

ESSU Technical Assistance

School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP)

The School to Work Alliance Program (SWAP) is designed to provide employment-related assistance to youth and young adults with disabilities, who are experiencing mild to moderate barriers to employment. Disabilities can take the form of physical, emotional, or learning disabilities. SWAP provides assistance that not only produces a desirable employment outcome (such as a career-path job), but also teaches appropriate job seeking and job retention skills that can be utilized throughout a lifetime.

SWAP is a collaborative initiative between the Colorado Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and local school districts, and is supported by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE). The SWAP program provides case management and direct services to youth who:

- Have mild to moderate needs in employment;
- Are applicants of or are eligible to receive DVR services (meeting disability documentation requirements and able to benefit from the program); and
- Need short-term support to become competitively employed and to achieve successful community outcomes.

Purpose of SWAP

The purpose of SWAP is to provide successful employment outcomes, increased community linkages, and new patterns of service for youth within all categories of disabilities. The program's goals include:

- Building on current transition planning efforts;
- Filling the case management gap for the targeted population; and
- Supporting collaboration between DVR, the Colorado Department of Education, and local school districts.

Typical SWAP Services

Clients being served through SWAP are eligible for services typically provided through DVR, such as evaluation and diagnostic services, vocational counseling and guidance, physical and mental restoration services, and training. Additionally, SWAP may provide services such as:

- Career exploration
- Career development
- Employment-related instruction
- Job development / placement
- Case management
- One year of follow-up

SWAP is designed to provide a new pattern of service that will enhance existing transition services and to provide employment services to an under-served population of youth. Unique components include:

- Year round community-based services;

2015-2016 SWAP Sites School District/BOCES

Academy 20.....	719-234-1333
Adams 12	720-872-2660
Adams 14	303-853-3294
Adams 50	720-542-4582
Aurora	303-344-4910
Boulder.....	720-561-5312
Brighton.....	303-655-4197
Buena Vista	719-395-4064
Cañon City	719-276-6173
Centennial BOCES	970-352-7404
Cherry Creek	720-886-5871
Co. Springs 11.....	719-520-2592
Delta	970-874-7607
Denver.....	303-866-3869
Douglas County	303-387-1104
Englewood/Sheridan.	303-866-4458
Estes Park.....	970-586-2361
Ft. Lupton.....	303-857-7295
Greeley 6	970-348-1080
Jefferson County	303-982-7014
Littleton.....	303-347-4418
Mesa County	970-254-6402
Moffat County.....	970-756-7927
Montrose.....	970-249-7783
Northeast BOCES.....	970-774-6152
Pikes Peak BOCES	719-380-6256
Poudre.....	970-490-3286
Rio Blanco BOCES.....	970-629-5333
Salida	719-207-1509
San Juan BOCES.....	970-247-1178
San Luis Valley.....	719-589-5851
St. Vrain.....	303-772-7700
Thompson	970-669-8349
Uncompahgre BOCES	970-626-2977
Windsor.....	970-686-8078
Ute Pass BOCES.....	719-686-2457



- Case management services; and
- One year of follow-up services after successful employment.

The Colorado Department of Education, through a contract with DVR, provides joint training and technical assistance, product development and dissemination, conflict resolution assistance, and program monitoring to 36 local SWAP sites.

Funding

Funding of a SWAP site occurs when schools provide state or local funds to DVR, which are then matched with federal funds. These funds are used to pay for staff and other expenses related to SWAP. Additionally, DVR pays the cost of case services for youth assisted by the project. Participation in SWAP is optional by local districts.

SWAP Target Population

SWAP services would be appropriate for:

- Youth between the ages of 16-25, and
- Applicants of or eligible for DVR services, and
- Have mild to moderate needs in employment, and
- Will be ready to work after short-term service provision, and
- Typically living within the boundaries of a school district or BOCES participating in the SWAP program. (Youth who do not live in a participating district or BOCES may access vocational rehabilitation services directly through the DVR program).

Youth could be:

- In-School served by:
 - Section 504 programs
 - IDEA [Special Education] programs
 - Suspected or known disability not under any other category
- Out-of-School
 - Graduated or aged out
 - Drop-out or at risk of dropping out
 - Under or unemployed

SWAP would not be appropriate for:

- Youth aged 14 or 15
- Youth with significant needs who will require extensive services for placement
- Youth identified as “most severe” or currently eligible for supported employment services
- Youth with on-going legal problems that make placement in a work setting difficult
- Youth who need long-term services, extensive training or attend a 2 or 4-year college full time program.

Referrals:

The appropriate time for referral is when an individual’s primary focus is employment and they are available for services. Referrals can be made from the schools through the IEP or 504 process, through a DVR counselor, or directly to a SWAP office. To make a referral contact the coordinator in the community in which the youth lives.

The contents of this handout were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

My name is Emily Romero, I am a sophomore at Regis University in Denver, CO, and my experiences with DVR are as follows. I applied for services through the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) during my sophomore year of high school at the age of 16. I had some pre-vocational goals in mind, including receiving training for the summer at the Colorado Center for the Blind which would help me with college and work readiness. Unfortunately, I was denied for services and placed on the wait-list, and I was not removed from the wait-list until August 19th, 2014, one day before I was due to move into my college dorm at Regis University in Denver. This meant that I would not be able to receive any services or student benefits through DVR for my entire freshman year. College was and is the cornerstone of my vocational readiness, so this late removal from the wait-list severely hampered DVR's ability to assist me in achieving readiness for employment.

I have always had self-confidence and the ability to set goals for myself and fulfill them despite my disability; the only time I have felt belittled or inferior due to my total blindness was when my DVR counselor found out I was planning on attending Regis University (which is prestigious, academically rigorous, and a private university) and he asked what the need for this was, and why I wasn't taking my classes at community college. While community college is a perfectly respectable option and is an option which works well for many, it was obvious that my counselor was only asking me why I was going to a four year university because I was blind. His implied meaning was clear to me: He did not expect that any blind person could navigate the mobility challenges, academic rigor, and general environment of a full-time university.

This is but one example of the largest problem facing persons who are blind like myself as we attempt to navigate DVR's system: counselors are uneducated on what blindness actually means for a person's employability and educability. Many hold a view of blindness as a completely catastrophic impediment to success in all its forms, when in fact blindness, in actuality is a condition of being which requires some relatively minor adjustments in life (such as having things verbally described or using technology in different ways than otherwise would be the case). This lack of an understanding of what blindness means for a person's goals is the single most inhibitory factor in my receiving services through DVR.