabilities until there is a true culture change – to an expectation of employment of individual with disabilities, including those with the most complex employment support needs.

Preparing students with disabilities for post-secondary opportunities

Transitioning from high school to post-secondary life is a challenging time for all students, including students with disabilities. All students deserve an education that prepares them for this transition as well as life beyond. The LDE is committed to a vision wherein all students with disabilities are prepared for post-secondary transition, employment, continued learning, and independent living. As outlined earlier, progress has been made in moving this vision forward. Despite this overall progress, barriers remain.

Critical to the success of every high school student, in particular those with disabilities, is the achievement of the following:

All stakeholders, from students and family members to classroom teachers to LEA administrators must collaboratively build:

- a culture of high expectations that all students, regardless of disability, are capable of success, both academic and vocational success,
- a culture of high expectations that all students, regardless of disability, are capable of postsecondary employment and continued life-long learning at institutes of higher education such as universities and community colleges, and/or vocational training organizations, and
- opportunities for students with disabilities such as community based academic and vocational training opportunities, based on student needs and interests as identified by person-centered planning.

PROPOSED STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

Increasing employment for individuals with disabilities to a level that starts to approach the level of the general population requires a comprehensive long-term strategic effort. The following are recommended areas to be addressed as part of such an effort. While each of these on their own will have some level of impact, together they will result in significant advancement in the workforce participation level of Louisiana citizens with disabilities.

Definition

Develop a clear cross-agency employment definition of employment based on WIOA definition that is considered as the goal for all individuals

- Full-time or part-time work at minimum wage or higher.
- Wages & benefits similar to those without disabilities performing the same work
- Fully integrated with co-workers without disabilities.
- Must be in a location typically found in the community.
- Both within the work unit and entire workplace, employee with a disability must interact with co-workers, customers, and vendors to the same extent as employees without disabilities in comparable positions.
- Provides opportunities for advancement similar to those without disabilities in comparable positions.

Expanded Employment First policy

Via policy issuance or legislation, consider development of a cross-agency and cross-disability Employment First policy to expand on the current OCDD statement. Within this policy consider language that it will be the policy of Louisiana that every effort will be made to ensure that all Louisiana citizens with disabilities are working to their maximum ability and maximum self-sufficiency. Use current Executive Orders, legislation, and public policies in other states as examples to work from.^{xxii}

Proposed policies

Effective public policies are critically important for providing the basis for advancement of Employment First, and expanding employment for Louisiana citizens with disabilities. It is recommended that the following policies be adopted, and once adopted, that those responsible for implementation be trained to ensure they are effective.

- **Employment as required part of planning process**
OCDD, La Department of Education/ Local Education Agency, and other agencies that provide ongoing services and supports to individuals with disabilities conduct an annual planning process (e.g., Education – IEP: Individualized Education Plan; OCDD – ISP: Individual Service Plan). It is recommended that a policy be developed that requires as part of any annual planning process, an exploration of employment options for those of working age (16 to 64). For those individuals not currently interested in or able to work at the current time, require full documentation of reasons for non-consideration of employment, and steps that will be taken to address the issues identified. ([Ohio](#) and [New Jersey](#) developmental disability agencies have examples of such policies^{xxiii}.) In addition, under Section 511 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA),

individuals currently earning sub-minimum wage must receive career counseling to explore competitive integrated employment on an annual basis; it is recommended that this process be linked with other annual planning processes (IEP, ISP, etc.).

- **Requirements for informed choice regarding employment**

In connection with the previous policy, develop a policy that requires that consideration of employment align with guidelines of U.S. Department of Justice in terms of informed choice (which are also best practice) to ensure that individuals fully understand their options and benefits of employment.^{xxiv}

Individuals and families, when initially offered the option of employment in the community, may initially express hesitancy or reluctance. Therefore, affirmative steps must be taken to ensure individuals have an opportunity to make an informed choice about working in integrated settings, including:

- Providing information about the benefits of working in integrated settings.
- Facilitating visits or other experiences in such settings: *situational assessment, informational interviews, job shadowing, job tours, etc.*
- Peer-to-Peer Opportunities: Individuals with disabilities & families.
- Identify and address any concerns or objections raised by individual or relevant decision-maker.

- **Transition**

Given the critical importance of transition to adult life as key to employment and career success as an adult, development of the following policies are recommended:

- Policy mandating employment planning beginning no later than age 16, with a recommended age of 14 and aligned with the above policy recommendation regarding annual discussions regarding employment and informed choice.
- Have a goal of minimum of 2 employment experiences before leaving school, with the expectation and recommendation that at least one of these be a paid work experience.
- Develop standards regarding employment experiences during transition that are reflective of typical teenage work experiences.
- Incorporate transition, including specifically addressing career development, into teacher education requirements.

Cross-Agency Collaboration and Coordination

Individuals with disabilities often receive services and supports from multiple organizations and service providers. Coordination of these efforts is important to ensure a seamless approach to service delivery and avoiding duplication of services. Progress in this area is already underway. As a central component of its work under a federal Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program grant, Louisiana has now convened an ongoing Employment First Workgroup, which meets monthly, and has as its

goal to promote collaboration and coordination. Recommendations in terms of cross-agency collaboration and coordination include the following:

- **Development of multi-agency guide**
Develop a guidance document that lists the various employment-related services individuals with disabilities are eligible for, including the agency, services, eligibility criteria, and how services can be accessed. As a minimum, this should include: LRS, OCDD, Mental Health Services, general workforce development (both adult and youth services), education, WIPA programs, Social Security, Medicaid, and Ticket to Work.
- **State coordination**
Examine the current structure of coordination at the state level, including memorandums of understanding, inter-agency work groups, etc., and determine methods for enhancement to ensure ongoing coordination and collaboration. Within these efforts address such areas as: a) consistent policies in terms of an Employment First philosophy; b) defining the roles of various agencies and entities; c) coordination of services for common clients/customers; d) data sharing; e) development of common intake procedures and service access points; f) consistent requirements across common service providers; g) common guidance to service providers regarding the roles of each agency, referral procedures, etc.; h) common guidance to individuals and families regarding the roles of each agency, referral procedures, etc.;
- **Regional coordination structure**
Develop structure of regional cross-agency entities that meet to share expertise and resources with a focus on addressing the needs of specific individuals, as well as building regional collaboration at a systems level, mirroring state coordination issues. A first step in this process will be to identify existing regional collaborations so that regions can capitalize on already existing regional collaborations. Initial fact gathering has revealed productive informal and formal collaborations already operating in some regions.

Data and reporting

Effective use of data is key to increasing employment of Louisiana citizens with disabilities, in terms of measuring progress, accountability, and identifying areas for improvement. Specific recommendations regarding data include the following:

- **Enhance existing data reporting systems for employment**
Identify current data collection on employment of individuals with disabilities, and determine how this data collection can be enhanced to more clearly monitor progress on employment of people with disabilities. Sources include: LRS, OCDD, mental health, workforce development, and education. Consideration should be given to investing in enhancements of current data systems to better measure provider and overall system performance.

- **Reporting of data**
Develop mechanisms for sharing of data among agencies and stakeholders. Consider development of an annual report on employment that reports and analyzes data across agencies.

Increased revenue and resources

As with any other individual, employment success for persons with disabilities requires that the individual maximize their own involvement in their job search and take as much initiative on their own as possible, with the support of their family and personal network. At the same time, as with many other individuals, persons with disabilities often need assistance in finding employment, in part due to a general lack of knowledge and skills regarding the job search process and pursuing a career path (which many people experience), as well as issues specific to their disability. As result, there is a need to have professional employment services and assistance available to individuals to help them enter and succeed in the workforce, and the necessary public funds available to pay for these professional employment assistance and supports.

However, having sufficient resources to meet the demand for employment assistance from various public and non-profit agencies has been an ongoing issue in Louisiana for many years, and the state budget situation continues to create ongoing challenges. The success of an Employment First effort is not wholly dependent on additional resources, and there are many things that can be accomplished without significant increases in resources. At the same time, the need for an investment of resources that will allow more individuals to obtain the necessary assistance to succeed in employment cannot be ignored, if Louisiana is to significantly increase the number of individuals with disabilities participating in the workforce.

Simply put, many individuals with significant disabilities cannot enter and succeed in the mainstream workforce without publicly funded professional assistance. It also needs to be recognized that increases in resources are an investment not only in individuals but society as a whole, reducing the reliance on public supports and assistance over the long-term, while transforming individuals into working, tax-paying citizens. The following are recommendations regarding increasing resources for employment assistance.

- **LRS Match**
As noted above, LRS has a federal allotment of \$53 million per year, but only draws down approximately \$33 million per year, resulting in 1/3 of potential VR resources that could be used to assist individuals with disabilities not being accessed. To address this issue, via state funding and other sources, a strategic effort needs to be made to increase the drawdown of federal vocational rehabilitation funds. Conduct research and consider additional successful funding strategies, incentives and mechanisms that ensure all service dollars are allocated in a quality, cost-effective and responsive manner.
- **Medicaid Match**

As noted, the federal government provides 64 cents of every dollar of Medicaid expenses in Louisiana. With additional state funding, the availability of employment services via Medicaid HCBS could be expanded, particularly for individuals with developmental disabilities. It is recommended that a strategic effort be made to increase state funding to Medicaid in order to leverage additional federal funding to increase the number of individuals able to access employment services through Medicaid waivers. Also, in consideration of the current DD data, the average annual cost to provide employment and day services to an individual with IDD is \$6,800 annually, yet the overwhelming majority of participants (68%) are in facility-based services. Developing a method to track this employment implementation and access indicator will reveal the extent of Employment First implementation change over time (and areas that need continual monitoring and adjustments).

- **Ticket to Work**

Every individual in Louisiana on SSI and SSDI between the ages of 18 to 64 is eligible for Ticket to Work from the Social Security Administration. If an individual with a Ticket goes to work at a certain earning levels (at least \$850 per month in 2018) and maintains employment, a qualified entity (Employment Network) can generate revenue spread out over several years, totaling approximately \$27,000 to \$28,000.^{xxv} Currently there are 270,000 individuals eligible for Ticket in Louisiana; however less than 4,000 individuals in Louisiana have assigned their Tickets.^{xxvi} It is likely that many Social Security beneficiaries are going to work in Louisiana without assigning their Tickets and therefore leaving money “on the table”. Consideration should be given regarding how to systematically identify individuals who are Ticket eligible and are considering going to work at an earnings level sufficient to generate Ticket revenue, and how to systematically have their Tickets assigned in order to generate additional revenue. (Note: Ticket payments can be combined with other resources being used to assist an individual with their employment needs. Specifically, CMS guidance confirms that ticket to work may be used concurrently with Medicaid waiver funding^{xxvii}..

An additional strategy that should be considered is marketing the Employer as Employment Network model of the Ticket program. The Employer Employment Network (EN) model is defined in the Ticket to Work program (Ticket program) as a business model that includes the EN serving as the beneficiary's employer or an employer's agent.

- **Federal systems change initiatives**

On occasion, the federal government issues requests for proposals to fund various systems change and demonstration efforts. Recent examples of these include the *Administration on Community Living Partnerships in Employment projects*, *U.S. Department of Labor Disability Employment Initiative*, and the *U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy's Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Projects*. These types of initiatives, if utilized

strategically, can bring resources into Louisiana that support advancing Employment First.

As an outgrowth of the taskforce’s work, Louisiana has already begun to take advantage of these resources. The State applied for and is receiving assistance under the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy’s Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Project. This finalized report incorporates the initial work under the EFSLMP project. It is recommended that the State continue to pursue and take full advantage of these federally funded systems change and demonstration efforts and that such efforts be used effectively as a catalyst for advancing employment of citizens with disabilities.

Rate structures

The current rate structures provide disincentives for employment in the community for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. There is a need for revision of OCDD rate structures to provide incentives for employment. With the release of the HCBS Settings Rule and the upcoming changes within OCDD, OCDD is actively evaluating the rate structure for both employment supports and more individualized community based services. LRS rates were recently reformed giving providers incentives for higher quality jobs. The current LRS rates for employment-related services have been in existence with some occasional adjustments of amounts to be paid at various milestones and with the addition of a one-time incentive payment for a “high quality” placement. These rates MUST be adjusted to reflect the actual cost of doing business and also the cost of providing services to a wide variety of individuals who all have differing support needs and resultant case costs.

Employment service capacity-building

Many individuals with disabilities are reliant on Louisiana’s network of service providers for assistance in helping them find employment. In order to advance employment, it is critical that the service provider network have sufficient resources as previously noted, but also be of consistent quality, with highly competent staff with the skills necessary to assist citizens with disabilities to find and succeed in employment and advance in their careers. Specific strategies to increase the capacity of the service system include the following:

- **Recommend/Consider staff competencies**
Identify the expected staff competencies of employment service providers, using national standards (e.g., [APSE Supported Employment Competencies^{xxviii}](#)) as a resource. Incorporate these standards into the requirements for service providers, and develop mechanisms for ensuring individual staff competency (e.g., [APSE Certified Employment Support Professional^{xxix}](#)). Nationally, there is a certification that has been developed and initiated that is the Certified Employment Support Professional (CESP). In several states, state agencies that fund employment services for IWD have implemented requirements for certification for Community Rehabilitation Programs that provide these

employment services. This is one method to ensure that IWD receive quality, state-of-the-art employment supports and services.)

- **Staff development**

Examine current methods and standards for service provider staff training and development and consider enhancements to ensure consistency connected with required competencies and wide availability. (Consider [ACRE – Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators standards](#)^{xxx} as an option in terms of training curriculums.) In the face of limited resources, it is imperative that Louisiana state agencies use in-state resources to provide service provider training and technical assistance and to keep our precious federal and state monies within our state. The HDC at Louisiana State University Health Center has been providing a competency-based series of CRP employment training for decades. All of these curricula are based on the national APSE employment standards and guidelines.

In light of limited resources, it will be useful to explore cross agency training in employment best practices to enhance capability of both providers and agency staff. The Work Group has identified a number of possible avenues for cross training and should map out think about next steps in capitalizing on these possibilities. As described above, the HDC at LSU has extensive expertise that can be available jointly to agencies working collaboratively. Each of the 15 Workforce Development Boards hold weekly staff training and development sessions that can be used to train and educate staff from other systems about the workforce system and to educate both workforce staff and other agency staff in best practices for advancing employment for people with disabilities, particularly customized employment. In many regions, the LDE's are already working with LRS pre-employment transition vendors, some of whom may also be OCDD providers. There are good opportunities here for cost-effective cross training.

- **Workforce development system resources**

As part of its responsibilities for ensuring that Louisiana businesses have a well-trained work force, work with the workforce development system on identifying strategies and resources to address needs for a well-trained workforce within the disability service system. Partner with LWC to develop strategies to enhance inclusion of IWD into the American Job Centers (AJC) menu of services. Explore with LWC planning committee ways to use the three types of monies the state receives of WIOA funding. For FY 2017, these allocations, which can be used for IWDs are as follows:

- Adult - \$15.2 million
- Dislocated Worker - \$15.6 million
- Youth - \$15.9 million

- **Career Solutions Center assessment**

Develop and implement statewide standards for annual required assessment of the American Job Centers required under WIOA, and use as basis of ongoing capacity-building to increase capacity to work with job seekers with disabilities. Create methods to measure the increase of IWDs who receive services from the BCSC over time and a cross agency committee to monitor and develop strategies and priorities. WIOA requires AJCs are certified every two years to ensure service delivery is provided universally. LWC's OWD department is writing a policy on center certification which will include service delivery for IWD.

- **Building service provider capacity**

Consider investment in ongoing technical assistance with service providers to build their capacity to assist individuals with their employment needs, with a particular focus on those service providers that operate segregated facility-based services, and those that achieve poor community employment outcomes. The employment data and status speak to the need for an Employment First Technical Assistance and Mentoring initiative. Quality service provision that enhances the employment rate and poverty rate require skilled and trained professionals who receive support and mentoring on evidenced-based methods.

Leveraging current federal policy efforts and Initiatives

As noted, there are a number of efforts at the federal level to increase employment of individuals with disabilities. The following are recommendations regarding how Louisiana can leverage these federal initiatives to advance Employment First.

- **New Restriction on Sub-Minimum Wage**

Currently there are over 3,000 individuals with disabilities in Louisiana earning sub-minimum wage under Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act.^{xxxii} Under Section 511 of WIOA there are new restrictions on the use of sub-minimum wage. These new restrictions provide an opportunity to serve as a catalyst for advancing employment through the following:

- Ensure integrity of new requirements restricting use of sub-minimum wage, including ensuring informed choice regarding pursuing competitive integrated employment.
- Develop a clearly defined process that promotes access to competitive integrated employment for those currently earning sub-minimum wage, or youth considering entering sub-minimum wage employment.
- Use the annual review process and access to career counseling under Section 511 to ensure full consideration of employment options.
- Under Section 511, ensure that the required self-determination, self-advocacy, and peer mentoring training opportunities to be made available to those currently in sub-minimum wage are of high quality and empower individuals to consider competitive integrated employment.
- Ensure development of cooperative relationships between LRS, OCDD, and Education on Section 511 implementation so that it is implemented with consistency and integrity. In July 2017, LRS, OCDD, and OBH took an important step toward collaboration by signing an MOU to promote

collaboration in the implementation of Section 511 responsibilities and to promote effective referrals of individuals to employment services. Agencies should now consider whether more specific procedures and monitoring are desirable for implementing the MOU.

- o *Note: OCDD no longer will allow for payment of sub-minimum wage as of 2020.*

- **Section 503: Requirements for federal contractors regarding employment of people with disabilities**

Under Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act, federal contractors have a responsibility to affirmatively recruit and employ individuals with disabilities. These requirements were enhanced in 2013.^{xxxii} These requirements provide an opportunity to enhance stronger private sector hiring of individuals with disabilities through the following:

- Determine the current status of efforts in Louisiana to proactively utilize Section 503 to encourage employment of people with disabilities.
- Develop the structure for maximum leveraging of Section 503, through coordinated federal contractor awareness and outreach.
- Consider using Section 503 as the basis for a similar effort to encourage state contractors to hire citizens with disabilities.

Public hiring

- **Hiring by federal government**

The federal government has ongoing efforts to encourage employment of individuals with disabilities by the federal agencies. These efforts include the Schedule A hiring authority that offers an exception to the traditional competitive federal hiring process for individuals with an intellectual disability, a severe physical disability, or a psychiatric disability. To take full advantage of these federal efforts, consideration should be given to a more coordinated approach including: a) enhanced awareness by service providers and people with disabilities of Schedule A and other federal hiring initiatives; b) training of service providers on how to utilize Schedule A; c) strategic linkages with major federal employers in Louisiana regarding their personnel needs and how the disability community can be more responsive.^{xxxiii}

- **State as model employer**

Develop a state as model employer initiative, whereby state government would be proactive in its effort to hire individuals with disabilities via goal setting, targeted recruitment, and policies that ensure full accommodation of people with disabilities in the employment process. This would then serve as an example for regional and local government, as well as the private sector.^{xxxiv} The following is a list of recommendations:

- Provide leadership, establish accountability, and set and track measurable goals.

- Set the tone that hiring individuals with disabilities into government service positions at all levels of government is a priority and that employment is an important goal for the administration.
- Establish and promote ‘fast track’ hiring mechanism. Civil service does include a fast track hiring mechanism for individuals receiving support from LRS and Blind Services. Through a SAME initiative, the State can emphasize the availability of this mechanism and promote its expansion. Given current limited LRS resources, Louisiana Civil Service may want to consider extending this exemption to individuals receiving services from other State agencies serving people with disabilities including OCDD and OBH.
- Develop and provide dedicated training to supervisors on the ADA, disability etiquette, and disability diversity and inclusion efforts within the state and/or municipality.
- Provide on-the-job work and education experiences for high school and college students with disabilities through internships and job shadowing programs with state/local agencies.
- Formalizing partnerships between state vocational rehabilitation agencies and state hiring agencies to ensure that people using vocational rehabilitation services have access to state jobs.
- Reach out to and develop partnerships with community-based, disability-specific organizations and American Job Centers as a source to recruit new hires.

As described below, this initiative has now been launched with the signing by the Governor of an Executive Order.

Public workforce system

Louisiana has 15 Workforce Development boards that oversee each region’s local workforce system for all job seekers, including each region’s American Job Centers, which provide access to workforce development services (60 total in the state). Vocational Rehabilitation must be represented on each board (WIOA 107(b)(2)(D)) and LRS is the VR representation on each board. It is recommended that efforts be made to ensure that disability issues are more fully addressed and incorporated within all aspects of the general workforce system including:

- Clear standards for ensuring maximum access to American Job Centers linked with the requirements for annual reviews of accessibility of One-Stop Career Centers under WIOA.
- Policies and practices that ensure workforce training vendors fully welcome and accommodate individuals with disabilities.
- Engaging the business members of the Workforce Development Boards regarding employment of people with disabilities (a majority must be a Business Owner, CEO, or Executive with optimum policymaking or hiring authority in an in-demand occupation. Must be greater than 50%).

- Develop mechanisms for engaging OCDD and Office of Behavioral Health within Workforce Development Boards in order to strategize regarding how the resources of these entities can be mutually leveraged.
- Consider combining employer outreach efforts of the general workforce system with LRS efforts.

Service access

Lack of access to services, including information about available services was identified as a major issue by the Employment First workgroup. The following are strategies to address this issue:

- Pilot use of Career Solutions Centers (One-Stop Career Center) as an in-person and online access point for services.
- Create user-friendly materials for individuals and families regarding employment service options and supports, and right to services, that are fully vetted, consistent in content, and widely available.
- Ensure full awareness of resources that are available, that are not necessarily dependent on state funding.
- To ensure a smooth and consistent serve flow for individuals, consider having - service providers serve as vendors for multiple funding sources – e.g., LRS supported employment service providers also being service providers for Medicaid funded supported employment services.
- In consideration of the choice mandate, develop a method to ensure stakeholders are informed through a third-party neutral and knowledgeable resource, such as the Louisiana’s Families Helping Families Center.

Benefits planning

One of the most frequently identified barriers to employment is concern over the impact of employment on public benefits. Currently, benefits counseling is available through the state’s Work Incentive Planning and Assistance (WIPA) programs funded by Social Security (Louisiana Benefits Planning Services at LSUHSC Human Development Center, and the Advocacy Center of Louisiana) and through a small number of Community Partners, operating out of Social Security-funded Employment Networks. WIPA services are of high quality but insufficient to meet the demand. Furthermore, WIPA services are limited to individuals who are currently receiving Social Security disability benefits, leaving employment seeking individuals unable to access benefits planning if they receive some public benefits but not Social Security disability benefits. To address this issue, the following is recommended:

- **Universal access to benefits counseling**
Have a goal of universal access to benefits counseling as-needed – i.e., any individual with a disability can easily and quickly get accurate guidance on the impact of employment on their public benefits, to assist them in consideration of employment options. This would involve a tiered approach, available in-person and online, from basic information, to development of a full benefits plan by a WIPA program. Doing so would help to ensure that concerns over benefits are

consistently addressed and create a culture in which benefits are not an insurmountable barrier to employment.

- **Tiered approach to benefits counseling**
Increase availability of benefits counseling at different levels via the following:
1) Create requirements for employment service providers to have a basic knowledge of talking points regarding work incentives, wage reporting requirements, benefits issues, how to avoid the spread of misinformation, and how and when to refer beneficiaries to more intensive benefits planning services such as WIPA. Provide such training for these employment providers through Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU), Cornell, and/or WIPA grantees; 2) Consider building a network of additional Community Partners who can obtain training available from VCU and Cornell; 3) Create user friendly basic benefits information (e.g., Basics of Benefits from SELN) that is made highly available via disability agencies and service provider network; 4) Develop strategies for making benefits assistance highly available via Career Solutions Centers in-person and online; 5) Consider investment in DB 101 (an online tool) for Louisiana (<https://www.db101.org>).

Transition

As noted, addressing employment as part of transition to adult life is key to success as an adult. Therefore capacity building on transition is a critical component of advancing Employment First efforts. Recommendations regarding transition practices included the following:

- **Training for teachers on transition**
Develop and enhance existing pre-service and in-service training for teachers on transition, with an emphasis on best practices in employment and transition.
- **Transition endorsement**
Consider a transition endorsement for teacher continuing education (see [Massachusetts example^{xxxv}](#)).
- **Parent training**
Develop quality indicators for consistent training of parents on transition, develop quality parent training materials, and deliver training and materials via existing family networks.
- **Parent mentoring/support**
Identify and implement mechanisms for parent mentoring, support, and guidance for development and implementation of transition plans as part of IEP process.
- **Department of Education promotion**
Within the Department of Education, develop a broad-based effort to promote effective practices in employment as part of transition, via department website,

internal and external communication, events, etc. Develop a broad-based focus by Department of Education on employment as part of transition.

Transportation

Transportation is often identified as a key barrier to employment. While the challenges of transportation go well beyond the scope of Employment First efforts, it is important that this be recognized as an issue, with recommendations to address it. These recommendations include:

- **Engagement with transportation officials**
Develop a structure for ongoing engagement and discussions between the disability community (service systems/providers, individuals, families, etc.) and state and regional transportation officials to address transportation needs and possible options for addressing them via the state's transportation resources.^{xxxvi}
- **Transportation materials**
Develop materials for service providers, individuals, and families, on identifying transportation options, with an emphasis on both formal transportation (e.g., transit) as well as informal transportation (e.g., ride sharing, carpooling).
- **Utilize national resources**
Consider engagement of national transportation technical assistance resources such as the Community Transportation Association of America (www.ctaa.org).
- **New Technologies**
Develop a plan to utilize new technologies (for example, G.I.S. and G.P.S.) in linking transportation vehicles, planners, dispatchers and drivers with all citizens who wish to access public transportation for any worthwhile purpose. (Source: [How New Information and Scheduling Technologies Support Mobility Access for All](#), June 21, 2017, National Aging and Disability Transportation Center, Easter Seals)

IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognize the need for an inter-related approach

The type of systems change recommended within this report, requires an inter-related approach of strategies. A good model for consideration in this regard is the High Performing States Model from the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. This model is based on work with state intellectual and developmental disability agencies over a number of years, undertaking systems change to increase employment. The elements of this model are: Catalysts of Change [Leadership and Values], leading to Strategies for Change [Strategies include: (a) Policy & Goals; (b) Financing; (c) Training & Technical Assistance; (d) Service innovation; (e) Outcome Data], resulting in Integrated Jobs. These elements are held together via Interagency Collaboration.^{xxxvii}

Translate recommendations into an Action Plan, S.M.A.R.T. goals

The series of recommendations in this report are a starting point in terms of advancing an Employment First agenda. In order to translate these recommendations into reality, resulting in significant increases in employment of Louisiana citizens with disabilities, there is a need to transform them into an action plan. It is recommended that such an action plan be developed using the concept of S.M.A.R.T. goals: **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**esults-focused, and **T**ime-bound.

Consider ongoing Employment First Taskforce

This report contains a wide series of recommendations, which will require varied amounts of time, effort, and resources for implementation. Making the recommendations in this report a reality will be a long-term process that requires ongoing attention. In order to assure that these recommendations are acted upon, it is recommended that an ongoing Employment First taskforce be developed, which would consist of representatives of various public agencies involved in employment of individuals with disabilities, along with various stakeholders. The purpose of this taskforce would be to translate these recommendations into action items and work plans, set priorities, and in turn monitor progress on implementation, and report on a regular basis to the Governor's office on progress. A number of states have undertaken similar strategies, and mandates and details of these taskforces have been included in many state Employment First policies and legislation. This type of ongoing support and monitoring mechanism is critical to assuring that the recommendations in this report are implemented and result in embracing of Employment First and true advancement in employment and careers for Louisiana citizens with disabilities.

INITIAL ACTIONS, STEPS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has provided a comprehensive analysis of the landscape, opportunities and challenges that should inform Louisiana's Employment First Initiative. The report has also set out a wide ranging set of recommendations. As first steps in implementing these recommendations and furthering its Employment First Agenda, Louisiana has undertaken and will be pursuing the following specific objectives over the next year:

- Convened an Ongoing Task Force to enable continued collaboration among State agencies and essential stakeholders in the implementation of an Employment First Agenda. This Task Force meets and will continue to meet on a monthly basis. This Task Force also functions as a Vision Quest Work Group to accomplish policy objectives under the U.S. DOL Office of Disability Employment Policy's Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program in which Louisiana is now participating. (See no. 2)
- Applied for and is receiving technical assistance from the U. S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Policy, Employment First State Leadership Mentoring Program. With the support of subject matter experts, the State will be implementing one or more policy objectives that will further its Employment First Agenda.
- On March 19, 2018, the Governor signed an Executive Order launching a State as Model Employer initiative in Louisiana.
- Plans to develop a multi-purpose guide that sets out for State agency staff, individuals, families, and advocates the avenues and resources for achieving competitive integrated employment, in the State of Louisiana.
- Plans to create a collaborative action plan through which agencies and other stakeholders can focus individually and collaboratively on specific items. Specific areas this action plan will address are:
 - A plan for maximizing resources by collaborating on training of staff including the staff of providers, LWB, LRS, OCDD, and LDE's.
 - Plans for promoting regional collaboration, based on a shared knowledge of ongoing collaborations and targeting of opportunities for collaboration
 - Designation of a work group to explore innovative ideas and initiatives that will help overcome barriers to employment created by transportation challenges
 - Specific objectives that work group members and/or represented agencies will be undertaking separately or in concert in the next year to advance employment first initiatives described above.

EMPLOYMENT FIRST WORKGROUP MEMBERSHIP

Individual with disability currently competitively employed	Jeff Arseneaux
Service provider for Deaf/Deaf-Blind/Hard of Hearing/Blind	Anne Jayes, Lighthouse Louisiana
Parents of adults with disability who is competitively employed	Warren Hebert, Iberia Parish Linda Kocher, Orleans Parish
Parent of a youth with a disability	Liz Gary, St. Tammany Parish
Louisiana chapter of APSE	Sue Killam, LSU Human Development Center
LA Developmental Disabilities Council	Sandee Winchell
Advocacy Center of Louisiana & WIPA	David Gallegos
Business, industry, and labor representative	Ryan Lagrange, Lafayette Economic Development
Community Rehabilitation Program Supported Employment provider	Eva Belcas, ACME, Inc.
Community Rehabilitation Counselor	Stacey Frederick, LRS (Acadiana region)
Transition Specialist employed by a local educational agency	Donna Weinstein, St. Landry Parish School Board
Support Coordinator	Leslie Fontenot, Medical Resources
Local governing entity representative	Donna Francis, Metropolitan Human Services District
Social Security Administration	Jerelyn Key
Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities	Mark Thomas
Office of Behavioral Health	Ashley Jefferson
Office of Aging and Adult Services	Tara Leblanc
Medicaid	Jen Steele
Louisiana Department of Education	Rebecca Hanberry
Louisiana Rehabilitation Services	Mark Martin
Governor's Office of Disability Affairs Staff -	Bambi Polotzola, Executive Director Jolan Jolivet, Assistant Director Jessica Lewis, SILC Director

ⁱ *Employment First Initiative Position Statement*, State of Louisiana, Department of Health and Hospitals, Office of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, June 1, 2011. - http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/assets/docs/OCDD/Other/Employment_First_MEMO.pdf

ⁱⁱ Source: *2016 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium*. (2016). Durham, NH: Institute on Disability, University of New Hampshire, p. 12. - <https://disabilitycompendium.org>

ⁱⁱⁱ *Employment First Resource List* (February 2017). SELN Working Document. Boston MA: State Employment Leadership Network.

^{iv} Details on US Department of Justice Settlement Agreements under the ADA and Olmstead can be found at: www.ada.gov/olmstead

^v *State of Louisiana Findings Letter, United States' Investigation, Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act, of Louisiana's Use of Nursing Facilities to Serve People with Mental Health Disabilities*, U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, December 21, 2016. - www.ada.gov/olmstead/documents/Louisiana_lof_12-21-16.pdf

^{vi} *Statement of the Department of Justice on Application of the Integration Mandate of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Olmstead v. L.C. to State and Local Governments' Employment Service Systems for Individuals with Disabilities - # 5: What factors are relevant in determining whether an individual does not oppose receiving services in an integrated employment setting?*; US Department of Justice, Office of Civil Rights, October 31, 2016. - www.ada.gov/olmstead/olmstead_guidance_employment.pdf

^{vii} Information on the CMS Settings Rule can be found at: <https://hcbsadvocacy.org>

^{viii} Office for Citizens with Developmental Disabilities, Home and Community-Based Services Transition Plan. - <http://new.dhh.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/page/1991>

^{ix} *State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Program; State Supported Employment Services Program; Limitations on Use of Subminimum Wage, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking*, Federal Register, April 16, 2015, p. 21060. - www.federalregister.gov/documents/2015/04/16/2015-05538/state-vocational-rehabilitation-services-program-state-supported-employment-services-program

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^{xii} Source: *2016 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium*. (2016). Durham, NH: Institute on Disability, University of New Hampshire, p. 12. - <https://disabilitycompendium.org>

^{xiii} Source: *ibid.*, - p. 22.

^{xiv} Source: *ibid.*, - p. 21.

^{xv} Source: *ibid.*, - p. 29.

^{xvi} Source: *2016 Annual Disability Statistics Compendium*. (2016). Durham, NH: Institute on Disability, University of New Hampshire, pp. 32-34. - <https://disabilitycompendium.org>

^{xvii} Source: *ibid.*, - p. 88

^{xviii} Source: *National Core Indicators - Person in Community Paid Job*. Human Services Research Institute and The National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services. - www.nationalcoreindicators.org

^{xix} Source: *National Core Indicators - Would Like to Have a Paid Job in the Community*. Human Services Research Institute and The National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services. - www.nationalcoreindicators.org

^{xx} Source: *Louisiana 2016 Mental Health National Outcome Measures (NOMS): SAMHSA Uniform Reporting System*. (2016). Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. - www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/Louisiana-2016.pdf

^{xxi} *Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Services. State by State Program Year Performance – PY 2015.* United States Department of Labor). - www.doleta.gov/performance/results/wagner-peyser_act.cfm

^{xxii} See *Employment First Resource List*. (February 2017). SELN Working Document. Boston MA: State Employment Leadership Network.

^{xxiii} Ohio Employment First Form:

<http://dodd.ohio.gov/medicaid/Documents/DODD%20Employment%20First%20Form1.pdf>;

New Jersey Pathway to Employment Form: www.nj.gov/humanservices/ddd/documents/pathway_to_employment.pdf

^{xxiv} See *Statement of the Department of Justice on Enforcement of the Integration Mandate of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Olmstead v. L.C. - # 5: What factors are relevant in determining whether an individual does not oppose an integrated setting?* - www.ada.gov/olmstead/q&a_olmstead.htm; also: *Statement of the Department of Justice on Application of the Integration Mandate of Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act and Olmstead v. L.C. to State and Local Governments' Employment Service Systems for Individuals with Disabilities - # 5: What factors are relevant in determining whether an individual does not oppose receiving services in an integrated employment setting?*; US Department of Justice, Office of Civil Rights, October 31, 2016, p. 9. - www.ada.gov/olmstead/olmstead_guidance_employment.pdf

^{xxv} See *Ticket to Work 2017 Payments at a Glance*, for a breakdown of Ticket to Work payments. -

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^{xxvi} *June 2017 Summary and Assignment Report* – downloaded from Social Security Ticket Tracker. -

www.ssa.gov/work/tickettracker.html

^{xxvii} - CMCS Informational Bulletin Attachment 1 Revisions to the Instructions and Technical Guide for \$1915 (c) Waivers for Supported Employment and Prevocational Services, www. <https://downloads.cms.gov/cmsgov/archived-downloads/CMCSBulletins/downloads/CIB-9-16-11.pdf>

^{xxviii} APSE Supported Employment Competencies - www.apse.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/APSE-Supported-Employment-Competencies11.pdf

^{xxix} Information on APSE CESP: Certified Employment Support Professional - <http://apse.org/certified-employment-support-professional/>

^{xxx} Information on Association of Community Rehabilitation Educators training competencies and certificates -

www.acreducators.org

^{xxxi} Data on number of individuals being paid sub-minimum wage downloaded from US Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division Special Employment web page - www.dol.gov/whd/specialemployment

^{xxxii} U.S. Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs information on Section 503 -

www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/disability-employment/

^{xxxiii} a) Federal Office of Personal Management information on federal hiring initiatives: www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/disability-employment/; b) U.S. Equal Opportunity Commission – The ABCs of Schedule A. -

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^{xxxiv} Resources on state as model employer: a) Barnett, S., Krepcio, K. (2013). *States as Model Employers of People with Disabilities: A Comprehensive Review of Policies, Practices, and Strategies* – Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion. - www.askearn.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/statemodel.pdf; b) *State as Model Employer Policies*. National Conference of State Legislatures, June 29, 2016. - www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/employing-people-with-disabilities.aspx; c) Whitehouse, E., Smith, S., Byers, L. (2017). *Workforce Development Efforts for People with Disabilities: Hiring, Retention and Reentry*. Washington, D.C.: The Council of State Governments. -

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^{xxxv} Information on Massachusetts Transition Specialist Endorsement -

<http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/educator-effectiveness/licensure/endorsements/transition-specialist-endorsement.html>

^{xxxvi} See Massachusetts example of regional transportation coordination -

www.massdot.state.ma.us/transit/MobilityManagementCenter/RegionalCoordinatingCouncils.aspx

^{xxxvii} A graphic of the High-Performing States Model is at: http://partnershipsinemployment.com/?page_id=120; background article: Hall, A. C., Buttenworth, J., Winsor, J., Gilmore, D., & Metzel, D. (2007). *Pushing the employment agenda: Case study research of high performing states in integrated employment*. *Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 45(3), 182–198.