



**TO:** Adult Career and Continuing Education Services  
(ACCES) Committee

**FROM:** Kevin G. Smith *KG Smith*

**SUBJECT:** ACCES-VR Employment Outcomes and Strategies for  
Improvement

**DATE:** February 29, 2012

**AUTHORIZATION(S):**

*J. B. 959*  
SUMMARY

Issue for Discussion

The Office of Adult Career and Continuing Education Services - Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR) plays a major role in assisting individuals with significant disabilities to achieve employment outcomes. The Board of Regents will be updated on recent results and strategic actions to increase the number and quality of employment outcomes for individuals participating in vocational rehabilitation services.

Reason(s) for Consideration

To inform the Board of Regents on the actions taken to improve the employment outcomes, outlined in the FFY 2012 State Plan for Vocational Rehabilitation and Supported Employment Services.

Proposed Handling

This item will come before the Regents ACCES Committee at its March 2012 meeting.

Background Information

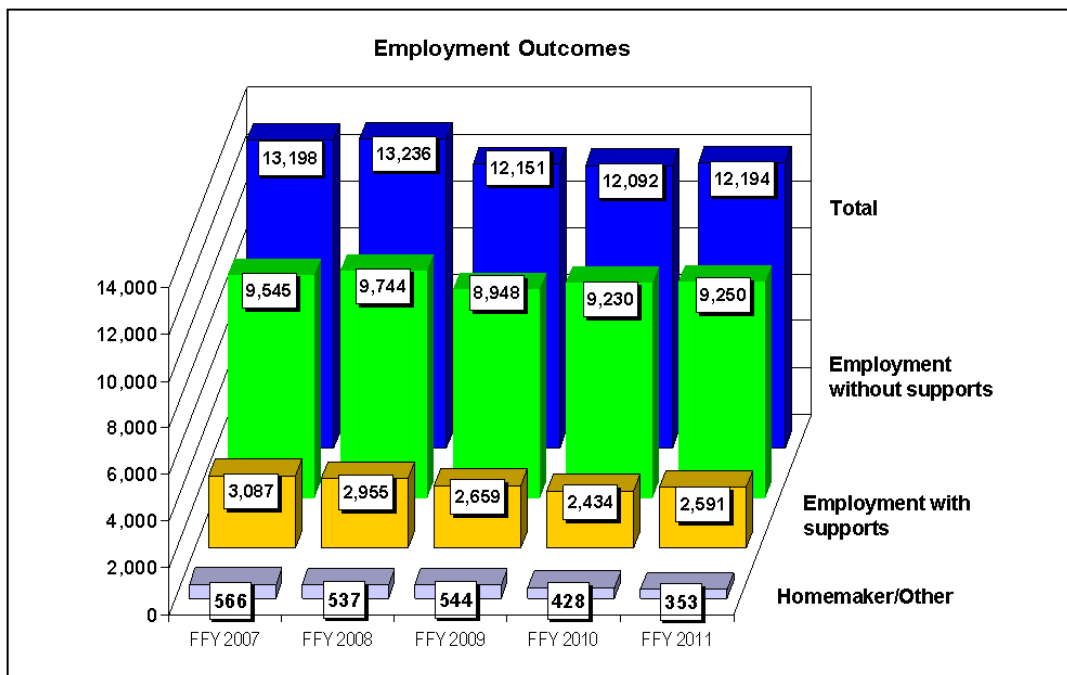
Individuals with disabilities in New York State have an employment rate of 33.8 percent, compared with 76.3 percent for individuals without disabilities. The depressed employment rate among individuals with disabilities is due to complex barriers related to poverty, discrimination, lack of educational and employment opportunities, transportation and disincentives inherent in the provisions of public assistance programs

that provide a minimal safety net of income, health care and housing. For some individuals, the fears, risks and real barriers associated with working lead to ambivalence in pursuing employment and fulfilling their desire for meaningful work.

The difference, or “gap”, between the employment rate of people with disabilities and their non-disabled peers is 43.5 percent. The employment gap has proven to be intractable since it was first measured almost a decade ago. Closing the gap requires comprehensive strategies across all sectors of the community – education and higher education, businesses and government – and most importantly, among individuals with disabilities.

To overcome these pervasive barriers, ACCES-VR and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) jointly develop the State goals and priorities to increase the employment outcomes and earnings for the individuals with disabilities it serves. Successful outcomes are determined by at least 90 days in employment. In FFY 2011, ACCES-VR assisted 12,194 individuals to achieve employment. This is a small increase in employment outcomes compared to FFY 2010, when 12,092 individuals obtained employment. The challenging economic outlook continues to pose a major obstacle to significant increases in employment outcomes.

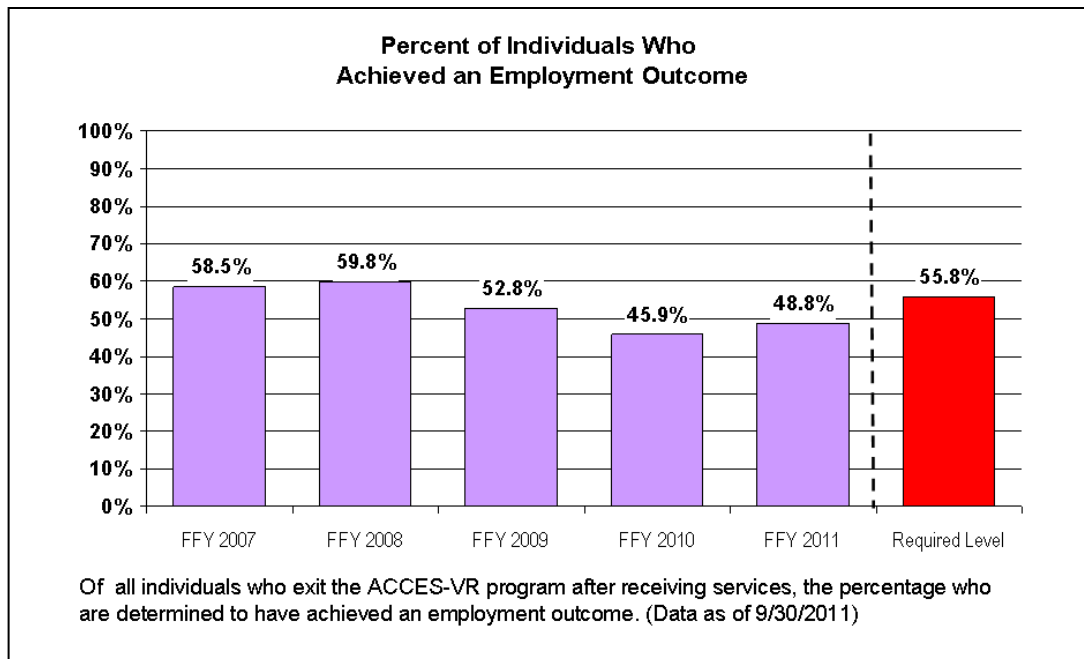
**Employment Outcomes for Individual Served by ACCES-VR**  
**FFY 2007 through FFY 2011**



Another core performance indicator is the employment rate of consumers who received services under an employment plan. The employment rate of our consumers is measured by comparing the number of consumers who had their case closed

as successfully employed compared to those who did not achieve an employment outcome. ACCES-VR is striving to meet the performance target of 55.8% established by the US Department of Education for all state VR programs. ACCES-VR met this target in FFY 2007 and 2008, but experienced a decline to 53.8% in FFY 2009. An even sharper decline in FFY 2010 drove the employment rate to 45.9%. For FFY 2011, the employment rate increased to 48.8%.

### Employment Rate of Individuals Served by ACCES-VR



### Strategies to Increase Employment Outcomes

ACCES-VR is employing a range of strategies to improve employment outcomes and earnings. Several of the key strategies include:

- **Data-Informed Performance Management** - ACCES-VR District Office Managers are monitoring the entire vocational process from referral and application, through eligibility, employment plan development and implementation, job placement and closure based on monthly performance reports for each of their offices. The focus is on increasing timeliness and direct VR counselor engagement with consumers to improve the quality of the services and the number of individuals who go to work after receiving ACCES-VR services.
- **Business Relations** – ACCES-VR is leading efforts to establish working relationships with businesses within New York State through the National Employment Team (NET), a partnership with the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). Through its affiliation with the NET,

ACCES-VR develops relationships with major businesses to recruit and hire individuals with disabilities. ACCES-VR has developed statewide and regional partnerships with employers such as CVS, Citizens Bank, Walgreens, Empire North Merchants, and Greyhound to obtain employment.

- **Services to Youth** – ACCES-VR is strengthening partnerships with local schools and postsecondary institutions to smooth the transition of students with disabilities from school to work. Schools are encouraged to begin the referral process early so VR counselors can share their expertise about skill development, post school training, employment and placement options with families and school staff. Youth can also benefit from independent living services, such as benefits advisement and peer counseling, that provide students with the information and skills to sustain employment.
- **Career Development** – ACCES-VR continues to promote post-secondary education and training as a means to increased earnings and to provide consumers with skills to achieve quality employment outcomes. Additionally, we are working with the P-20 data system project to capture wage information.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Labor proposed regulations that would require federal contractors and subcontractors to set hiring goals for individuals with disabilities. The intent of the proposed regulations is to strengthen the affirmative action requirements established in section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 obligating federal contractors and subcontractors to ensure equal employment opportunities for qualified workers with disabilities. The proposed regulations outline specific actions that contractors must perform related to recruitment and hiring, including specific workforce percentages. If these changes occur, it will create more opportunities for ACCES-VR consumers. Nationally, there are roughly 200,000 companies that generate \$700 billion a year in federal contracts. New York State contracts and economic development initiatives might also be a source of employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities if similar provisions existed.

### Recommendation

ACCES-VR will continue to implement the above strategies to improve the number of individuals who achieve employment, as well as the employment rate. Through an emphasis on increasing direct and timely engagement of VR counselors with consumers, ACCES-VR will ensure our consumers are receiving quality vocational rehabilitation services.