

Introduction:

Community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) report that they have varying experiences with effectively partnering with schools to support students with disabilities. Often, CRPs will express that it can be difficult to be included as a partner in supporting youth with disabilities while they are still in school. As a partner, CRPs bring a unique set of valuable skills and resources that can assist students with preparation and transition from high school into competitive integrated employment.

With the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) there is new momentum for increased support for transition services through the inclusion of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), with a focus on serving students earlier in their high school years. WIOA provides the perfect impetus to open doors for CRPs to partner in supporting students with disabilities. This toolkit pulls together information and resources for CRPs related to serving transition aged youth and implementation of WIOA and Pre-ETS.

Effective WIOA implementation requires collaboration between vocational rehabilitation agencies (VR), schools, families, and all other community partners. For CRPs to be viewed as a critical partner, they will want to ensure that they are well versed and skilled in providing Pre-ETS services and have developed effective processes for connecting and collaborating with schools and VR agencies. In addition, it is important to remember that each community is distinctive in their culture, approach, level of resources, engaged partners, etc. Schools, VR agencies, CRPs, and other local services will want to work together to determine how best to meet local needs. This toolkit will provide CRPs with considerations and suggestions for developing effective processes for connecting with and collaborating with multiple partners around Pre-ETS.

Some Considerations & Things to Remember:

- There is not one approach, and there are multiple connection points to getting connected to schools and serving students.
- Who you connect with and how you connect with them will all depend on your community and/or your local school district(s). But remember, just like in job development and business engagement, it's all about relationships!
- Remember that educators and schools are moving and working within a different system from adult service providers. They have different measures of success and are dealing with competing priorities. It will be important to learn and understand the school culture of your local school(s). Be prepared to share how you can collaborate and what you can bring to the partnership to help the school meet their goals.

"It's all about relationships! They are so important, so utilize your social capital and reach out to your social networks."

Some Suggestions for Connecting:

- Contact and connect with your local VR counselor and/or supervisor. With greater focus on engaging students earlier in their high school experience, and demand for Pre-ETS, a VR counselor was assigned to every school in Iowa. VR is partnering closely with each school district to develop a **Local School Plan**. This plan describes how the school, VR, and other partners listed in the plan will collaborate to implement Pre-ETS and transition services. Connect with your VR counselor or supervisor to request to see the Local School Plan. Examples of a few Local School Plans are included in the resource section of this toolkit. Offer to host and bring partners together to brainstorm and identify together where there are gaps and opportunities to collaborate to offer needed services and programs for students.

- Be familiar with resources to support students and connect with the resources in your community. For a review of the various partners and services offered to transition aged youth around employment, refer to the ‘Partners & Services in Employment for Transition Aged Youth’ in the resource section of this toolkit.
- Reach out to and connect with your local education resources. This could include local school(s), Area Education Agencies (AEA), Family Educator Partnership coordinators (FEPs found at AEAs), and Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams. Educators facilitate transition activities and services via the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Special education services align with WIOA, to prepare students for postsecondary employment and/or education.
- When connecting with educators, remember it will be important to learn and understand the culture of your local school(s). Be prepared to share how you can collaboratively partner to support students and their families, including, but not limited to offering Pre-ETS and understanding and navigating the adult service system.
- Create opportunities to connect with students & their families. Consider fun and innovative ways to engage students and families in a variety of settings and across partners, such as student/parent nights, school-to-work events, transition to adulthood informational meetings, social events, etc.

Tools in this Kit

- A. Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): Overview, Examples, & Resources
- B. Partners & Services in Employment for Transition Aged Youth
- C. WINTAC CRP Pre-ETS Guidebook
- D. Examples of Two IVRS Local School Plans
- E. HCBS Waiver Resource for Parents & HCBS Program Comparison Chart
- F. Iowa Graduation Information & Guidance for Families: Changes in Definition of Regular High School Diploma, Fall 2018
- G. Iowa Webinars & Supporting Materials:
 - Part 1: Working with Schools: What Service Providers Need to Know
 - Part 2: Supporting Transition-Aged Youth: A Deeper Look at Partner Collaboration between Schools, CRPs, & Vocational Rehabilitation Services