

Alaska Employment First

Annual Progress Report FY 2023




ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
& WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

A proud partner of the American Job Center Network

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Foreward

As the Director of the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), it is our privilege to serve and assist Alaskans with disabilities in obtaining competitive and integrated employment. Alaska DVR continues to adapt to the changes made over the last year impacting service delivery and increasing the number of Alaskans with disabilities served. It is vital we build upon our progress to improve the social and emotional well-being of Alaskans with disabilities. We are a planning agency that works with the consumer to help them establish a career through “informed choice.” Good jobs advance Alaskans with disabilities to a better standard of living and well-being. Good workers, including those with disabilities, help lift Alaskan businesses to new heights. In fiscal year 2023, we saw increases to Alaska DVR’s:

- Applications by 6% (964)
- Eligibilities by 2% (818)
- Individualized Plans for Employment by 1% (593)

One of our top successes is the number of Alaskans with disabilities placed into competitive and integrated employment (292), and the increase in hourly wage from \$16.87 in fiscal year 2022 to \$18.66 in fiscal year 2023. This is a significant increase compared to previous years and should be celebrated. We are doing extensive outreach to our employer community statewide with the Business Engagement Services Team (BEST). I personally now hear from employers from across the state that they know who DVR is and how we can help them. They value hiring



DVR Director, Duane Mayes

Alaskans with disabilities because they make great employees when it comes to performance and longevity. We see extensive evidence this is happening not just within the state of Alaska, but throughout the country. As shared in last year’s annual report, a time-limited Alaska Work Matters Taskforce (AWMTF), supported by Governor Dunleavy, was established in early 2021 to address and improve programs and policies specific to competitive integrated employment for Alaskans with disabilities throughout the state. The AWMTF met formally five times with numerous subcommittee meetings, wrapping up their work with a final report in September 2022. The AWMTF consisted of Alaskans with disabilities, employers, tribal partners, State of Alaska beneficiary boards, key department leaders, and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (The Trust). A total of twenty-two recommendations were identified, some of which include:

- State of Alaska as a Model Employer for individuals with disabilities, including DVR’s Provisional Hire Program.

- Building the capacity of the private sector to enhance employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities.
- Designing youth transition programs providing career development, work-based learning experiences, and parental involvement.
- Establishing Employment First initiatives recognizing that work in the general workforce (competitive integrated employment) is the first and preferred outcome in the provision of publicly funded services and supports of all working age individuals with disabilities, including individuals with the most significant disabilities.
- Improving transportation policies to address options that are reliable and accessible for individuals with disabilities.
- Implementing stay at work, return to work policies and programs for individuals who become ill or injured on the job.
- Supporting businesses owned by people with disabilities, including veterans, through procurement and contracting systems.
- Enhancing rural traditional skill development such as subsistence, self-employment, etc.
- Expanding the use of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model.

- Developing a policy enhancement recommendation report relating to improving employment outcomes for Alaskans with disabilities.
- Promoting telework as a core-employment strategy.

Over the past year, multiple presentations have been given to our community partners, State of Alaska beneficiary boards, national organizations in the field of disability, and key leaders within the Alaska Legislature and the State of Alaska's Executive Branch. With the AWMTF recommendations now set in stone, it is our job to educate key leaders. As many of the AWMTF members would say, the value of work matters. Employment is the most direct and cost-effective way to empower individuals with disabilities to achieve independence and economic self-sufficiency. Employment of individuals with disabilities revitalizes Alaska's economy by growing the taxpayer base while simultaneously lowering the State's public assistance and medical benefits costs. Over the past year we have seen improvements with the State of Alaska as a Model Employer of individuals with disabilities; an increase in the number of employers in the private sector that are employing Alaskans with disabilities; an increase in activities through career-based grants for youth with disabilities; and funding to the Anchorage School District for the roll out of the College Ready, Career Ready, and Life Ready Academies Model designed to improve transition services for students with disabilities districtwide.



We are also seeing teleworking as a core employment strategy for Alaskans with disabilities statewide. It is critical that we maintain our momentum to memorialize the recommendations identified by the AWMTF. As I am often quoted in saying, competitive integrated employment for Alaskans with disabilities is a “game changer.” As we enter into the next year, we will have a new Combined State Plan as required by the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) to outline what Alaska is doing to help individuals with disabilities enter into high-quality jobs and careers, a new five-year Comprehensive Integrated Mental Health Plan that will incorporate many of the recommendations outlined in the AWMTF report, and a new three year DVR Strategic Plan developed by the State Vocational Rehabilitation Committee (SVRC) and DVR Leadership using data from the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment.

I’ve been privileged to work most of my career with Alaska DVR. I have met many Alaska DVR professionals who have dedicated their lives to helping Alaskans with disabilities. Over the last two and a half years, we lost two of those dedicated individuals to terminal illnesses. It is my hope that we continue to honor their memory by carrying on the work they so dearly loved.

My best,



Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to promote and assist with implementing effective policies and activities to improve the employment rates and conditions of individuals with disabilities in Alaska. Alaskans with disabilities have the capacity to become employed and the citizen right to equal access to employment. Employment is a way for Alaskans with disabilities to become economically self-sufficient, live independently, have equity of opportunity, and have full participation in their community resulting in meaningful lives of their choosing.

The following report will provide a summary of the standards achieved over the last year. Agencies completed a questionnaire using a Likert Scale of 1-5 used to gauge attitudes, values, and opinions. The questionnaire required them to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with a series of statements:

1. There are no performance goals and outcomes relating to this goal.
2. There are performance goals and outcomes, but they are too vague and are worded within overall outcomes, such as quality of life.
3. There are performance goals and outcomes, but they are insufficient, and all are not measurable.
4. There are measurable goals and outcomes, but they are somewhat problematic (i.e., meeting the outcome does not necessarily mean an improvement in or increasing the rate of services in employment, as compared to segregated or non-work services.)
5. There are measurable outcomes with meaningful benchmarks.



DVR, along with other Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development divisions, visited the Joint Base Elmendorf - Richardson to hear about their specific hiring needs.

Standards

“Without standards, there can be no improvement.” - Taiichi Ohno



1. Alaska has measurable annual performance goals and outcomes with clear and meaningful benchmarks that track several key indicators. These indicators show support for competitive and integrated employment and effective implementation of the Employment First initiative, including outcomes and goals for the numbers and percentages of persons with disabilities who achieve competitive and integrated employment.
2. Each relevant state agency has a strong and effective policy detailing how it will implement the Employment First law.
3. Alaska has an effective method for collecting and publishing outcome data involving competitive and integrated employment for people with disabilities. This method tracks a variety of data, including but not limited to competitive and integrated employment data. This data is used to engage stakeholders and inform strategy and policy decisions.
4. Alaska’s relevant state agencies successfully execute specific strategies to fully implement the Employment First law and to ensure competitive and integrated employment of people with disabilities is fully supported in their programs, policies, procedures, and funding.
5. Alaska has effective, meaningful, and productive collaborations among stakeholder groups and between these stakeholders and state government to support the Employment First policy and competitive and integrated employment of people with disabilities.
6. Relevant state agencies will enter into formal interagency agreements to successfully implement, track, and support the Employment First policy and competitive and integrated employment.
7. Alaska’s relevant state agencies aggressively pursue resources to support innovation in competitive and integrated employment services and to better advance and implement the Employment First initiative.
8. Adequate resources are readily available to Alaskan transition-age students and their families to encourage them to choose competitive integrated employment and/or postsecondary education over other options.



DVR Business Solution Specialist, Carol Polito, meeting with ENSTAR Natural Gas Company Customer Service Supervisors and Manager, and HR Department Director and staff, to learn about their hiring requirements and candidate preferences.



Performance Progress Measurement Findings

- There are measurable outcomes with meaningful benchmarks in relevant state agencies.
- Some state agencies have a strong Employment First policy along with the details of how they will implement the policy in its programs, supports, and services.
- Most of the relevant state agencies have a comprehensive data system in place both within and across state agencies. Information on employment, percentages, and outcomes are routinely collected, analyzed, reported, and discussed. It is central to informing and impacting strategy and policy decisions.
- Some of the relevant state agencies have developed effective strategies and fully implemented them. The strategies are adjusted at least yearly with further stakeholder involvement.
- Effective collaborations and relationships exist among state, regional, and provider agencies, advocacy organizations, and employers to support competitive and integrated employment, including regular workgroup and statewide meetings involving stakeholders. Their collaborations are effective in supporting Employment First both among the stakeholders and between the stakeholders and state government.
- Formal inter-agency agreements exist to better ensure the effective implementation of the Employment First policy. Issues and problem areas to be addressed by these inter-agency agreements should be developed using the input of disability stakeholders.
- Several innovations have been emerging. These innovations are documented and discussed for broad implementation among stakeholders and state agencies. Multiple applications for resource support have been made.
- Resources are readily available to transition-age students and individuals waiting for services and their families to encourage them to choose competitive integrated employment over other service options.

Partnerships

The following programs have partnered in the completion of the 2023 Alaska Annual Progress Report:

Department of Health

- Division of Senior and Disabilities Services (DSDS)
- Division of Behavioral Health (DBH)

Department of Education and Early Development

Department of Labor and Workforce Development

- Division of Employment and Training Services (DETS)



Alaska Department of Health, Division of
Senior and Disabilities Services



Alaska Department of Health
Division of Behavioral Health



Alaska Department of
Education & Early Development



Department of Labor and Workforce Development
EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING SERVICES



Department of Labor and Workforce Development
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

DVR State Fiscal Year 2023 Program Highlights

Individuals served by DVR represent demographics as vast as Alaska itself. Although each individual has their own unique story, looking at aggregate numbers can help provide the community with an understanding of the overall scope of Alaska's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program.

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Highlights

- 1,951 individuals with disabilities received services
- 98% of individuals receiving services experienced significant disabilities with multiple barriers to employment
- 964 individuals applied for VR services
- 1,782 individuals received information and referral services
- \$3,446,700 was spent on services to individuals in the VR program
- 292 individuals exited the VR program employed
 - o \$18.66 was the average hourly wage
 - o 250 individuals were employed in the private sector
 - o 30 individuals were employed in Federal, State, or Local Government
 - o 12 individuals were self-employed
- 66 students with disabilities received services from the VR program
- \$183,521 was spent on Pre-Employment Transition Services from the VR program

Potentially Eligible (PE) Students with a Disability Highlights

- 1,368 students with disabilities received services from the PE transition program
- 91 Alaskan cities hosted PE programs and 75% of them were held in rural Alaska
- \$1,489,001 was spent on Pre-Employment Transition Services from the PE program

DVR Participants at a Glance

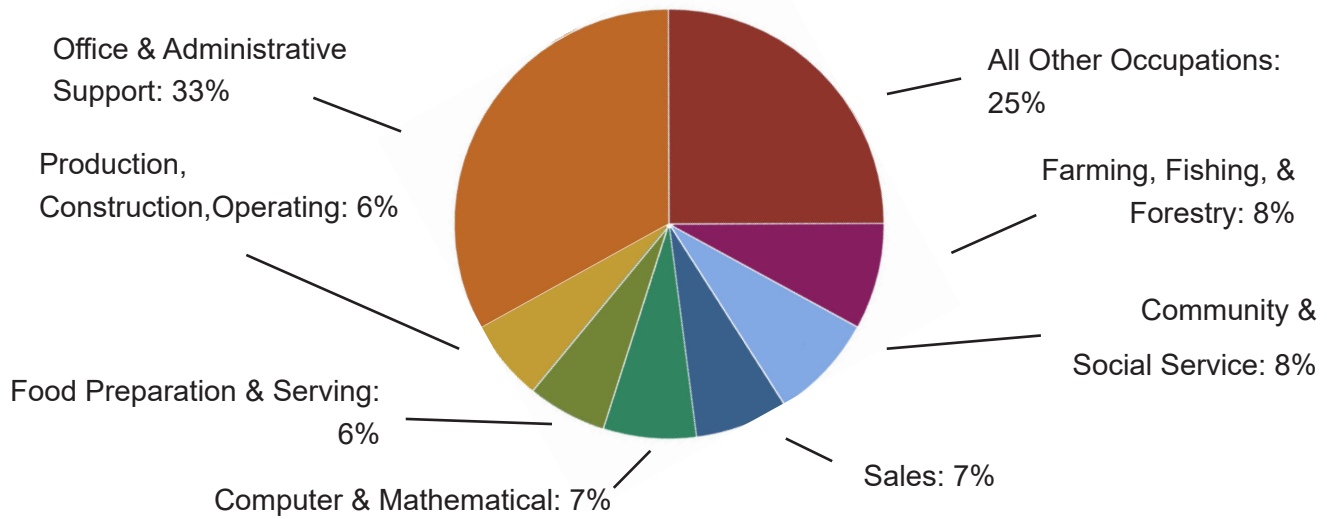
Age Breakdown

- 27% Ages 14 – 24
- 56% Ages 25 – 54
- 17% Ages 55 Plus

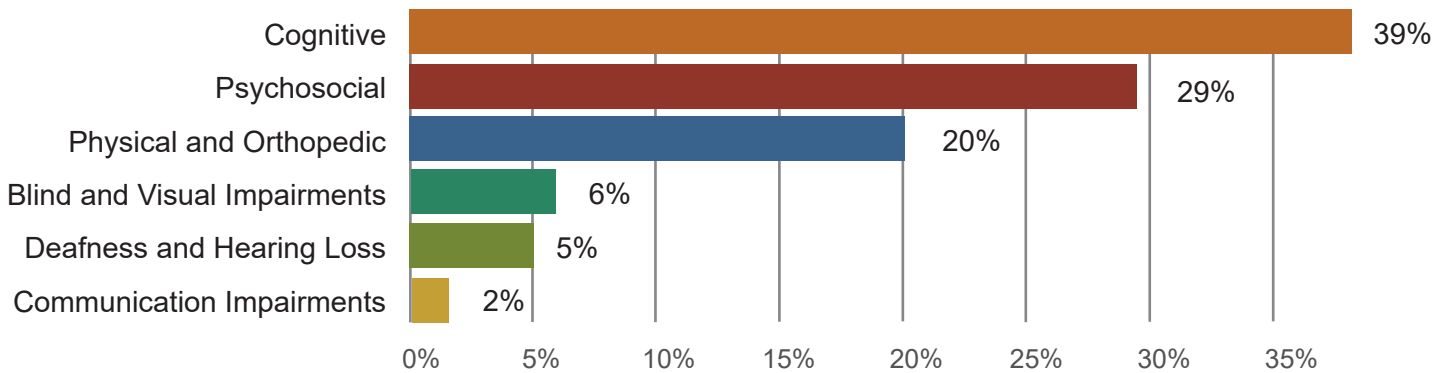
What DVR Does and Who We Serve

Each year, the Alaska Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) helps hundreds of Alaskans with disabilities prepare for, obtain, and keep meaningful jobs. Individuals wanting to work or continue to work who experience a physical, intellectual, or mental disability that prevents them from achieving career success may be eligible for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services.

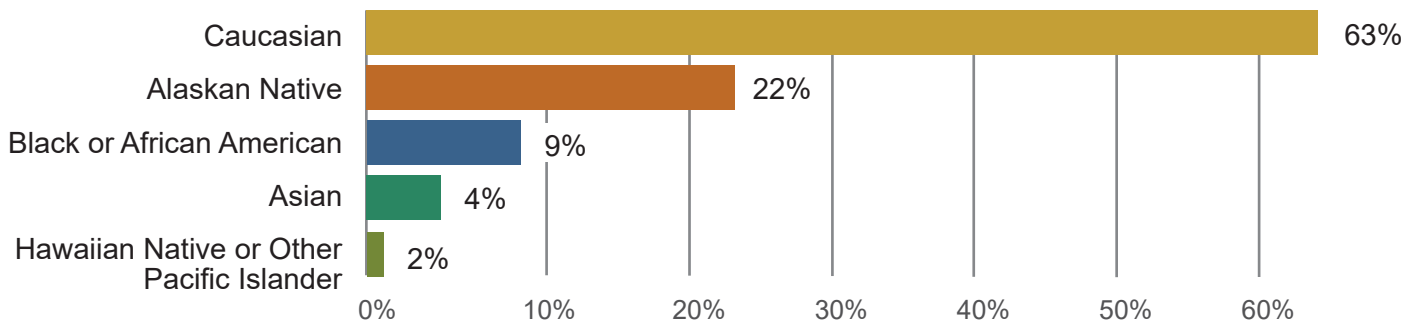
SFY 2023 Occupations of DVR Participants after Exiting the Program



Disabilities of DVR Participants SFY 2023



DVR Participants by Race SFY 2023



DVR Purchased Services SFY 2023

The federal agency that oversees DVR is the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). RSA has restructured service categories provided to individuals into five specific focus areas:

Career Services

Career Services involve identifying the needs of individuals as their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is developed. Career Services include services such as labor market information, vocational assessments, diagnosis and treatment, and counseling and guidance. Career Services are provided to assist individuals in obtaining or retaining employment.

Training Services

Training Services are provided to assist individuals in accomplishing their vocational goals. Training Services are available for individuals who are unlikely or unable to obtain or retain employment that leads to self-sufficiency. Training Services include services such as college/university enrollment (junior, four-year, and graduate levels), occupational/vocational training, on-the-job training, and apprenticeships. Training Services assist individuals in obtaining an education credential, such as a degree or certificate, which will increase

their probability of achieving competitive integrated employment.

Other/Supportive Services

Other/Supportive Services are available to participants who are receiving career or training services and to assist in reducing barriers to employment. Other/Supportive Services include services such as support for transportation, personal assistant services, maintenance, rehabilitation technology, reader services, and interpreter services.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) under the VR program

Pre-ETS are a specialized group of services provided to Students With a Disability (SWD) to prepare them to transition from an educational setting to postsecondary education or employment. Pre-ETS under the VR program are delivered to SWD who have applied for VR services and can be provided at any stage in the VR process. These services are provided to a participant of the VR program who is 14-21 years old and currently enrolled in an educational program such as high school, college, or a recognized educational program. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as Amended identifies five distinct Pre-ETS activities: Job Exploration Counseling; Work-Based Learning Experiences; Counseling on Enrollment Opportunities in Post-Secondary Education; Workplace Readiness Training and Independent Living;

Consumer Quote from Satisfaction Surveys

“From the start to the very end it was a group effort... and I had so many resources helping me make the best, informed choices for my career path. I was so fortunate to have such a wonderful team.”

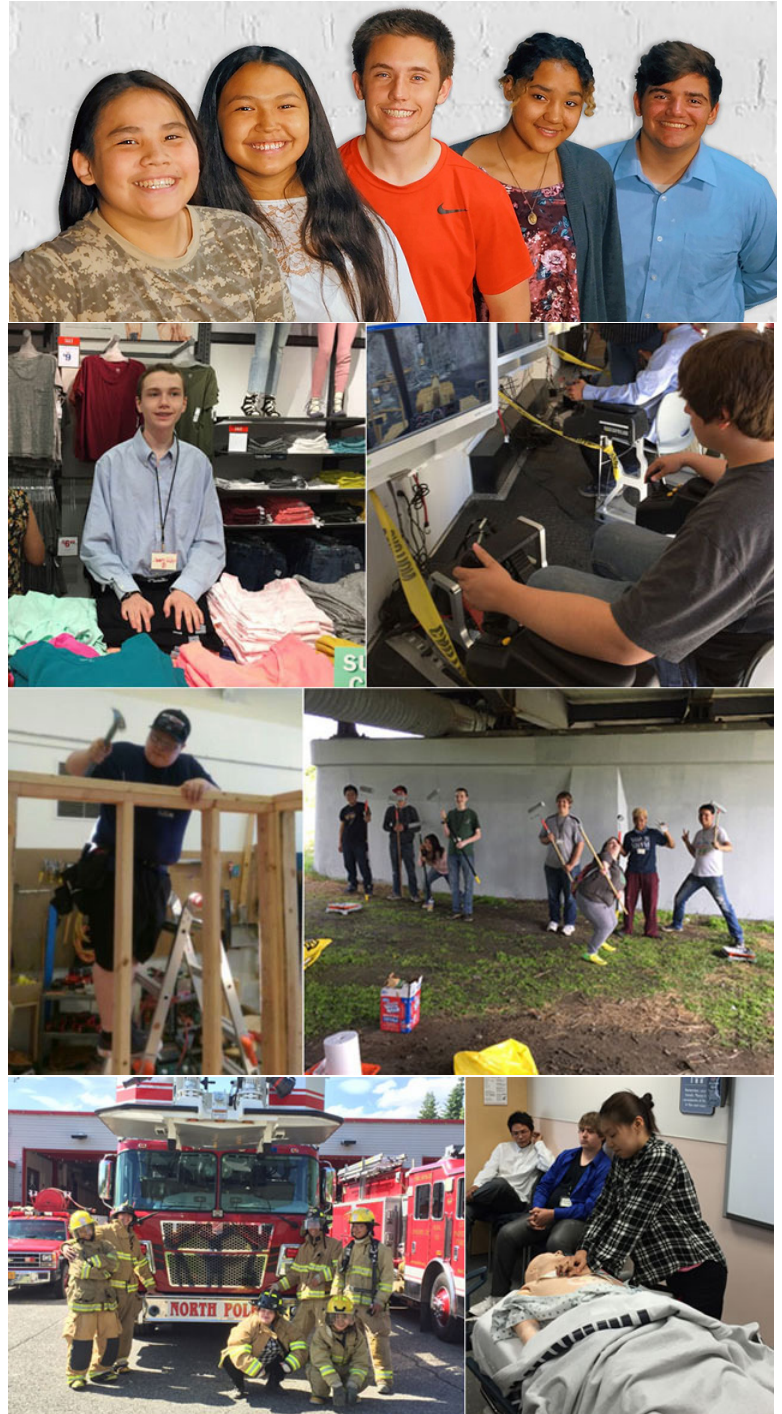
DVR Purchased Services (Continued)



and Instruction in Self-Advocacy. DVR provided Pre-ETS services to 66 SWDs under the VR program in SFY23.

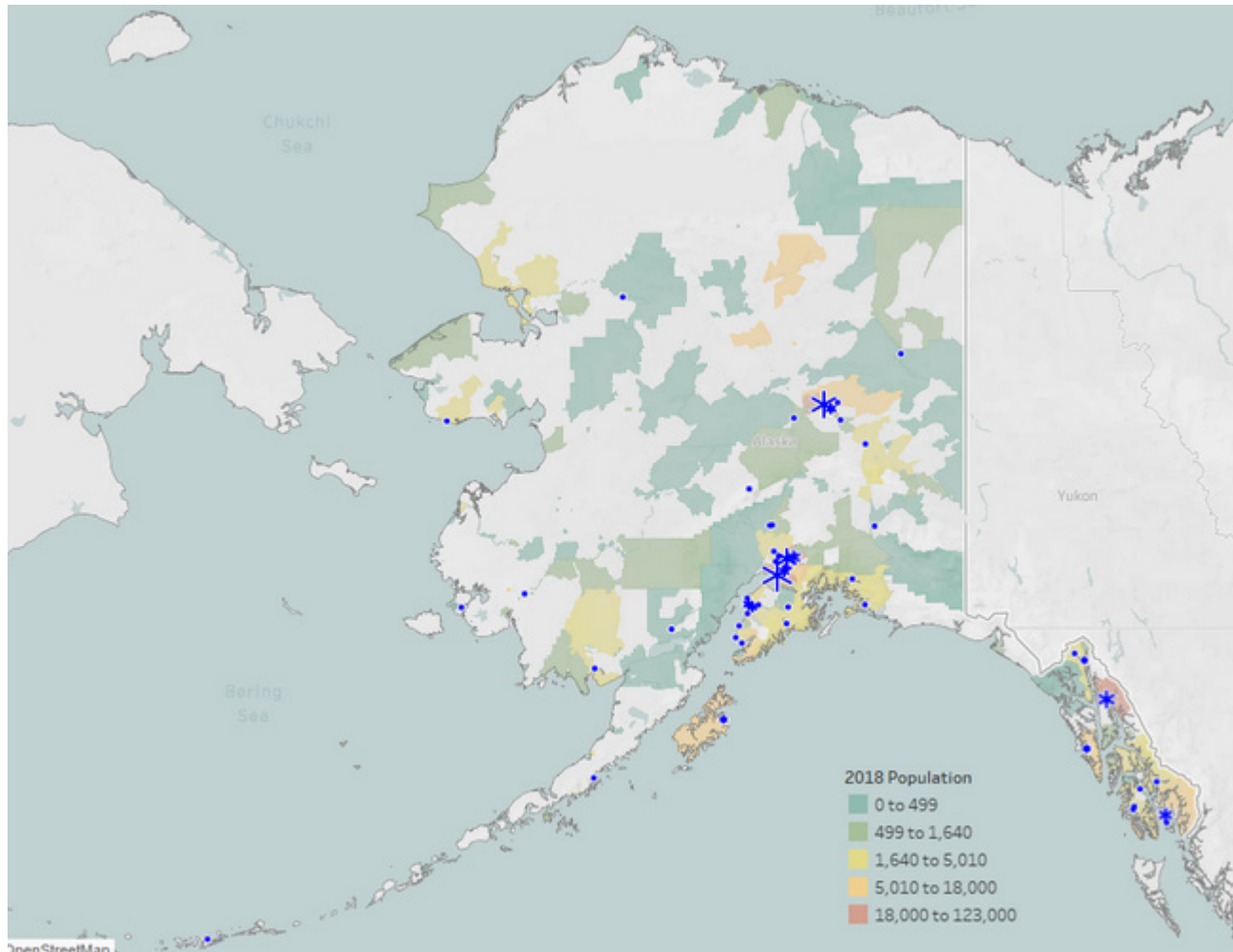
Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) under the Potentially Eligible program

Similar to the Pre-ETS under the VR program described above, Pre-ETS under the Potentially Eligible (PE) program provides Pre-ETS to Students With a Disability (SWD) who are not applicants for the VR program but who are considered to be potentially eligible for VR services. These services are provided to SWD who are 14-21 years old and currently enrolled in an educational program such as high school, college, or recognized educational Program. These SWD are also provided with Job Exploration Counseling; Work-Based Learning Experiences; Counseling on Enrollment Opportunities in Post-Secondary Education; Workplace Readiness Training and Independent Living; and Instruction in Self-Advocacy. DVR provided Pre-ETS services to 1,368 SWDs under the PE program in 91 different cities throughout SFY23.



Locations of Alaskans Served SFY 2023

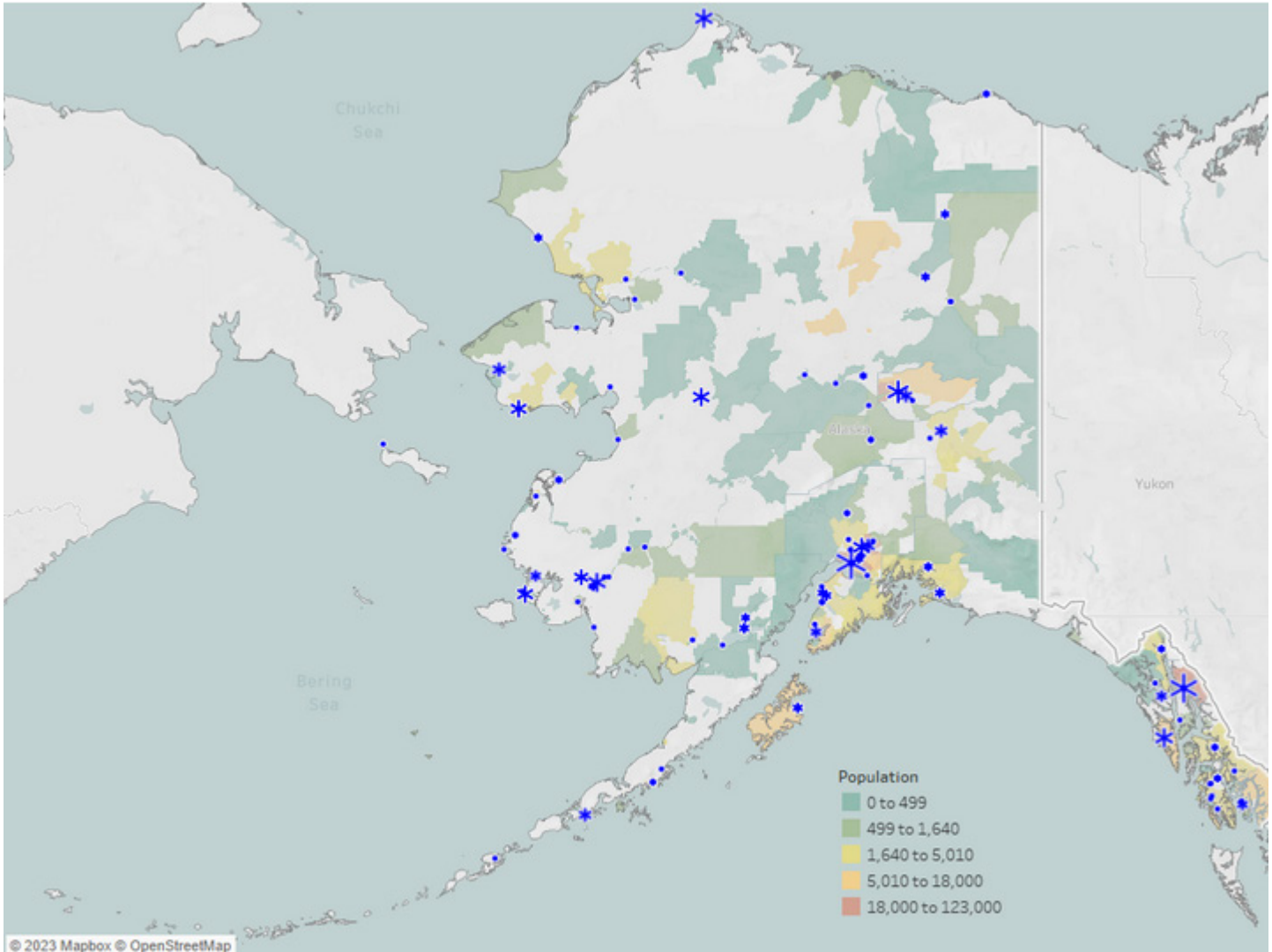
1,951 Participants Served by the Vocational Rehabilitation Program in 52 Communities



Vocational Rehabilitation Program: These are individuals who have applied for Vocational Rehabilitation Services and have been assigned a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to assist them towards achieving competitive integrated employment.



1,434 Students With Disabilities Participants Served in 92 Communities (Potentially Eligible and Vocational Rehabilitation Program)



See a description of Pre-Employment Transition Services under the VR program on page 11 and a description of Pre-Employment Transition Services under the Potentially Eligible program on page 12.

Consumer Satisfaction

Survey of Participants Who Exit DVR Services

The SVRC oversees the ongoing consumer satisfaction survey to DVR participants who were closed either employed or not employed, and after an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) was developed.

Consumer Satisfaction Survey Highlights

DVR is a consumer-driven organization where a participant's self-involvement and informed choice during the vocational rehabilitation process are vital for success. The consumer satisfaction surveys focus on four points: Consumer and Staff Interaction, Consumer Involvement, Program Information, and Program Satisfaction.

Surveys are sent to participants' email addresses via the online survey tool SurveyMonkey. The surveys are sent on a monthly basis to individuals who have exited the Program after an Individualized Plan for Employment was developed. Currently, 95% of DVR participants who meet the established survey parameters have a valid email address, which is a 2% increase from last year. The average monthly response rate is 6.3%.

Treating the Consumer Participant with Respect

Ninety-one percent of DVR participants who responded agreed that staff replied promptly to their questions, requests, and informed them of changes. Additionally, 88% of respondents felt staff were polite and helpful on an ongoing basis during the life of their case.

Informed Choice and Involvement in the DVR Process

Eighty-five percent of respondents were pleased with their involvement in the decision-making process that led to their Individualized Plan for Employment. Additionally, 85% stated that Alaska DVR helped them understand their abilities so that they could choose a job consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

Referral of Others

Overall, 82% of respondents stated they would recommend Alaska DVR to others. Respondents indicated an 82% satisfaction rate of the DVR program and the services they received.

Review

The results of the surveys are reviewed on a quarterly basis and forwarded to regional office managers for follow-up and further action, if needed.

"I had so many resources. DVR got me hooked up with other agencies. Beyond grateful." - DVR Consumer



All Respondents SFY 2023 - Survey Categories

1. Program Satisfaction

I would recommend DVR to others.	82%
Overall, I am satisfied with the services.	82%

2. Program Information

I knew the goal of DVR was to help me find employment or stay employed.	85%
DVR staff helped me understand the services available to me by DVR and other agencies.	82%

3. Consumer Involvement

I was aware of my right to disagree and was informed about the process to appeal DVR decisions and about the Client Assistance Program.	94%
I was pleased with my involvement in the decision making process that led to my plan for employment.	85%
Alaska DVR helped me understand my abilities so that I could choose a job consistent with my strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, capabilities, interests and informed choice.	85%

4. Consumer and Staff Interaction

DVR staff replied promptly to my questions, requests and informed me of changes.	91%
DVR staff were polite and helpful on an ongoing basis throughout the time I had an open case.	88%

Looking Ahead: Goals for 2024

Employment First Policy

- With the completion of the time-limited Alaska Work Matters Taskforce that leads to the Alaska Work Matters final report with recommendations, pursue the following next steps:
 - Form an ad hoc committee that will oversee the implementation of those recommendations within the State of Alaska.
 - Continue to educate leadership within the State of Alaska as well as our community partners on the value of work for Alaskans with disabilities.

Training

- Provide training and resources for the Business Solutions Specialist, staff, and service recipients to increase service quality and job opportunities for Alaskans with disabilities.
 - National and Statewide presenters to help develop and implement Best Practices for the Program.

Business Engagement & Outreach

- Ongoing collaboration between DVR and Employment First partners.
- Collect and share data for Employment First partners and vocational rehabilitation clients.
- Expand its presence at job fairs, employer/ job-seeker meetings, and Job X.

- Provide opportunities for Vocational Rehabilitation clients and businesses to become more informed about the Employment First Program.
- Pursue federal grants to increase employment opportunities for Alaskans with disabilities in collaboration with the Alaska Workforce Investment Board and other key partners.
 - Priority should focus on at-risk youth with disabilities as well as creating an environment of diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.

Competitive Integrated Employment

- Implement strategies to support and improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for people with disabilities, including youth and seniors.
 - BEST Team
 - At-Risk Youth Initiative
 - Senior Employment

Measurable Goals

1. Exceed FY23/24 employer presentations by 25%.
2. Forecast: increase the employment rate by 10% in 2024.
3. Continue to expand regional and national presence.
4. Increase Provisional Hires by 5%.
5. Increase Schedule A Hires by 3%.

Contact Information



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The State of Alaska
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DVR on Social Media

- Facebook: www.facebook.com/alaskadvr/
- LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/company/dvrbusiness
- Instagram: www.instagram.com/alaskadvr/
- YouTube: www.youtube.com/@AlaskaDVR907

Appendix



Appendix A – Department of Education and Early Development

Appendix B – Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Appendix C – Department of Health, Division of Behavioral Health

Appendix D – Department of Health, Senior and Disability Services

2023 Alaska Employment First Annual Progress Report

Department:
Department Representative:
Date:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 1: Alaska has measurable annual performance goals and outcomes with clear and meaningful benchmarks that track a number of key indicators to prove full support of competitive and integrated employment and effective implementation of the employment first initiative, including outcomes and goals for the numbers and percentages of persons with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment.

- 1: There are no performance goals and outcomes relating to this goal.
- 2: There are performance goals and outcomes, but they are too vague and are worded within overall outcomes, such as quality of life.
- 3: There are performance goals and outcomes, but they are insufficient and all are not measurable.
- 4: There are measurable goals and outcomes, but they are somewhat problematic (i.e., meeting the outcome does not necessarily mean an improvement in or increasing the rate of services in employment, as compared to segregated or non-work services.)
- 5: There are measurable outcomes with meaningful benchmarks.

Standard 1 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 2: Each relevant state agency has a strong and effective policy detailing how it will implement the Employment First law.

1: No relevant state agencies have adopted an Employment First policy detailing how they will implement Employment First in all programs, supports and services, nor is one being considered.

2: Relevant state agencies are considering Employment First policies, but there is not a formal group working on it.

3: Relevant state agencies are actively working on an Employment First policy; or agencies have a policy but it is flawed, incomplete in its implementation details or it is not clear.

4: Relevant state agencies have an Employment First policy, but it could be worded stronger so that Employment First is more meaningful in influencing practice.

5: ALL relevant state agencies have a strong Employment First policy along with the details of how it will implement the policy in its programs, supports and services..

Standard 2 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 3: Alaska has an effective method for collecting and publishing outcomes data involving competitive and integrated employment for people with disabilities. This method tracks a variety of data, including but not limited to competitive and integrated employment data. This data is used to engage stakeholders and inform strategy and policy decisions.

- 1: There is no comprehensive method for collecting and publishing data.
- 2: Partial data is sometimes collected.
- 3: Partial data is sometimes effectively collected, summarized & published.
- 4: Data is collected, published and effectively summarized but not a part of ongoing discussion and is not integrated into strategy discussions.
- 5: A comprehensive data system is in place both within and across state agencies. Information on employment, percentages and outcomes are routinely collected, analyzed, reported, and discussed. It is central to informing and impacting strategy and policy decisions.

Standard 3 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 4: Alaska's relevant state agencies successfully execute specific strategies to fully implement the employment first law and to ensure competitive and integrated employment of people with disabilities is fully supported in their programs, policies, procedures and funding.

- 1: There are no meaningful, specific strategies regarding employment first and competitive and integrated employment.
- 2: There are some programmatic/ regional strategies in place and being discussed with some stakeholders.
- 3: A core group of stakeholders are discussing several programmatic/regional and agency-wide strategies in a more comprehensive manner. Some strategies are implemented.
- 4: All stakeholders are invited and a sizeable number meaningfully participate in developing programmatic/regional and agency-wide strategies. A robust discussion is occurring, some strategies are implemented, but all strategies have not been implemented.
- 5: Effective strategies have been both developed and fully implemented and they are adjusted at least yearly with further stakeholder involvement.

Standard 4 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 5: Alaska has effective, meaningful and productive collaborations among stakeholder groups and between these stakeholders and state government to support the Employment First policy and competitive and integrated employment of people with disabilities.

- 1: There are few, if any, relationships among stakeholders and between stakeholders and state government.
- 2: Relationships are beginning to form and some collaboration efforts exist.
- 3: Relationships exist among all the major stakeholders, collaboration is occurring somewhat and ideas are being discussed.
- 4: Relationships and collaborations are somewhat effective and improving at state/regional/local levels among stakeholders.
- 5: Effective collaborations and relationships exist among state, regional, and provider agencies, advocacy organizations and employers to support integrated employment, including regular workgroup and statewide meetings involving stakeholders. These collaborations are effective towards supporting Employment First both among the stakeholders and between the stakeholders and state government.

Standard 5 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 6: Relevant state agencies will enter into formal interagency agreements to successfully implement, track and support the Employment First policy and competitive and integrated employment...

- 1: There are no formal agreements.
- 2: Agreements are beginning to be discussed.
- 3: Some formal agreements exist and a broad outline of other agreements is emerging.
- 4: Several formal agreements exist and others are being developed and discussed.
- 5: Formal interagency agreements exist to better ensure effective implementation of the Employment First policy. Issues and problems areas to be addressed in these interagency agreements should be developed from the input of disability stakeholders.

Standard 6 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 7: Alaska relevant state agencies aggressively pursue resources to support innovation in competitive/integrated employment services and to better advance and implement the Employment First initiative.

- 1: There is no plan to pursue resources or investment in innovations.
- 2: State agencies are discussing the need for innovations among some stakeholders.
- 3: There is agreement among state agencies and stakeholders to pursue resources to encourage innovations, but no applications for resource support have been made.
- 4: Some innovations are being encouraged and supported by state agencies, and some applications for resource support have been made.
- 5: Several innovations have/are emerging. These innovations are documented and discussed for broad implementation among stakeholders and state agencies. Multiple applications for resource support have been made.

Standard 7 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 8: Adequate resources are readily available to Alaska transition-age students and individuals waiting for services and their families to encourage them to choose competitive integrated employment and/or postsecondary education over other options.

- 1: Few if any resources are available.
- 2: The need for transition resources and resources for individuals waiting for services is beginning to be discussed.
- 3: There is agreement to provide these resources.
- 4: Some additional resources are available statewide and more are emerging for these needs.
- 5: Resources are readily available to transition-age students and individuals waiting for services and their families to encourage them to choose competitive integrated employment over other service options.

Standard 8 Summary:

2023 Alaska Employment First Annual Progress Report

Department: Labor & Workforce Development
Department Representative: Demetria Veasy
Date: 12/13/2023

Alaska Employment First Progress Report	
<p>Standard 1: Alaska has measurable annual performance goals and outcomes with clear and meaningful benchmarks that track a number of key indicators to prove full support of competitive and integrated employment and effective implementation of the employment first initiative, including outcomes and goals for the numbers and percentages of persons with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1: There are no performance goals and outcomes relating to this goal. <input type="checkbox"/> 2: There are performance goals and outcomes, but they are too vague and are worded within overall outcomes, such as quality of life. <input type="checkbox"/> 3: There are performance goals and outcomes, but they are insufficient and all are not measurable. <input type="checkbox"/> 4: There are measurable goals and outcomes, but they are somewhat problematic (i.e., meeting the outcome does not necessarily mean an improvement in or increasing the rate of services in employment, as compared to segregated or non-work services.) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5: There are measurable outcomes with meaningful benchmarks.

Standard 1 Summary:

The Division of Employment and Training Services (DETS) provides measurable outcomes around competitive and integrated employment of individuals with disabilities, with data collected through AlaskaJobs. DETS Alaska Job Centers proactively apply Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) prioritization to individuals experiencing disabilities by serving eligible individuals' needs in accordance with WIOA and informed choice. Each of these metrics has a target negotiated with US DOL/ETA, though the targets are for the programs as a whole and not specifically for individuals with disabilities.

DETS Participant totals for FY 23¹:

Program	Self-identified Participants Served ²	Q2 After Exit Employment Rate	Q4 After Exit Employment Rate	Quarterly Median Earnings
Wagner-Peyser	230	62%	52%	\$6,749
WIOA Adult	67	67%	62%	\$9,291

WIOA Dislocated Worker (DW)	12	100%	82%	\$12,137
WIOA Youth	235	65%	59%	\$4,160
Alaska Adult Education	196	N/A	N/A	N/A

740 individual program enrollments³ self-reported as having a disability or severe disability. Program enrollments are for the time period 7/1/22 – 6/30/23.

¹ From ETA 9169 Annual Performance Report, PY 21; AAE from Enrolled Individuals Report.

² Disability is a self-reported data element. As such, participants have the option to not disclose any disability status.

³ The reported enrollments don't account for possible co-enrollment in two or more programs by participants.

Alaska Employment First Progress Report	
<p>Standard 2: Each relevant state agency has a strong and effective policy detailing how it will implement the Employment First law.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1: No relevant state agencies have adopted an Employment First policy detailing how they will implement Employment First in all programs, supports and services, nor is one being considered. <input type="checkbox"/> 2: Relevant state agencies are considering Employment First policies, but there is not a formal group working on it. <input type="checkbox"/> 3: Relevant state agencies are actively working on an Employment First policy; or agencies have a policy but it is flawed, incomplete in its implementation details or it is not clear. <input type="checkbox"/> 4: Relevant state agencies have an Employment First policy, but it could be worded stronger so that Employment First is more meaningful in influencing practice. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5: ALL relevant state agencies have a strong Employment First policy along with the details of how it will implement the policy in its programs, supports and services.

Standard 2 Summary:

Alaska passed an Employment First law in 2014, and in 2016 repealed an exemption to the minimum wage law that allowed a reduced minimum wage for individuals with disabilities. The Division of Employment and Training Services (DETS) continually evaluates policies and procedures related to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to increase service delivery effectiveness across the customer spectrum, with disability resource coordinators at each job center to serve individuals with disabilities.

WIOA is designed to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy, with a focus on serving populations with the greatest barriers to employment. This design aligns directly with Employment First principles. Ongoing Employment First discussions with primary stakeholders may identify additional policy opportunities to increase effectiveness and alignment with other appropriate state agencies.

Alaska Employment First Progress Report	
<p>Standard 3: Alaska has an effective method for collecting and publishing outcomes data involving competitive and integrated employment for people with disabilities. This method tracks a variety of data, including but not limited to competitive and integrated employment data. This data is used to engage stakeholders and inform strategy and policy decisions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1: There is no comprehensive method for collecting and publishing data. <input type="checkbox"/> 2: Partial data is sometimes collected. <input type="checkbox"/> 3: Partial data is sometimes effectively collected, summarized & published. <input type="checkbox"/> 4: Data is collected, published and effectively summarized but not a part of ongoing discussion and is not integrated into strategy discussions. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5: A comprehensive data system is in place both within and across state agencies. Information on employment, percentages and outcomes are routinely collected, analyzed, reported, and discussed. It is central to informing and impacting strategy and policy decisions.

Standard 3 Summary:

AlaskaJobs, brought online in June 2020, integrates and aligns the service delivery, case management, and data reporting of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth), Title II (Adult Education), and Title III (Wagner-Peyser) programs as well as Trade Act and Veterans Services (both part of Title III). Provision of services is tracked and employment outcomes, including wages, for individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment are reported quarterly.

AlaskaJobs allows for combined reporting, where applicable, to occur. Reporting to the US Departments of Labor through the Workforce Integrated Performance System and to the Department of Education through the National Reporting System are the primary tools for evaluation of WIOA program performance.

Alaska Employment First Progress Report	
<p>Standard 4: Alaska’s relevant state agencies successfully execute specific strategies to fully implement the employment first law and to ensure competitive and integrated employment of people with disabilities is fully supported in their programs, policies, procedures and funding.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1: There are no meaningful, specific strategies regarding employment first and competitive and integrated employment. <input type="checkbox"/> 2: There are some programmatic/ regional strategies in place and being discussed with some stakeholders. <input type="checkbox"/> 3: A core group of stakeholders are discussing several programmatic/regional and agency-wide strategies in a more comprehensive manner. Some strategies are implemented. <input type="checkbox"/> 4: All stakeholders are invited and a sizeable number meaningfully participate in developing programmatic/regional and agency-wide strategies. A robust discussion is occurring, some strategies are implemented, but all strategies have not been implemented. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5: Effective strategies have been both developed and fully implemented and they are adjusted at least yearly with further stakeholder involvement.

Standard 4 Summary:

The Division of Employment and Training Services (DETS) policies are in alignment with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements and Employment First principles. Federal law and local policies specify expectations and requirements for access to services and priority of enrollment of individuals facing the greatest barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, in WIOA programs delivered through the division. The efforts of DETS, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Alaska Workforce Investment Board in formulating the WIOA Combined Plan includes Employment First objectives. This plan drives current, and influences future, programmatic, service delivery, and policy decisions.

Alaska Employment First Progress Report	
<p>Standard 5: Alaska has effective, meaningful and productive collaborations among stakeholder groups and between these stakeholders and state government to support the Employment First policy and competitive and integrated employment of people with disabilities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1: There are few, if any, relationships among stakeholders and between stakeholders and state government. <input type="checkbox"/> 2: Relationships are beginning to form and some collaboration efforts exist. <input type="checkbox"/> 3: Relationships exist among all the major stakeholders, collaboration is occurring somewhat and ideas are being discussed. <input type="checkbox"/> 4: Relationships and collaborations are somewhat effective and improving at state/regional/local levels among stakeholders. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5: Effective collaborations and relationships exist among state, regional, and provider agencies, advocacy organizations and employers to support integrated employment, including regular workgroup and statewide meetings involving stakeholders. These collaborations are effective towards supporting Employment First both among the stakeholders and between the stakeholders and state government.

Standard 5 Summary:

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) hosts weekly Job X meetings in partnership with the Division of Employment and Training Services (DETS) in Anchorage, Wasilla, Fairbanks, and Juneau. An employer is invited each week to spotlight their organization, present information on the mission of the organization, and highlight their hiring needs. The Business Connection teams in the job centers assist DVR with inviting employers to present at each Job X meeting.

Alaska Employment First Progress Report	
<p>Standard 6: Relevant state agencies will enter into formal interagency agreements to successfully implement, track and support the Employment First policy and competitive and integrated employment...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1: There are no formal agreements. <input type="checkbox"/> 2: Agreements are beginning to be discussed. <input type="checkbox"/> 3: Some formal agreements exist and a broad outline of other agreements is emerging. <input type="checkbox"/> 4: Several formal agreements exist and others are being developed and discussed. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5: Formal interagency agreements exist to better ensure effective implementation of the Employment First policy. Issues and problems areas to be addressed in these interagency agreements should be developed from the input of disability stakeholders.

Standard 6 Summary:

Alaska’s Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Combined Plan requires multiple state agencies to work together regarding employment for individuals with the greatest barriers to employment, including individuals with disabilities, and is guided by principles of competitive and integrated employment. Data on employment, education, training, and support services provided and employment outcomes, including wages, is reported quarterly.

Federally required reporting of common data and performance elements currently exists for WIOA Title I (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth), Title II (Adult Education), Title III (Wagner-Peyser), and Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation) programs.

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 7: Alaska relevant state agencies aggressively pursue resources to support innovation in competitive/integrated employment services and to better advance and implement the Employment First initiative.

- 1: There is no plan to pursue resources or investment in innovations.
- 2: State agencies are discussing the need for innovations among some stakeholders.
- 3: There is agreement among state agencies and stakeholders to pursue resources to encourage innovations, but no applications for resource support have been made.
- 4: Some innovations are being encouraged and supported by state agencies, and some applications for resource support have been made.
- 5: Several innovations have/are emerging. These innovations are documented and discussed for broad implementation among stakeholders and state agencies. Multiple applications for resource support have been made.

Standard 7 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report	
<p>Standard 8: Adequate resources are readily available to Alaska transition-age students and individuals waiting for services and their families to encourage them to choose competitive integrated employment and/or postsecondary education over other options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1: Few if any resources are available. <input type="checkbox"/> 2: The need for transition resources and resources for individuals waiting for services is beginning to be discussed. <input type="checkbox"/> 3: There is agreement to provide these resources. <input type="checkbox"/> 4: Some additional resources are available statewide and more are emerging for these needs. <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 5: Resources are readily available to transition-age students and individuals waiting for services and their families to encourage them to choose competitive integrated employment over other service options.

Standard 8 Summary:

The division’s Priority Populations Policy for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Adult, coupled with accessibility requirements across all programs and close partnership with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and other Employment First stakeholder agencies and programs, continues to ensure access and availability of program resources to assist individuals to be successful in their employment planning and efforts.

The ongoing Alaska Adult Education (AAE) program ensures that all providers have the ability to serve all students, including students with disabilities. The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) requires all students to have equal access to programs, facilities, and services. AAE is a critical pathway for older youth to achieve educational goals and become competitive in the workforce.

In FY23, The Division of Behavioral Health (DBH) funded 3 supported employment programs. The programs are located in Homer and Soldotna. Currently there are two agencies that have implemented the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model. The other grantee continued to be hindered with implementation due to the impact of COVID-19. The IPS model is an evidence-based practice that assists individuals with behavioral health disorders to gain competitive employment. The IPS model is based on 8 practice principles: systematic job development, rapid job search, integrated services, benefits planning, zero exclusion, time- unlimited supports, competitive employment, and worker preferences. The IPS model adheres to a 25- item fidelity scale. IPS programs that adhere to good fidelity are more likely to achieve enhanced competitive employment outcomes.

The Division of Behavioral Health has collaborations with various stakeholders, including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority. In FY23, DBH established the IPS steering committee. The purpose of the steering committee is to bring stakeholders together to assist with implementation of IPS across the state of Alaska. Some of the activities of the steering committee are:

1. **Coordination and Collaboration:** The IPS Steering Committee brings together key stakeholders and partners involved in the delivery of IPS services in Alaska. It serves as a platform for collaboration, coordination, and communication among various agencies, organizations, and individuals involved in the IPS program.
2. **Strategic Decision-Making:** The committee plays a crucial role in making strategic decisions related to the planning, development, and implementation of IPS programs across the state. Through collective discussions and consensus-building, the committee establishes priorities, sets goals, and determines the direction for IPS services.
3. **Policy Development and Advocacy:** The IPS Steering Committee contributes to the development of policies and procedures that govern IPS programs in Alaska. It helps establish guidelines and standards for the delivery of high-quality IPS services and advocates for the importance of evidence-based practices in supporting individuals with mental health challenges.

If FY23 DBH applied for and was accepted into the SAMHSA Transitional Aged Youth Supported Employment Policy Academy. The purpose of the academy was to assist the State of Alaska in enhancing and advancing employment and educational services for youth statewide. The policy academy will continue throughout FY24.

DBH tracks outcome measures of the supported employment programs. Below is the outcome data for FY23:

Total number of clients enrolled: 83
Total number of clients employed: 43
Percentage of clients employed: 52%

2023 Alaska Employment First Annual Progress Report

Department:
Department Representative:
Date:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 1: Alaska has measurable annual performance goals and outcomes with clear and meaningful benchmarks that track a number of key indicators to prove full support of competitive and integrated employment and effective implementation of the employment first initiative, including outcomes and goals for the numbers and percentages of persons with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment.

- 1: There are no performance goals and outcomes relating to this goal.
- 2: There are performance goals and outcomes, but they are too vague and are worded within overall outcomes, such as quality of life.
- 3: There are performance goals and outcomes, but they are insufficient and all are not measurable.
- 4: There are measurable goals and outcomes, but they are somewhat problematic (i.e., meeting the outcome does not necessarily mean an improvement in or increasing the rate of services in employment, as compared to segregated or non-work services.)
- 5: There are measurable outcomes with meaningful benchmarks.

Standard 1 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 2: Each relevant state agency has a strong and effective policy detailing how it will implement the Employment First law.

1: No relevant state agencies have adopted an Employment First policy detailing how they will implement Employment First in all programs, supports and services, nor is one being considered.

2: Relevant state agencies are considering Employment First policies, but there is not a formal group working on it.

3: Relevant state agencies are actively working on an Employment First policy; or agencies have a policy but it is flawed, incomplete in its implementation details or it is not clear.

4: Relevant state agencies have an Employment First policy, but it could be worded stronger so that Employment First is more meaningful in influencing practice.

5: ALL relevant state agencies have a strong Employment First policy along with the details of how it will implement the policy in its programs, supports and services..

Standard 2 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 3: Alaska has an effective method for collecting and publishing outcomes data involving competitive and integrated employment for people with disabilities. This method tracks a variety of data, including but not limited to competitive and integrated employment data. This data is used to engage stakeholders and inform strategy and policy decisions.

- 1: There is no comprehensive method for collecting and publishing data.
- 2: Partial data is sometimes collected.
- 3: Partial data is sometimes effectively collected, summarized & published.
- 4: Data is collected, published and effectively summarized but not a part of ongoing discussion and is not integrated into strategy discussions.
- 5: A comprehensive data system is in place both within and across state agencies. Information on employment, percentages and outcomes are routinely collected, analyzed, reported, and discussed. It is central to informing and impacting strategy and policy decisions.

Standard 3 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 4: Alaska's relevant state agencies successfully execute specific strategies to fully implement the employment first law and to ensure competitive and integrated employment of people with disabilities is fully supported in their programs, policies, procedures and funding.

- 1: There are no meaningful, specific strategies regarding employment first and competitive and integrated employment.
- 2: There are some programmatic/ regional strategies in place and being discussed with some stakeholders.
- 3: A core group of stakeholders are discussing several programmatic/regional and agency-wide strategies in a more comprehensive manner. Some strategies are implemented.
- 4: All stakeholders are invited and a sizeable number meaningfully participate in developing programmatic/regional and agency-wide strategies. A robust discussion is occurring, some strategies are implemented, but all strategies have not been implemented.
- 5: Effective strategies have been both developed and fully implemented and they are adjusted at least yearly with further stakeholder involvement.

Standard 4 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 5: Alaska has effective, meaningful and productive collaborations among stakeholder groups and between these stakeholders and state government to support the Employment First policy and competitive and integrated employment of people with disabilities.

- 1: There are few, if any, relationships among stakeholders and between stakeholders and state government.
- 2: Relationships are beginning to form and some collaboration efforts exist.
- 3: Relationships exist among all the major stakeholders, collaboration is occurring somewhat and ideas are being discussed.
- 4: Relationships and collaborations are somewhat effective and improving at state/regional/local levels among stakeholders.
- 5: Effective collaborations and relationships exist among state, regional, and provider agencies, advocacy organizations and employers to support integrated employment, including regular workgroup and statewide meetings involving stakeholders. These collaborations are effective towards supporting Employment First both among the stakeholders and between the stakeholders and state government.

Standard 5 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 6: Relevant state agencies will enter into formal interagency agreements to successfully implement, track and support the Employment First policy and competitive and integrated employment...

- 1: There are no formal agreements.
- 2: Agreements are beginning to be discussed.
- 3: Some formal agreements exist and a broad outline of other agreements is emerging.
- 4: Several formal agreements exist and others are being developed and discussed.
- 5: Formal interagency agreements exist to better ensure effective implementation of the Employment First policy. Issues and problems areas to be addressed in these interagency agreements should be developed from the input of disability stakeholders.

Standard 6 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 7: Alaska relevant state agencies aggressively pursue resources to support innovation in competitive/integrated employment services and to better advance and implement the Employment First initiative.

- 1: There is no plan to pursue resources or investment in innovations.
- 2: State agencies are discussing the need for innovations among some stakeholders.
- 3: There is agreement among state agencies and stakeholders to pursue resources to encourage innovations, but no applications for resource support have been made.
- 4: Some innovations are being encouraged and supported by state agencies, and some applications for resource support have been made.
- 5: Several innovations have/are emerging. These innovations are documented and discussed for broad implementation among stakeholders and state agencies. Multiple applications for resource support have been made.

Standard 7 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Progress Report

Standard 8: Adequate resources are readily available to Alaska transition-age students and individuals waiting for services and their families to encourage them to choose competitive integrated employment and/or postsecondary education over other options.

- 1: Few if any resources are available.
- 2: The need for transition resources and resources for individuals waiting for services is beginning to be discussed.
- 3: There is agreement to provide these resources.
- 4: Some additional resources are available statewide and more are emerging for these needs.
- 5: Resources are readily available to transition-age students and individuals waiting for services and their families to encourage them to choose competitive integrated employment over other service options.

Standard 8 Summary:

Alaska Employment First Annual Progress Report FY 2023

Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development

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**ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR
& WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

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