

CAPE - Youth

CENTER FOR ADVANCING POLICY
ON EMPLOYMENT FOR YOUTH

Unlocking the Potential of WIOA Title I

To Help America's Youth and Young
Adults with Disabilities Access Jobs

Overview

This brief synthesizes the powerful opportunities within Title I of the [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) to expand Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE) and educational pathways for youth and young adults with disabilities (Y&YAD). WIOA and [America's Talent Strategy](#) (ATS) offer a strong foundation for innovation, equipping states, and local workforce systems with flexible tools to build responsive, data-informed, and cross-system service models. Evidence from federal pilots and state initiatives demonstrates that integrated resource teams, strengthened cross-system partnerships, and

braided approaches with vocational rehabilitation can successfully increase training access, employment readiness, and collaboration. YouthBuild and other industry-driven workforce training programs also show promise in creating accessible pathways into high-demand fields. By leveraging these strengths, states and localities can enhance alignment across agencies, use data to elevate effective practices, and scale models that promote meaningful CIE. This brief provides actionable strategies to help policymakers build on existing assets and accelerate positive outcomes for Y&YAD.



Background

The WIOA represents a significant federal investment in advancing economic opportunity for individuals facing barriers to CIE including American Y&YAD. Title I of WIOA is administered by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) through the Employment and Training Administration (ETA). Formula grants under Title I provide support for employment and training programs for youth, adults, and dislocated workers. The youth funding formula requires a commitment to supporting out-of-school (i.e., 75 percent of funds) and in-school youth aged 14 to 24, especially those facing heightened barriers to entry into the workforce.

WIOA and ATS offer powerful opportunities to expand economic mobility for Y&YAD by equipping state and local systems with the tools to adopt intentional, data-informed strategies. Y&YAD often navigate additional barriers to CIE, such as homelessness, aging out of foster care, or economic hardship, requiring local

implementation to include thoughtful approaches that bridge service gaps, enhance systems integration, tailor interventions, and support business needs through industry-driven strategies. While challenges do remain with consistently providing these opportunities across local areas, they underscore the importance of fully leveraging WIOA's promise and ATS's framework to improve access and outcomes.

The WIOA Youth Formula Program includes [14 required program elements](#). Comprehensive youth services provide opportunities to address the career and employment needs of America's out-of-school and in-school youth aged 14 to 24 who face one or more barriers to CIE. WIOA requires the provision of supports to youth with disabilities, those experiencing homelessness, those in the foster care system or who have aged out, youth in an out-of-home placement, low-income youth needing extra assistance to enter or

complete an educational program or secure or maintain employment, youth in economic need, those who are basic skills deficient, or English language learners.¹ Congress established common performance measures across workforce systems to evaluate the ongoing outcomes achieved under WIOA. These measures include customers' employment rates in the second and fourth quarters after program exit, median earnings in the second quarter after exit, credential attainment, measurable skill gains, and the state's effectiveness in serving employers (see Table 1).

By analyzing administrative and population data, policymakers can identify variations in enrollment, service receipt, and outcome achievement to

ensure accountability under ATS.² By investing in meaningful improvement and evaluation processes, such as improvement science, root cause analysis, and scaling successful pilot initiatives,³ states can better prepare programs and services to support Y&YAD within the workforce development system. Specifically, DOL's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)'s Employment Transition Model Demonstration (ETM) projects in Connecticut, Kansas, Minnesota, and New York demonstrate how to employ improvement and evaluation processes to increase outcomes, better inform policymakers of emerging and actual needs, and develop policies to enhance practice.

TABLE 1⁴

WIOA Common Performance Measures	All Title I Youth	Title I Youth with Disabilities
Employment & Education Rate Second Quarter After Exit	72.7%	69.8%
Employment & Education Rate Fourth Quarter After Exit	73.4%	70.7%
Median Earnings Second Quarter After Exit	\$4,839	\$4,575
Credential Attainment Rate	61.8%	59.9%
Measurable Skill Gains	63.2%	63.9%



Promising Strategies to Support Y&YAD through WIOA Title I

Some Y&YAD may not receive all Title I services they are eligible for under WIOA due to non-apparent disabilities, hesitancy to disclose, or immediate referral to WIOA Title IV

vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies for services. State policymakers can use the information in this brief to enhance their states' efforts to implement WIOA Title I and better serve Y&YAD.

1 | Leveraging other federal initiatives across state workforce agencies to initiate innovation at the local level.

Outcome Statement: State workforce agencies systematically leverage and align federal initiatives to drive coordinated innovation at the local level, resulting in increased adoption of integrated service strategies, enhanced cross-system collaboration, and improved CIE for Y&YAD.

Supporting Evidence: Drawing on multi-agency federal pilots such as ODEP/ETA's Disability Employment Initiative and Rehabilitation Services Administration's (RSA) NextGen work, states demonstrate that integrated resource team (IRT) models and cross-system integration increase access to workforce training for

Y&YAD (e.g., more than 300 individuals reached under MassAbility).⁵ Furthermore, some states and local workforce development areas have expanded services for Y&YAD through prior ODEP- and ETA-funded projects. For instance, the Hempstead Works office in New York has sustained and broadened mentoring, IRT, and career pathway initiatives initially developed with federal funding.

ATS Alignment: Advances Pillar III (Integrated Systems) by replacing fragmented programs with unified service approaches and Pillar V (Innovation) by scaling models tested through federal demonstrations.⁶

2 | Enhancing systems integration among the state and local workforce, education, and community organizations to effectively support Y&YAD.

Outcome statement: State and local workforce, education, and community organizations operate through an integrated, coordinated system that aligns services, resources and WIOA performance indicators, resulting in more seamless supports and improved outcomes in education, CIE, and independent living for Y&YAD.

Supporting Evidence: Research shows ongoing recruitment challenges for out-of-school youth;⁷ partnership models such as LEAP and in Compass demonstrate improved outreach and increased access to coordinated

work-based learning, career navigation, and support services for youth with significant barriers. These efforts led to referral relationships and collaborations with local school districts, vocational rehabilitation, community mental health, and other non-required WIOA community partners to advance work-based learning and CIE opportunities for Y&YAD.

ATS Alignment: Advances Pillar III (Integrated Systems) by streamlining access points and Pillar II (Worker Mobility) by improving on-ramps to employment and education.⁸

3 | Building specific braided service approaches with VR agencies to enhance access to services for Y&YAD.

Outcome statement: State workforce systems increase access to CIE and training opportunities for Y&YAD by aligning WIOA Title I services with VR supports, especially in states operating under Order of Selection.

Supporting Evidence: While WIOA emphasizes the partnership between the workforce and VR systems, states can struggle to identify the best opportunities for collaboration. Examples such as Maryland's Single Step partnership and Wisconsin PROMISE⁹ show that coordinated VR-workforce strategies lead to improved work readiness, expanded access to

services, and sustained cross-system collaboration for youth with cognitive, developmental, and mental health disabilities. These efforts have been sustained in Wisconsin through ongoing collaboration between the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to increase opportunities for Y&YAD.

ATS Alignment: Advances Pillar I (Industry-Driven Strategies) by better aligning training to employer-validated needs and Pillar III (Integrated Systems) by reducing barriers created by sole implementation by VR.¹⁰

4 | Supporting approaches in YouthBuild to create opportunities for Y&YAD.

Outcome Statement: YouthBuild programs implement coordinated approaches aligned with WIOA Title I systems that expand access to training and career pathways for Y&YAD.

Supporting Evidence: Building on the success of YouthBuild, there is an opportunity to expand the model, using Universal Design principles, to support Y&YAD effectively. There are approximately 200 U.S. DOL-funded YouthBuild programs operating in 40 states and serving approximately 6,000 youth annually. A national YouthBuild evaluation showed increases in high

school equivalency attainment, college enrollment, and employment,¹¹ and local enhancements (e.g., Social Enterprise and Training [SEAT] Center mental health supports, Mockingbird Methodology, Heart of Oregon Corps expansions) demonstrate adaptive models that further increase access and success for Y&YAD.

ATS Alignment: Advances Pillar I (Industry-Driven Strategies) by delivering employer-aligned pathways and Pillar II (Worker Mobility) by creating on-ramps into high-demand skilled trades.



Conclusion

WIOA provides state and local workforce development areas with tools to expand access to meaningful CIE and education. Looking ahead, state and local leaders have a

powerful opportunity to take one of the following actionable steps to further strengthen CIE outcomes of America's Y&YAD.

Align and Braid Federal Funding Streams

Identify and coordinate across federal initiatives (e.g., WIOA Titles I & IV, ODEP, RSA) to support integrated service delivery models at the local level.

Use Data to Identify Gaps and Target Services

Analyze enrollment, service utilization, and outcome data (including performance gaps for Y&YAD) to guide resource allocation and improve accountability.

Strengthen Cross-System Partnerships

Formalize partnerships between the workforce, education, VR, and community-based organizations to ensure seamless referrals, shared case management, and coordinated supports.

Expand Industry-Aligned Training Pathways

Scale models such as YouthBuild and other work-based learning strategies that align with employer demand while incorporating accessibility and universal design.

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Endnotes

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