

COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION
PROCEDURES BETWEEN

THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

AND THE

DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES

OF THE

MARYLAND STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

MAY, 2007

I. PURPOSE

This plan of cooperation is entered into between the Division of Rehabilitation Services, Office of Blindness and Vision Services, of the Maryland state Department of Education (herein referred to as DORS/OBVS/OBVS) and the Maryland School for the Blind (herein referred to as MSB) for the purpose of establishing practical and effective working relationships between the two agencies in coordinating services to eligible citizens of Maryland who are blind and severely visually impaired.

It is mutually agreed that agencies should work cooperatively to enable persons who are blind and severely visually impaired to live productively and independently. In meeting these responsibilities, there will be times when each agency, the School and the Division, has a discreet role to play and, therefore, coordination of services is necessary to avoid duplication and to ensure that all eligible persons receive maximum benefits from both programs.

The desire of DORS/OBVS and MSB to coordinate their efforts in providing appropriate and timely services to eligible persons results in the following purposes of this cooperative agreement:

- A. Define the role and function of each agency participating in this agreement;
- B. Establish principles for the development of working relationship's between the two agencies;
- C. Define areas of cooperation, including procedures related to referrals, service provision, exchange of information, and case closure;
- D. Enhance the probability that educational benefits are retained, expanded, and improved once a student completes school and enters employment, undertakes continued training, or pursues independent living goals.

II. LEGAL BASIS

The coordination of programs serving individuals who are blind or severely visually impaired and the development of cooperative agreements between these programs has the following basis in federal and state law:

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (P.L. 101-476); Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (P.L. 93-112), as amended; The Americans with Disabilities Act; and the public school laws and regulations of Maryland

III. ROLE AND FUNCTION OF EACH AGENCY

A. Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS/OBVS)

DORS/OBVS is the official State agency responsible for providing for eligible individuals with disabilities, vocational rehabilitation and independent living services and occupational placement opportunities consistent with the assessed needs and abilities of the individual. DORS/OBVS is responsible for assessing the independent living and vocational potential of applicants with disabilities and providing services to enable them to live productively and independently.

DORS/OBVS will make maximum efforts to ensure that students/clients who are who are eligible for services based on visual impairments, benefit from continued support and assistance from appropriate community resources upon completion of education programs at the School, or after completion of such programs so long as the services required are not the responsibility of the School or other public programs.

DORS/OBVS personnel will be available to inform School personnel of the Division of Rehabilitation Services' role and function. In appropriate cases, DORS/OBVS may be requested to be represented in discussions about individual students and to assist in the development of a comprehensive plan of services including Individualized Education program (IEP).

The responsibility for the determination of the individual's eligibility for vocational rehabilitation or independent living rehabilitation services rests with DORS/OBVS and may not be delegated to any other agency. All of the following conditions must exist in order to an individual to be determined eligible for vocational rehabilitation service from DORS/OBVS:

- a. The presence of a physical or mental impairment which for the individual constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment; and
- b. The individual can benefit in terms of an employment outcome from vocational rehabilitation services provided; and
- c. The individual requires vocational rehabilitation services to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain gainful employment.

In addition to vocational rehabilitation services, DORS/OBVS may also provide independent living rehabilitation services to individuals with severe physical or mental impairments whose ability to function independently in the family or community or whose ability to obtain, maintain, or advance in employment is substantially limited and for whom the delivery of independent living services will improve the ability to function, continue functioning, or move towards functioning independently in the family or community or to continue in employment, respectively.

An assessment for determining eligibility is conducted by DORS/OBVS following an individual's application for services, usually at the end of the sophomore year.

DORS/OBVS is responsible for establishing the financial eligibility of clients for selected vocational or independent living rehabilitation services. Services such as evaluation, counseling, placement, and rehabilitation teaching services provided by DORS/OBVS staff may be provided without regard to financial need. DORS/OBVS will also assure that comparable services and benefits are utilized prior to committing its funds for needed rehabilitation services.

MSB students will generally be referred to DORS/OBVS two (2) years prior to the anticipated completion of their educational program to determine their eligibility for services, the end of the sophomore year as defined by MSB. While DORS/OBVS will make every effort to utilize existing medical, psychiatric, psychological or vocational evaluation reports to determine eligibility for services, evaluations addressing educational needs of blind or visually impaired students may not always address the specific eligibility requirements for vocational or independent living rehabilitation services. Under these circumstances, DORS/OBVS will arrange to purchase evaluations, as required, to assure that students meet the established eligibility criteria for vocational or independent living rehabilitation services.

Evaluation, counseling, and placement services may be provided by DORS/OBVS in cooperation with School personnel. When it is deemed that such services will enhance the student's employability or independent functioning, these services will be specifically provided for in the student's Individualized Education Program (I.E.P.) as well as the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Training services will ordinarily not be provided by DORS/OBVS to individuals enrolled in an elementary or secondary educational program. Physical restoration services will be provided when such services will enhance the student's employment potential or independent living. These services will only be provided when not available through comparable benefit programs, or are not the responsibility of the School under Public Law 101-476.

The focus of all rehabilitation services provided to blind or severely visually impaired individuals who are receiving educational services is to design and implement a plan for the student's transition from school to employment and greater independence in the community.

B. THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

Services provided by DORS/OBVS to students who are blind or severely visually impaired will be distinguished from those services provided by the MSB as part of a free, appropriate public education guaranteed under state and federal law.

The MSB will provide educational and related services to blind and severely visually impaired students attending the school, as specified under an Individualized Education Program. Related services include transportation, speech/language and audiology services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, medical and counseling services, transition services and other services which are required so that a student may benefit from special education.

Responsibility for informing transitioning students and their families of community programs which may provide continued assistance beyond the School rests initially with the School. This function becomes a mutual and coordinated responsibility once referral is made to DORS/OBVS. The Local Education Agency, which is responsible for the placement of the student in an appropriate special education program and must likewise approve the student's Individualized Education Program, should be informed by the School of the services which DORS/OBVS may provide. The School will also inform referral sources and applicants that financial eligibility must be established for all rehabilitation services with the exception of evaluation, counseling, placement and rehabilitation teaching services provided by DORS/OBVS staff.

The School will be responsible for referring students to DORS/OBVS no later than the first semester of the student's junior year, referrals will be taken the last semester of the sophomore year. When feasible, the School will make its facilities and staff available to assist in DORS/OBVS' evaluation of students who have been referred for consideration.

If, through an evaluation, DORS/OBVS has determined that the student does not currently possess those skills requisite for employment or further training and has also determined that there is reasonable expectation that such inadequacies may be remediate by the School, a description of the student's specific difficulties and DORS/OBVS's recommended action plan will be submitted

for consideration in the student's Individualized Education Program.

If, prior to the completion of the educational program, DORS/OBVS determines through evaluation, that the student is not eligible for rehabilitation services, the School's Transition Services staff and DORS/OBVS will cooperatively assist the Local Education Agency, the student, and the student's family in identifying other appropriate community resources for consideration.

IV. AREAS OF COOPERATION

The Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services and the Maryland School for the Blind comply fully with all of the provisions and regulations under which the programs operate, ensuring availability of equal services to all eligible citizens regardless of race, religion, sex, national origin or handicapping condition. No individual will, on the grounds of sex, race, creed, color, age, national origin, residence, physical or mental disability, or political affiliation be excluded from participation in or be denied the benefits of services provided by either agency.

V. MONITORING PROVISIONS

The parties to this Agreement realize that it will be necessary periodically to review and revise the Agreement as necessary, based on changes in law and/or improved methods of providing services. A review will be conducted at least bi-annually by the Office of Blindness and Vision Services Designee and the President, Maryland School for the Blind or her designee. This Agreement may be amended upon written agreement of all parties or as amendments to the law may require.

The Cooperative Agreement between the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation services and the Maryland School for the Blind has been reviewed by the undersigned. This Agreement satisfactorily defines the working relationships between the two agencies for the purpose of providing

IMPLEMENTATION PROCEDURES RE:
THE COOPRATIVE AGREEMENT BETWEEN
THE MARYLAND SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND AND
THE DIVISION OF REHABILITATION SERVICES

I. LIAISON PERSONNEL

Both the Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS/OBVS) and the Maryland School for the Blind (MSB), respectively, will designate an individual to serve as its representative to assist in the coordination of those routine activities which are carried out between the two agencies with respect to their mutual clientele.

A. ROLE OF MSB'S TRANSITION COORDINATOR

1. The individual so designated by MSB will be responsible for performing or facilitating the following activities:
 - a. To acquaint students and their families with those services available through DORS/OBVS.
 - b. To gather and prepare appropriate information for referrals, including all necessary signed authorizations for the release of information.
 - c. To transmit referrals to the DORS/OBVS designated liaison counselor (DLC) from Region III by the end of the sophomore year or during the first semester of the students junior year.
 - d. To assist the designated liaison counselor (DLC) and students in making arrangements for necessary evaluation procedures.

- e. To develop and implement remediation of problem areas identified during evaluations.
 - f. To consult routinely with the DLC to develop solutions to any problem areas which exist.
2. The following information will be provided by MSB liaison to DORS/OBVS designated liaison counselor (DLC):
- a. A completed Rehabilitation Services Referral Form (copy attached as Appendix 1)
 - b. Medical information to include, as available, the most current:
 - 1. general health record
 - 2. ophthalmological evaluation
 - 3. hearing/screening test
 - 4. psychological evaluation
 - 5. information on additional disabilities
 - c. Current education records to include:
 - 1. Individualized Education Program
 - 2. Transcript of current academic status
 - 3. Vocational evaluation and training information
 - d. Employment history, work-study, and other background information as deemed appropriate by MSB liaison

B. ROLE OF DORS/OBVS DESIGNATED LIAISON COUNSELOR (DLC)

A counselor from Office of Blind Services, District 82 will serve as the designated liaison counselor (DLC) with MSB and will have the following responsibilities:

1. To be available, as requested, to provide information regarding the services of DORS/OBVS to the MSB staff, students, and the student's family members.
2. To participate in parent workshops regarding the cooperative vocational effort between MSB and DORS/OBVS.
3. To interpret policies and procedures of DORS/OBVS as they relate to the provision of services to individuals currently in MSB's programs.
4. To provide in-service training to the staff of MSB regarding services provided by DORS/OBVS and how to access these services.
5. All referrals of students from MSB for services are provided to the DLC through MSB liaison. The DLC will receive and review the available information regarding the student in an effort to assess the student's current level of function.
6. Referrals are to be made by the end of the sophomore year or no later than the first semester of the MSB student's junior year in school.
7. DLC will provide electronic acknowledgement of the referral information to the MSB liaison.
8. DLC will provide to MSB liaison tentative dates for initial contact with the student and/or the student's family.
9. Students remaining at MSB after referral, will remain on the caseload of the Local Designated Counselor within Unit 82 of DORS/OBVS until they relocate to their home community or their

next primary residence, at that time the case may be transferred as appropriate.

10. DLC will facilitate appointments and a smooth transition of services.
11. To assure that MSB has available current lists of the DORS/OBVS Counselors serving people who are blind or visually impaired.
12. The Designated Liaison will determine eligibility for rehabilitation services.
 - a. Should the DLC determine that a student is ineligible for rehabilitation services because of the severity of their disability(s), the student may be further evaluated for Independent Living services.
 - b. Should the student not meet the eligibility criteria for either program, the DLC will assist MSB in identifying potential resources in the student's area of residence.
13. If the available information does not permit the DLC to determine the individual's potential, the Counselor may wish to arrange for additional evaluation through outside resources.
14. Upon written consent of the student and/or the student's parent(s), the DLC will provide MSB liaison with the results of diagnostic evaluations and reports. Planning efforts will be shared with MSB and developed between the DLC and the student.
15. DLC may, in consultation with the Home Counselor, transfer the case management responsibility and case record to the Home Counselor upon the student's exit from MSB.

16. DLC may participate in the development of the student's Individualized Education Program.
17. The DLC will coordinate the development of the IPE.
18. The DLC meet monthly with the MSB liaison to develop solutions to any problem areas which exist. There will also be a quarterly meeting which will be expanded to included the DORS/OBVS Supervisor and the MSB Career Education Coordinator.

C. DORS/OBVS HOME COUNSELOR

1. The Home Counselor will meet with the DLC and client (and parents, if appropriate) during the last semester of the senior year.
2. The Home Counselor, in consultation with the DLC, will receive the transferred case upon the student's exit from MSB

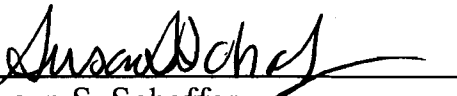
DORS/OBVS Unit Supervisor for District 82

NOTE: These duties may also be carried out by the Director OBVS

D.


1. The Unit Supervisor will serve as the Division's Liaison and represent DORS/OBVS in matters of statewide interests between MSB and DORS/OBVS.
2. The Unit Supervisor will coordinate the provision of workshops on DORS/OBVS service to staff of the MSB.
3. The Unit Supervisor will work with the MSB to identify the size, characteristics, and needs of blind students attending MSB.

The Cooperative Agreement Implementation Procedures between the Maryland Division of Rehabilitation Services and the Maryland School for the Blind has been reviewed by the undersigned. This agreement satisfactorily defines the working relationships between the two agencies for the purpose of providing maximum service to blind and vision impaired students of MSB.



Susan S. Schaffer
Director, Office of Blindness and
Vision Services

5/18/07
Date



Daren Barrios
Career Education Coordinator
Maryland School for the Blind

5/18/07
Date