**Executive Summary – Employment First Oversight Commission –**

**2014 Recommendations to Increase the Number of Kansans with Disabilities in Competitive and Integrated Employment:**

* **Incentivize the Goal of Employment First – adjust the way employment and support services are funded to incentivize the outcome of increasing numbers of Kansans with disabilities in quality competitive and integrated employment.**
	+ Coordinate and adjust funding to dramatically increase the numbers of Kansans in integrated and competitive employment.
	+ Reward vendors that keep people employed in competitive and integrated settings.
	+ Ensure timely and adequate funding in order to obtain effective outcomes.
	+ Work with stakeholders to change incentives and design a more effective outcomes-based business model, focused on competitive and integrated employment.
* **Ensure Employment First Consistently Occurs – Establish proper accountability measures and gate keeping to help ensure that competitive and integrated employment is truly the first option.**
	+ Establish gate keepers to focus on competitive and integrated employment.
	+ KSDE offer technical assistance detailing that schools that only fund placements or supports in competitive and integrated settings will be in compliance with Employment First.
* **Change the Rate Structure – Current system is insufficient to obtain effective outcomes.**
	+ The current pay for performance rates are not sufficient to pay for the service costs needed to obtain competitive and integrated employment.
	+ KRS payments for should be more reflective of the costs to achieve each milestone.
	+ KRS must make it easier to obtain job coaching.
	+ KRS needs to better fund and support an in-depth, effective discovery process.
* **Transition Services – Funding and services better support the transition from school to work.**
	+ KRS must better assist with job training and development to better ensure that students can transition from school to an adult career that is both competitive and integrated.
	+ KRS needs to ensure that its transition services are robust and ensure active engagement by KRS, starting at age 14, based on meeting specific benchmarks.
	+ Braiding of funding and resources must occur between the school system, KRS and adult long term care services, with the goal of employment before the student exits school.
	+ KRS fund contractors to work with students in school work programs, like Project SEARCH
	+ KSDE needs to work with stakeholders to develop easy to use tools and materials for transition-aged students with disabilities and their parents.
* **Track Data to Show Improvement in Employment First –State must track data specifically detailing the numbers and percentages of Kansans with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment.**
	+ Most state agencies are not sufficiently tracking data specifically about the numbers of Kansans with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment. Some examples:
		- KSDE should track the cost of and numbers of students being transitioned to a sheltered workshop or other non-competitive, non-integrated settings.
		- State programs needs to track numbers of people who end up in competitive and integrated employment settings and those who do not.
	+ Because Employment First is not an everyday reality, Kansas needs to follow the lead of States such as Ohio by hiring a consultant (ex: Rob Cimera) to assist the state with determining a data plan and conducting a study to measure performance and cost effectiveness of Employment First.
* **Prove Measurable Progress – State agencies need to issue a yearly report to the people of Kansas proving measurable progress and full implementation of the Employment First law by detailing specific strategies and changes that the agencies have made at the program, policy, procedure, funding and systemic levels.**
	+ The Employment First Oversight Commission would like to receive a copy of that yearly report and pledges to help the State promote and distribute it to Kansas stakeholders. Doing this is an important step to ensuring that Employment First becomes the everyday reality in Kansas.
* **Make the Business Case – The State needs to make the business case for employing people with disabilities in competitive and integrated settings, including:**
	+ Approaching businesses about employing people with disabilities with a proposition on the value they will bring, not an appeal to their corporate responsibility.
	+ Anticipating questions from businesses about their concerns for employing people with disabilities.
	+ Develop materials for employers to answer these questions.
	+ Continuing support for the development of local Business Leadership Network chapters.
* **Find and Engage Businesses – The State needs to find and engage business to help promote the employment of people with disabilities in competitive and integrated settings, including:**
	+ Finding businesses that want to employ people with disabilities and support them with a dedicated state employee who can discuss the benefits of doing so.
	+ Developing the appropriate level of expertise within designated staff of state agencies.
	+ Gathering input from employers to determine what Kansas can do to assist with accommodations that empower persons with disabilities to be employed.
* **Support Businesses - The State needs to support business in these efforts, including:**
	+ Providing one point of contact to interact with business, and encourage that contact to communicate regularly.
	+ Ensuring that people with disabilities have the skills businesses need.
	+ Providing job coaches when appropriate for individuals who otherwise would not be able to work in an integrated setting.
	+ Maximizing funding sources that support people with disabilities toward job training (for example, New Hampshire’s revolving sector-based training fund).
* **Support Self Employment - support self-employment for persons with disabilities.**
	+ People with disabilities are twice as likely as people without disabilities to own their own business. The state needs to develop specific strategies to maximize this opportunity.
* **Benefits Planning: a Key to Unlock Employment – Because effective benefits planning is important for people with disabilities to obtain employment, the State of Kansas needs to ensure a comprehensive network of benefits planning is available.**
* KDHE needs to increase the number of benefits planners to at least two for each Kansas workforce area, and direct them to work with both active and non-active job seekers.
* KRS, through its KRS program, needs to ensure benefits counseling is part of the employment plan for all customers seeking employment and make benefits counseling a requirement within all fee-for-service and contract employment services.
* The Department of Commerce needs to ensure all its KANSASWORKS employment counselors stress the importance of effective benefits counseling.
* **Managed Care Contracts and Outcomes need to support Benefits Planning – KDHE and KDADS need to develop benchmarks for its KanCare contracts with Managed Care Organizations (MCOs) that include requiring the MCOs to provide or fund certified benefits planning to their members with disabilities for active job seekers. The Commission believes that benefits counseling is so important that it should have its own benchmarks and outcomes in the MCO contracts.**
* KDHE and KDADS need to create both policy and procedural safeguards to ensure that when services are provided to members with disabilities that they cover basic benefits planning and ensure certified benefits planning to all members who want it.
* Without access to benefits counselors, supported by both KDADS/KDHE and the MCOs, people with disabilities may never seek out employment.
* **Innovate with a 1915i application – The State of Kansas needs to apply for a 1915i State Plan Option to provide employment services, focused on competitive and integrated employment, for persons with disabilities not otherwise eligible for the 1915c HCBS Waiver.**
* **Build on the Successful WORK program – There should be an examination of whether the WORK program requirements could be adjusted so that a person with a disability who meets the SSI definition of disability and is employed could still qualify for and receive services from this helpful program. If this is possible, then this policy should change.**
* **Help Make Project SEARCH even more Successful – KSDE should make adjustments to allow rural communities to benefit more from Project SEARCH.**
* **Technical Assistance – States that have a commitment to training and technical assistance regarding the delivery of quality employment services obtain better outcomes. Kansas needs to establish a formal mechanism for statewide training and technical assistance on implementation of Employment First and quality employment services. This is an important component that has been demonstrated to result in better outcomes by other states, such as Washington.**