



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES
REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

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DCL-24-02

Dear Colleagues:

Please accept this invitation to join me as we work together to revolutionize vocational rehabilitation (VR). Throughout my life, I have endeavored both personally and professionally to demonstrate that living with a disability should not limit what we aspire to be. Three decades ago, I went to the California Department of Rehabilitation seeking support to find my first job. Today, I am honored to have been nominated by President Biden and recently confirmed by the U.S. Senate to serve as Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). I am thankful for this important opportunity to join forces with you as we redefine what it means to be a working individual with a disability. I invite you to learn more about me on our [website](#), and I look forward to learning more about you.

Under my leadership, RSA will keep individuals with disabilities at the forefront of all we do. RSA will boldly provide leadership, resources, and discretionary investments to assist states and other agencies in providing and supporting VR services. We will do this to maximize employment, independence, and integration into the community and the competitive labor market. Individuals with disabilities must experience equity in the workforce and every aspect of our society to take their rightful place as first-class citizens who lead purposeful lives. “Just enough” is not enough. RSA programs must prepare individuals with disabilities for fulfilling careers, that grow our economy and empower individuals with disabilities to realize their dreams, rather than settling for entry-level jobs.

Everyone, including individuals with disabilities, aspire to a life’s work that builds a sense of personal value, financial equity, and greater independence. If RSA programs do not add value to the lives of those we serve, we are wasting our time and resources. We must raise our expectations, leave behind the status quo, and deliver on our Nation’s promise of economic security, equal opportunity, and independence for Americans with disabilities.

To accomplish this, I have set these priorities through which RSA will approach its work:

1. Build true partnerships with other Federal agencies and stakeholders, including VR agencies and their coalitions, to promote earlier and deeper engagement and highlight best practices to achieve the best outcomes for individuals with disabilities;
2. Elevate community expectations for competitive integrated employment by showcasing success stories of individuals with disabilities; and
3. Encourage integration of assistive technology and artificial intelligence tools to fuel competitive integrated employment in the 21st century for individuals with disabilities.

All individuals with disabilities, including those with most significant disabilities, if provided the needed supports and services, can achieve competitive integrated employment and enjoy equal

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The Department of Education’s mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.

pay for equal work alongside their non-disabled peers. RSA recently issued two important policy pieces:

- [*Maximizing Services and the Use of Funds to Support Quality Employment Outcomes for Individuals with Disabilities through the VR and Supported Employment Programs*](#)
- [*Promoting Meaningful and Sustained Engagement of Individuals with Disabilities in the State VR Services Program*](#)

If you have not done so already, I encourage you to read this policy guidance and act upon it, taking steps within your programs to revisit longstanding practices and implementing strategies to maximize VR services, fully engage with individuals with disabilities, and advance high-quality competitive integrated employment.

I want RSA's relationship with you to be highly collaborative. We need to trust one another and honestly communicate with one another. I know that we are all unwavering in our commitment to high expectations, both in our work and for the individuals that we serve. I believe in program and fiscal accountability, and value exceptional performance. RSA will continue to highlight best practices and celebrate bright spots in our progress. RSA will also continue to hold our grantees to high expectations because our grantees' performance, especially in the VR program, is a direct measurement of whether individuals with disabilities are achieving high-quality competitive integrated employment. I will work vigilantly with RSA staff as they continue to support VR agencies in maximizing their Federal awards, fully expending their funds, and investing in VR services that lead to good jobs.

Embracing Secretary Cardona's commitment to [Raise the Bar](#) and echoing the words of Mary Switzer, we cannot accomplish our mission for individuals with disabilities "simply by doing more of the same, in the same way...it calls for the minds and the experience and the courageous determination of many people in many places, to produce and use the improvements we will need." These words ring as true today as when Director Switzer said them nearly 60 years ago.

We must drive change and meet the challenges of our incredibly important mission to empower this generation of individuals with disabilities. As RSA Commissioner, I am seeking positive transformation through collaboration with our grantees and stakeholders. As an individual with a disability, RSA's work and the success of the VR program is very personal to me. I want to make the VR program the premiere "program of choice" for individuals with disabilities.

I look forward to your company as we embark upon this journey together. As always, I welcome your feedback and suggestions.

Sincerely,

/s/

Danté Q. Allen
Commissioner