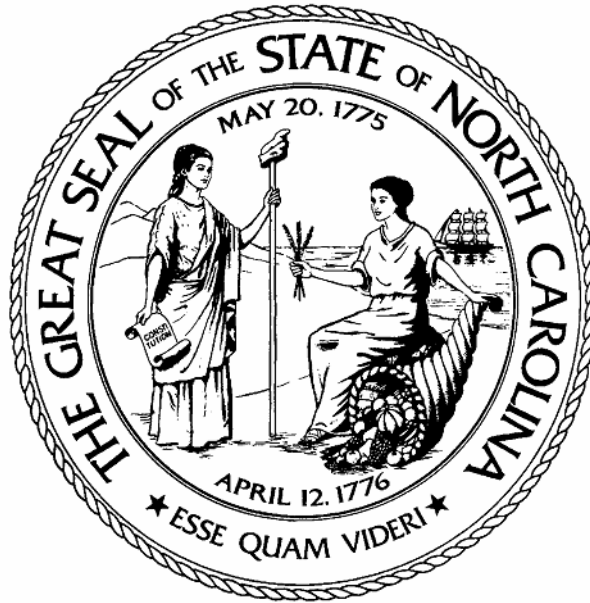


**EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES**

SESSION LAW 2015- 241

LEGISLATIVE REPORT



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

**DIVISION OF MENTAL HEALTH, DEVELOPMENTAL
DISABILITIES AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES**

NOVEMBER 16, 2015

Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities
SL 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a)
First Report

November 15, 2015

I. Introduction

The North Carolina General Assembly, under Session Law (SL) 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a), charged the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), through its Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (DMH/DD/SAS), with the assistance of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division of Social Services, the Department of Public Instruction, The University of North Carolina, and the North Carolina Community College System, and in consultation with the North Carolina Postsecondary Education Alliance, community stakeholders, and other interested parties, with reporting to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services with regard to postsecondary education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

This is the first report under that provision. In light of passage of the Appropriations Act on September 18, 2015 which set the reporting date of November 15, 2015, the initial report is limited in scope. It offers background information and a general approach to stakeholder engagement, and collaboration. An advisory group will conduct a more in-depth inquiry and produce future reports that address the provisions of the law in more detail.

Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a) sets out a framework for review of postsecondary education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities in North Carolina. The identification of cross-system needs, as well as gaps in individual skill sets, to support transition to adulthood for people with disabilities; the development of programs and policies to expand and sustain current growth in postsecondary education and employment opportunities for this population; increased awareness of the benefits and availability of postsecondary education and employment opportunities; shared policies and data collection around meaningful outcomes; and linked agency data bases may, over time, result in gains in productivity, prosperity and wellbeing for people with disabilities and their families. Such change may also accrue to the benefit of employers and the public as a whole. Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a) sets the stage for these propositions to be tested and, potentially, affirmed.

The first report required by Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a) is comprised of the following sections:

- I. Introduction
- II. Provisions of Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a)
- III. Defining the Target Population for Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a): Students with Disabilities
- IV. Transition to Adulthood for Students with Disabilities
- V. Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students with Disabilities
- VI. Innovations in Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities in North Carolina
- VII. Common Data Indicators for Tracking Outcomes for Students with Disabilities after Leaving High School
- VIII. Options for Technology to Link Agency Databases
- IX. Response to Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a)
- X. Summary

II. Provisions of Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a)

Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a) states as follows:

The Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services, with the assistance of the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and Division of Social Services, the Department of Public Instruction, The University of North Carolina, and the North Carolina Community College System, and in consultation with the North Carolina Postsecondary Education Alliance, community stakeholders, and other interested parties, shall:

- (1) Assess gaps and system needs to support transitions of people with disabilities to adulthood.*
- (2) Develop a program and fiscal policies to expand and sustain postsecondary education and employment opportunities for people with disabilities.*
- (3) Plan and implement approaches to public awareness about postsecondary education and employment for people with disabilities.*
- (4) Plan and implement joint policies and common data indicators for tracking the outcomes of people with disabilities after leaving high school.*
- (5) Consider options for technology to link agency databases.*

The Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services shall report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services by November 15, 2015, and annually thereafter through November 15, 2017, on the implementation of this section.

III. Defining the Target Population for Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a): Students with Disabilities

The lead agency for this provision, the DMH/DD/SAS, oversees a statewide system of services and supports for people with mental health issues, developmental disabilities and substance use disorders. While DMH/DD/SAS's purview touches the lives of many people, its purview is not as broad as that which provision references: "people with disabilities." The antecedent bill, House Bill 921 sec. 2.1(a) referred to "people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities" (I/DD), while sec. 2.2 of the same bill referred to "people with disabilities." However, Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a) adopted the language of section 2.2, omitting reference to people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities in favor of "people with disabilities." In this section, DMH/DD/SAS in collaboration with the identified stakeholders defines that population within the context of Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a).

The legal definition of "people with disabilities" is articulated broadly in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).¹ Under the ADA, disability means, with respect to an individual, (a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; (b) a record of such an impairment; or (c) being regarded as having such an impairment.²

Although the term "people with disabilities" is inclusive of many types of disabilities, its operational definition is governed by the federal statutes under which the agencies named in this provision operate. We begin with the definition of disability used in primary and secondary education. The Department of Public Instruction's (DPI) services to students with disabilities at the elementary (primary) and high school (secondary) level are governed by the nation's special education law: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. IDEA defines "child with a disability" as a child evaluated in accordance with Sec.

¹See 42 U.S.C. sec. 12102.

² Ibid. Common examples of disabilities covered by the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act are chronic diseases such as AIDS, hearing or vision impairment, severe mobility impairments, emotional or mental illness, intellectual disability or epilepsy. To be covered by the ADA or the Rehabilitation Act, a disability must substantially limit a major life activity. Examples of a disability not covered under the ADA or Rehabilitation Act are a broken leg or ordinary stress that is not debilitating. There are, however, some disabilities that are not visible, such as a learning disability. Learning disabilities are covered by the ADA.

300.304 through 300.311 as having mental retardation³, a hearing impairment (including deafness), a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment (including blindness), a serious emotional disturbance, an orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.⁴ IDEA includes specific disability terms, which are also defined by the law.⁵ The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act covers people up to age 22 and accords eligible individuals with a free and appropriate public education.

As Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), the University of North Carolina and the North Carolina Community College System deliver postsecondary education to people with disabilities. These partners in SL 2015-241, sec. 11.19(a) are covered under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA, Public Law 110-315). In Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act mandates equal access to educational opportunities for “otherwise-qualified individuals with documented disabilities”⁶, as opposed to the definition of disability for accessing services under IDEA. The 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act contained a number of important provisions related to disability, including some relevant to the definition of people with disabilities.⁷ In addition to definitions of disability, which apply to higher education through civil rights law, the Higher Education Opportunity defines “student with an intellectual disability,”⁸ a group that has only recently begun to achieve access to institutions of higher education.⁹ Other definitions in the Act track Section 504 and the ADA.

³ PL 111-256, known as Rosa’s Law, amends the Higher Education Act of 1965, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Public Health Service Act, the Health Professions Education Partnerships Act of 1998, the National Sickle Cell Anemia Act, Cooley’s Anemia, Tay-Sachs, and Genetic Diseases Act, the Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008, and other federal enactments and regulations to change references to mental retardation to references to an intellectual disability.

⁴ See <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cregs%2C300%2CA%2C>.

⁵ These categories are: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, including blindness. See <http://www.parentcenterhub.org/repository/categories/>.

⁶ Under Section 504, individuals with disabilities are defined as persons with a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities. People who have a history of, or who are regarded as having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, are also covered. Major life activities include caring for one’s self, walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, working, performing manual tasks, and learning. Some examples of impairments which may substantially limit major life activities, even with the help of medication or aids/devices, are: AIDS, alcoholism, blindness or visual impairment, cancer, deafness or hearing impairment, diabetes, drug addiction, heart disease, and mental illness. See <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/resources/factsheets/504.pdf>.

⁷ See, e.g., Kurtz, A. (2011). An analysis of disability-related provision in the 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA): what universities and policy makers should know. http://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1002&context=ccids_education.

⁸ HEOA, Title VII, Part D, Section 760.

⁹ <http://www.thinkcollege.net/topics/opportunity-act>

Based on this analysis, the DMH/DD/SAS in consultation with the partners identified in SL 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a) have concluded that the references to “people with disabilities” made in the context of “postsecondary education and employment opportunities” is specific to students with disabilities under IDEA and, when applicable, those students with disabilities covered by the Higher Education Opportunity Act.

IV. Transition to Adulthood for Students with Disabilities

Transition to adulthood for students with disabilities has been referred to as the “transition cliff.”¹⁰ SL 2015-241, section 11.19.(a) directs MH/DD/SAS and the organizations and agencies named to “assess gaps and system needs to support transitions of people with disabilities to adulthood.” Some of these gaps and needs are a result of the “transition cliff.” The “cliff” is created by shifts in eligibility that occur as students with disabilities move from services for children to adult services, e.g., vocational rehabilitation programs and cash benefits. The difficulties associated with accessing programs, services and supports after secondary school can complicate the transition to adulthood for students with disabilities, relative to peers without disabilities.

Another part of the complexity surrounding the transition to adulthood for students with disabilities is the shift from high school special education services and supports under IDEA to postsecondary education services under Section 504 and the ADA. IDEA’s services, including transition services, are entitlements for eligible children and youths with disabilities in compulsory education settings. In postsecondary educational and employment settings, the approach to working with students with disabilities is governed by other laws and regulations.

As noted in Section III of this report, for Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), Section 504 mandates “equal access to educational opportunities for otherwise-qualified individuals with documented disabilities.”¹¹ Most IHEs have a disability support services office to provide students with equal access to educational opportunities; yet, in practice, navigating the environment may still be daunting for students with disabilities. By way of example, under Section 504 and Title II of the ADA, IHEs must provide academic adjustments and auxiliary aids and services. They must make “reasonable modifications to policies, practices, or procedures when necessary to avoid disability-based discrimination,” unless the institutions can demonstrate that a “fundamental alteration” or “undue burden”

¹⁰ Podmostko, M. (2007) *Tunnels & Cliffs, A Guide to Workforce Development Practitioners and Policymakers Serving Youth with Mental Health Needs*. Washington, D.C.: National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

would occur.^{12 13} How these laws play out and impact students with disabilities varies widely—and may be unfamiliar to students entering postsecondary education settings. Parents and students with disabilities who have mastered the IDEA may find that they are less certain when it comes to protections such as adjusting a student’s course load, the interaction of Social Security Act programs with financial aid, obtaining accessibility instructional materials, or flexible policies regarding withdrawal from college. Moreover, students and families often do not understand the interaction between vocational rehabilitation and financial aid and may not have access to information about the interplay among these financial resources and other benefits programs upon which students with disabilities may rely. It is possible that the “transition cliff” accounts, in part, for postsecondary education completion rates among people with disabilities that are much lower than those of peers without disabilities.¹⁴

V. Post-Secondary Education and Employment for Students with Disabilities

Among the general public, the benefits of postsecondary education with regard to attaining employment, developing a career path, and accruing income and assets are unquestioned. For the eleven percent of undergraduate students with a disability-- some two million students nationally--the potential of postsecondary education for attaining these same benefits is not fully realized.¹⁵ Students with disabilities are attending postsecondary education at rates similar to students without disabilities, but their completion rates are much lower. Only 34% finish a four-year degree in eight years, compared to 51.2 percent of the general population.¹⁶

While currently only 32% of working-age people with disabilities are employed, those with a college education are more likely to be employed and are earning a higher average wage than those without a college education.¹⁷ In testimony in May of 2015 before the Department of Labor’s Advisory Committee on Increasing Integrated Employment for Individuals with Disabilities, the national Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) underlined the particular

¹² 28 C.F.R. § 35.130(b)(7), more commonly known as the Title II Regulation, and 34 C.F.R. § 104.44(a),(b),(d), more commonly known as the Section 504 Regulation.

¹³ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Program, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development: Country Report for the United States, Pathways for Students with Disabilities to Tertiary Education and Employment, Washington, D.C., 2010.

¹⁴ National Council on Disability (2015). Briefing Paper: Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA): The Implications for Increasing the Employment of People with Disabilities; <https://www.ncd.gov/publications/2015/05192015>.

¹⁵ National Council on Disability (2015). Briefing Paper: Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA): The Implications for Increasing the Employment of People with Disabilities; <https://www.ncd.gov/publications/2015/05192015>

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

significance of employment for students with disabilities. APSE noted that too many students with disabilities were leaving American schools without any significant work experience or a clear career plan. Such youth were, APSE continued, more likely to drop out of high school, not receive adequate job training, become involved in the juvenile justice system, and remain on government programs resulting in a life of poverty and cyclical dependence. Evidence-based research, testimony noted, has documented that youth with significant disabilities who were educated in inclusive settings, exposed to work experience and career exploration, and participated in a paid work experience during school had better postsecondary outcomes and higher rates of sustainable employment.¹⁸ Further, data gathered by the Rehabilitation Services Administration, indicates that young adults with intellectual disabilities who participated in postsecondary education were 26% more likely to exit their vocational rehabilitation program with employment and earned a 73% higher weekly income.¹⁹ Such data point to the potential cost-effectiveness of postsecondary education for students with disabilities, and also point to other outcomes associated with increased quality of life.

Further, over 600 North Carolina youth in foster care will reach adulthood (age out) in 2015. Of those youth, it is estimated that over 100 have some type of intellectual or developmental disability. The North Carolina Postsecondary Education Support Scholarship Program, known as **NC Reach** that was authorized by the 2007 General Assembly, can pay for the balance of cost of attendance at any branch of the UNC system or any NC Community College for students who either aged out of NC foster care or who were adopted from NC foster care on or after their 12th birthday. Eligibility for the scholarship continues until the day before the student's 26th birthday. In SFY2014, 292 youth utilized this opportunity.

VI. Innovations in Postsecondary Education for Students with Disabilities in North Carolina

North Carolina has been a leader in supporting postsecondary education, particularly with regard to students with complex disabilities. In 2006, prior to the passage of the Higher Education Opportunity Act in 2008²⁰, the state's first

¹⁸ <http://apse.org/apse-public-testimony-to-the-advisory-committee-in-increasing-competitive-integrated-employment-for-individuals-with-disabilities/>

¹⁹ Cf.

http://www.academia.edu/9425600/A_Survey_of_Postsecondary_Education_Programs_for_Students_With_Intellectual_Disabilities_in_the_United_States

²⁰ Under the HEOA, students with intellectual disabilities in Comprehensive Transition Programs, designated by the US Department of Education, became eligible for Pell Grants. The HEOA also gave students access to Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants and the Federal Work-Study Program. Originally, students with intellectual disabilities were not eligible for financial aid because they often lacked a regular high school diploma and did not meet an "ability to benefit" from postsecondary education test. HEOA allows the Secretary of Education to waive certain sections of the law that would normally

postsecondary education program for students with intellectual disabilities, Beyond Academics™,²¹ became operational at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). DHHS was instrumental in the effort.²² The UNCG-based program received three Transformation Grants from the DMH/DD/SAS between 2006 and 2011. Beyond Academics™ also secured from DHHS' Division of Medical Assistance (DMA) permission to use Medicaid Home and Community Based Services, under North Carolina's Innovations Waiver, for ancillary supports for eligible students where the ADA and Section 504²³ did not cover the necessary services. With the active involvement of DHHS and other stakeholders, UNCG subsequently became one of the first universities in the country to award a four-year certificate, designed against an undergraduate framework, to a cohort of students with intellectual disabilities (ID): the Certificate in Integrative Community Studies.²⁴

The development of UNCG's program was followed by initiatives that garnered federal grant dollars through the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID),²⁵ i.e., Western Carolina University's University Participant (UP) program²⁶ and Appalachian State University's Scholars with Diverse Abilities program.²⁷ In 2010, the Postsecondary Education Alliance was formed and is housed at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Carolina Institute for Developmental Disabilities (CIDD).²⁸ In addition to diverse programs within the state's universities²⁹, there are also postsecondary education programs for students with ID in the NC Community College System. These include Alamance Community College³⁰,

prevent students with intellectual disabilities from attending institutions of higher education. See <https://dus.psu.edu/mentor/2011/05/intellectual-disability-programs/>

²¹ <http://beyondacademics.uncg.edu/about/>

²² The North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD), Office of the Secretary, DHHS, assisted Beyond Academics™ with grant funding.

²³ Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 protects qualified individuals from discrimination based on their disability. The nondiscrimination requirements of the law apply to employers and organizations that receive financial assistance from any federal department or agency. Section 504 forbids organizations and employers from excluding or denying individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to receive program benefits and services. It defines the rights of individuals with disabilities to participate in, and have access to, program benefits and services. <http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/civilrights/resources/factsheets/504.pdf>

²⁴ <http://beyondacademics.uncg.edu/academics/>

²⁵ See <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/tpsid/index.html>. The Model Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) provides grants to institutions of higher education or consortia of institutions of higher education to enable them to create or expand high quality, inclusive model comprehensive transition and postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

²⁶ <http://www.wcu.edu/academics/departments-schools-colleges/CEAP/ceap-depts/stl/special-education-programs/university-participant-up-program/>

²⁷ <http://sdap.appstate.edu/>

²⁸ <http://www.cidd.unc.edu/psea/>. CIDD also offers traineeships for people with ID in its graduate-level program.

²⁹ There are three main models of postsecondary education programs that admit students with intellectual disabilities: mixed or hybrid, substantially separate, and totally inclusive. Within each model, a wide range of supports and services is provided. <https://ici.umn.edu/products../impact/233/233.pdf>.

³⁰ <https://www.alamancecc.edu/services-for-students-site/disability-services/career-college/>

College of the Albemarle³¹ and Wake Technical Community College³². Collectively, these 13 programs³³--ranging from a year in length to four years-- have learned from one another through participation in the Postsecondary Education Alliance.³⁴

VII. Common Data Indicators for Tracking Outcomes of Students with Disabilities after Leaving High School

The 2014 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)³⁵ envisioned the need to prepare students with disabilities through postsecondary education. WIOA includes mandates that act as drivers for the collaboration of many of the agencies named in SL 2015 241, Section 11.19.(a). WIOA is comprised of a number of core programs: the Adult Program (Title I); the Dislocated Worker Program (Title I); the Youth Program (Title I); the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program (Title II); the Wagner-Peyser Act Program (Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by Title III); and the Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV).³⁶ WIOA's proposed performance accountability measures for transition-age students with disabilities, ages 14-24, are as follows.³⁷

1. The percentage of program participants who are in education or training activities, or in unsubsidized employment, during the second quarter after exit from the program.
2. The percentage of program participants who are in an education or training program or in unsubsidized employment in the fourth quarter after exit.
3. The median earnings in the second quarter after participants exit from the program.

³¹ <http://www.albemarle.edu/academics/basic-and-transitional/compensatory-education-program>

³² <https://www.waketech.edu/news/innovative-program-students-intellectual-disabilities-holds-first-graduation>

³³ As of 2014, North Carolina had ten programs in postsecondary education for students with ID in its community colleges and three at universities.

³⁴ According to the National Coordinating Center, Think College, funded through the Office of Post-Secondary Education, there are now over 200 programs in postsecondary education serving students with intellectual disabilities in 40 states.

³⁵ See <http://www.doleta.gov/wioa/Overview.cfm> for an overview of WIOA.

³⁶ For WIOA's Title I and Title III workforce programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, TAA) NCWorks Online is the state's official labor exchange and case management system. It is a one-stop online resource for job seekers and employers in North Carolina.

³⁷ Proposed § 677.155(d)(1)–(6) identifies the primary indicators of performance that states must to address in their Unified or Combined State Plans for the youth program under WIOA, Title I. The youth indicators apply universally to the youth workforce investment program and, therefore, apply to in-school and out-of-school youth as defined in WIOA sec. 129(a)(1)(B) and (C).

4. The postsecondary credential attainment and high school completion of program participants who have exited from the youth program under WIOA, Title I.
5. The percentage of participants who, during a program year, are in education or training programs that lead to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment, and who are achieving measurable skill gains.

As key metrics for SL 2015-241, sec. 11.19.(a) are developed, we will take into account the performance accountability measures under WIOA, resulting in enhanced collaboration and integration among the partner agencies, as well as stronger alignment of effort. Establishing common performance accountability measures will also enable the caliber of evaluation for program planning and development that is essential to achieving improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

VIII. Options for Technology to Link Agency Databases

SL 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a) includes a requirement with the potential to support postsecondary education and employment opportunities for students with disabilities through co-joint policies and common data indicators for tracking outcomes. Such policies may, in the future, be strengthened by the provision's requirement to review options for linking agency databases.

To address the technology component of the provision, the named agencies will consider leveraging work that is underway through the Institute of Education Sciences' (IES) State Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) Grant. This grant, awarded to North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI), builds upon an earlier grant to DPI to create a K-12 Longitudinal Data System. The current grant does so by adding in some Early Childhood programs not within the K-12 domain.³⁸ At this time, partnerships and data sharing are well established among the following: North Carolina Department of Public Instruction; North Carolina Department of Commerce, Labor and Economic Analysis Division (DOC/LEAD); North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS);³⁹ the University of North Carolina (UNC); and the North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities (NCICU). Key products of these grants are the unique identifier number (UID) assigned to the individuals who are part of each partner agency's domain, the

³⁸ The Early Childhood programs are included as a result of the Early Learning Challenge Grant, part of the Race to the Top Grant. This component of the program is known as the Early Childhood Integrated Data System (ECIDS).

³⁹ North Carolina's Community College System has relatively decentralized processes for data collection and reporting. The 58 community colleges collect data for their students, and the NC Community College System uses a Literacy Education Information System (LEIS). The LEIS captures, e.g., enrollment data, functioning levels and testing. Reports are submitted to the federal government annually, at the end of the calendar year for the past program year ending June 30.

automation of current data sharing, the inclusion of some Early Childhood programs, and the inclusion of the Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC).

Going forward, the Government Data Analytics Center (GDAC) will act as a “federated data system” broker at the hub of a spoke system with each of the five agencies’ existing data systems. In 2016 GDAC, will serve as the data broker for the Common Follow-up System, collecting demographic, educational, and earnings data on workforce and education program participants. Partnering agencies for SL 2015-241, 11.19.(a) will discuss the feasibility of leveraging GDAC as a central resource for integrating data across systems for this initiative. A system of this type can enable queries that draw upon multiple databases and generate responses without compromising confidential information. Going forward, the technology could support longitudinal, cross-sector tracking of a cohort, such as children and/or students with disabilities, against specified probes or outcomes. The capacity to track shared outcomes across sectors, as a population moves through educational settings and into the workforce, potentially offers strategies for refining the fiscal and programmatic policies that can sustain, expanding and improving programs. Such technology holds promise for the achievement of positive outcomes associated with postsecondary education and employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

IX. Response to Session Law 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a)

DMH/DD/SAS, DHHS, will appoint and convene an advisory group by January 15, 2016. The working group will meet at least once quarterly and report annually through November 15, 2017. DMH/DD/SAS proposes that the group be co-chaired by a representative from the higher education community. The co-chairs will work collaboratively to appoint a diverse complement of stakeholders, including representatives of the following:

- Department of Health and Human Services
- Department of Public Instruction, Division of Exceptional Children
- The University of North Carolina
- The North Carolina Community College System
- North Carolina Postsecondary Education Alliance
- Parents of students in North Carolina’s postsecondary education programs for students with disabilities
- Students or alumni in North Carolina’s postsecondary education programs for students with disabilities
- North Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities
- North Carolina Government Data Analytics Center
- Member(s) of NC General Assembly

Beginning in the first quarter of 2016, this group will develop and implement an approach to these preliminary tasks:

- 1) Assess gaps, systems needs and necessary skill development to support transitions of students with disabilities into postsecondary education programs and employment.
- 2) Develop recommendations for programmatic and fiscal policies to expand and sustain postsecondary education for students with disabilities and employment opportunities for students in and graduating from secondary and postsecondary education programs.
- 3) Develop recommendations to increase public awareness about postsecondary education for students with disabilities and employment opportunities.
- 4) Develop recommendations with regard to joint policies and data indicators for tracking key outcomes for people with disabilities who are participating/have participated in postsecondary education programs and employment opportunities.
- 5) Develop recommendations with regard to linked, agency data bases regarding outcomes associated with postsecondary education and employment for students with disabilities.

X. Summary

This is the first report submitted in response to the requirements under SL 2015-241, Section 11.19.(a)., Education Opportunities for Students with Disabilities. The provision requires a multi-agency report annually, between November 15, 2015 and November 15, 2017, to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee on Health and Human Services. The stakeholders named in the legislation have been initially engaged and will continue the effort to develop cohesive policies and practices related to postsecondary education for students with disabilities, with the goal of improving employment opportunities for these individuals. This first report provides background information; identifies the target population; delineates the context of the provision; describes innovations in the state in postsecondary education for people with disabilities; addresses the role of common data indicators for tracking outcomes; considers resources and options for linking databases; and outlines process with regard to the implementation of the provision.