VR Counselor Experiences with Pre-Employment Transition Services: Lessons from the Field

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Mission Statement: Improving lives of people with disabilities through meaningful work and community inclusion.

vr&youth
Rehabilitation Research & Training Center

VR Counselor Experiences with Pre-ETS

Lessons from the Field

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Context of the Study

- The Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) was enacted in July, 2014
- The Act required state VR agencies (SVRAs) to reserve 15% of their federal funds for Pre-Employment transition services
- The Act's mandates expanded the pool of VR consumers to include those who are eligible and *potentially eligible* for VR Services

Pre-Employment Transition Services

- What are the Required Pre-ETS?
  - Job exploration counseling
  - Workplace readiness training
  - Work-based learning experiences
  - Counseling on postsecondary enrollment
  - Instruction on self-advocacy

What are VR agencies required to do?

- Offer Pre-employment transition services to students (enrolled in secondary or post-secondary institutions) who are eligible or POTENTIALLY eligible for VR services
- Conduct outreach to partners, such as schools and families, to provide information and referral on VR and Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Develop partnerships with LEAs and community providers to deliver Pre-ETS services to students via structured service agreements with state SVRAs
- Document and record Pre-ETS services authorized by the SVRA to meet federal reporting requirements

Background of the Current Study

- We conducted a national survey on SVRA counselor transition practices in 2016 with more than 500 respondents
  - Neubert, Luecking & Fabian (2018)
  - Survey conducted *after* enactment of WIOA, BUT before regulations fully implemented and prior to SVRAs scaling up for delivery of Pre-ETS
- However, Pre-ETS were "on the horizon" as the results of the study indicated:
  - VR counselors identified 3 Pre-ETS as among most important transition practices
  - VR counselors indicated they needed additional information and skills to provide them

The Current Study

- Designed a qualitative interview study of a sample of the VR counselor respondents to the original survey
- Selected respondents based on their experience under WIOA offering Pre-Employment Transition Services
- Developed a short interview protocol to capture respondent experiences with Pre-ETS and WIOA
- Conducted 30-minute telephone interviews in fall 2017

What did we ask?

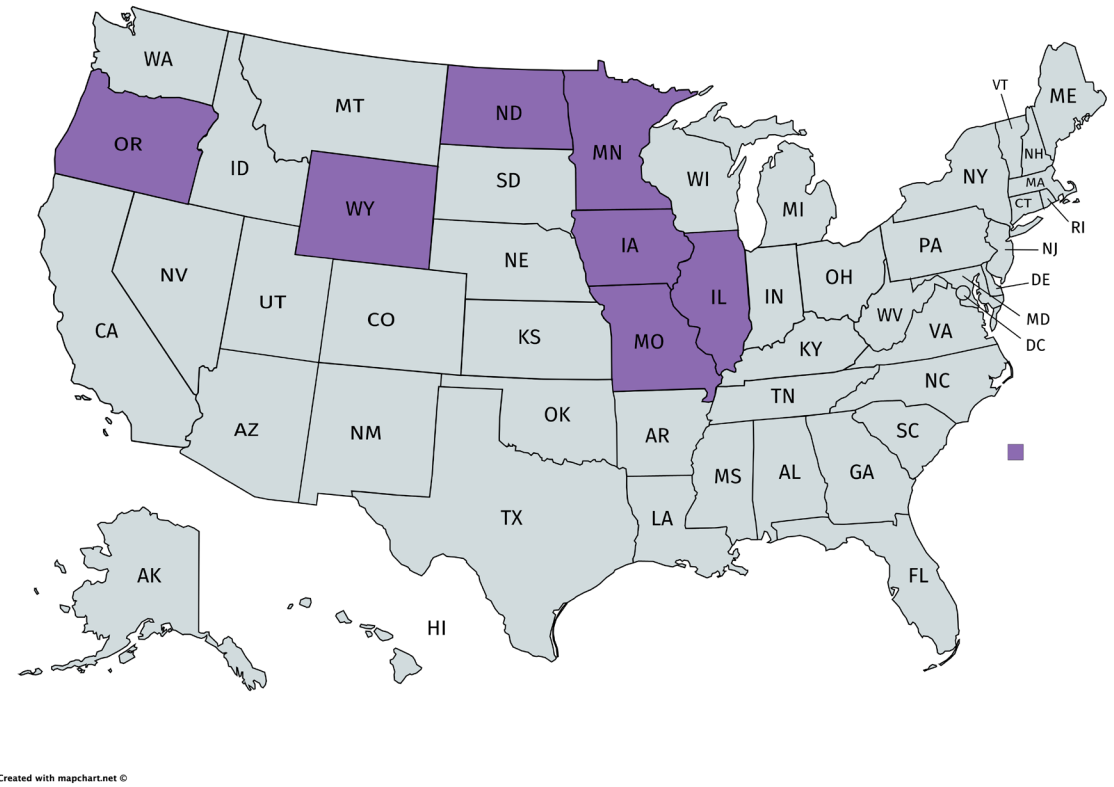
- How did WIOA impact your role?
- What is your experience in delivering pre-employment transition services?
- What are the major challenges you encounter in delivering pre-employment transition services?
- What strategies have you devised to address them?

Participants

- 52% female
- 14 or 48% were CRCs
- Average years in VR = 12.9
- Average years working with youth/young adults = 11
- Caseload proportions
  - 15% had entire caseload of transitioning youth (including students and out-of- school school)
  - 67% had caseloads of both adults & transitioning youth

Participating State VR Agencies

- Illinois
- Iowa
- Missouri
- Minnesota
- North Dakota
- Oregon
- Wyoming



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How does WIOA/Pre-ETS impact your role?

We had positive & negative responses to this question…..

Positive Impact of WIOA & Pre-ETS

- Better relationship with schools: More time in the schools
- More outreach to families to engage youth
- Start students in VR at an earlier age – a continuum of services
- Teachers are “on board” with vocational rehabilitation
- Expand VR population to include students with 504 plans
- Already have transition programs in place – Pre-ETS formalizes the delivery
- More invitations to IEP meetings

What they said…

"Outreach to schools is a good way to establish relationships and rapport with students BEFORE they are formal VR clients."

"I estimate that I spend twice as much time in schools as I did pre-WIOA. Also I have a different relationship…schools proactively send me referrals, rather than me seeking them out."

What they said…

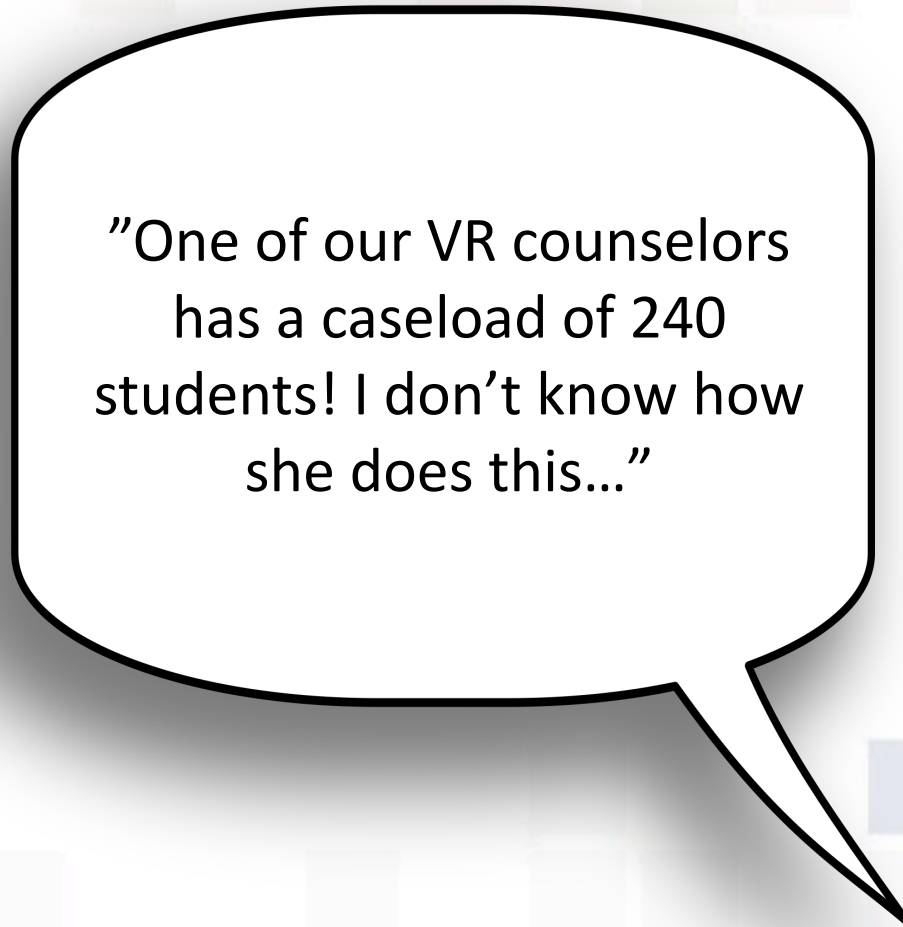
"I no longer beg schools for referrals. The relationships are much more defined since there is a specific process to follow (Pre-ETS) and the teachers definitely see the value of Pre-ETS"

"I would say that my outreach to schools and time spent with them has doubled since WIOA"

Not So Positive Impacts

- More reporting requirements
- Larger cases to manage
- Great to focus on students – but comes at a cost to the adults on the caseload
- Inadequate or just unavailable community providers to deliver pre-ETS services
- Essential services that can't be covered – like transportation impede delivery of some of the services

What they said…



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What's your experience in delivering Pre-ETS?

What services do you offer?

Who Delivers PreETS Services?

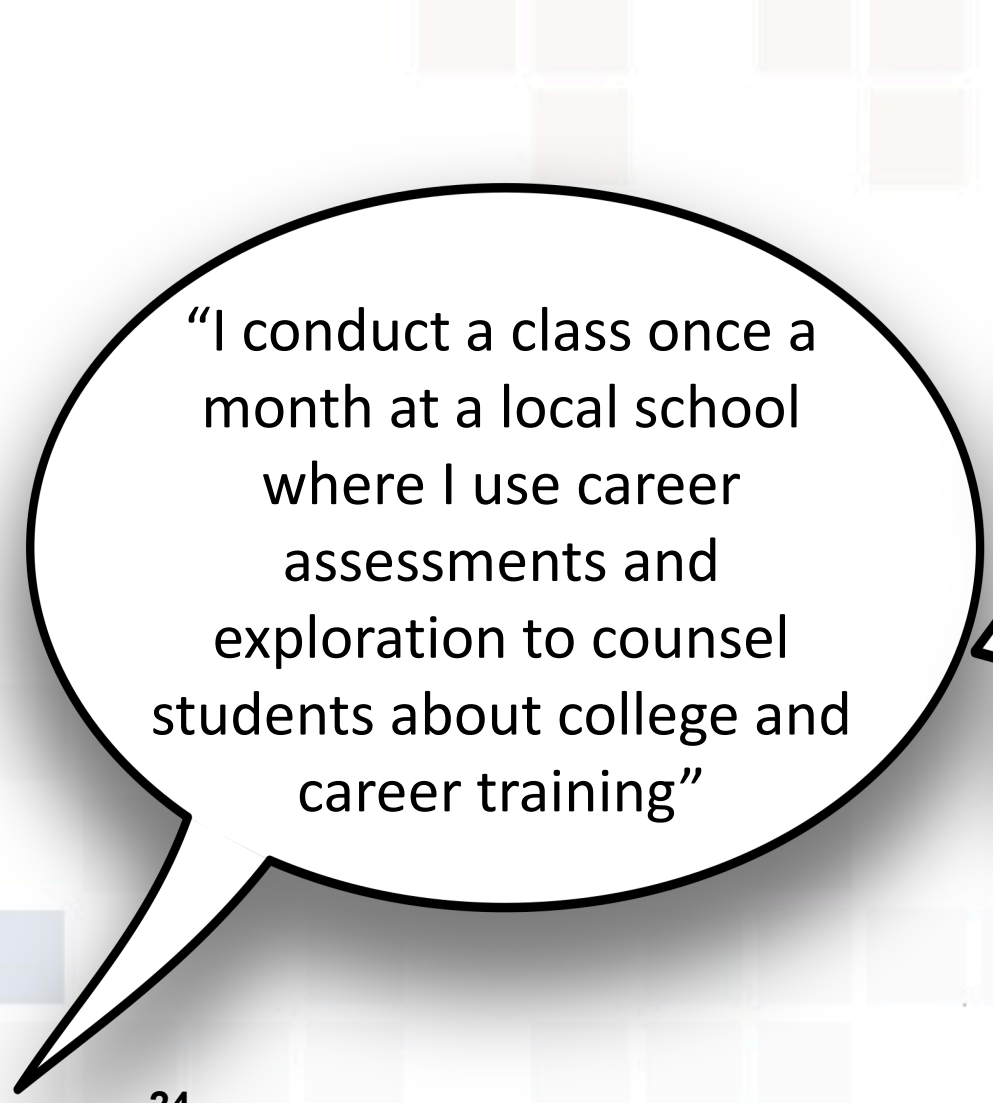
What Pre-ETS services are offered?

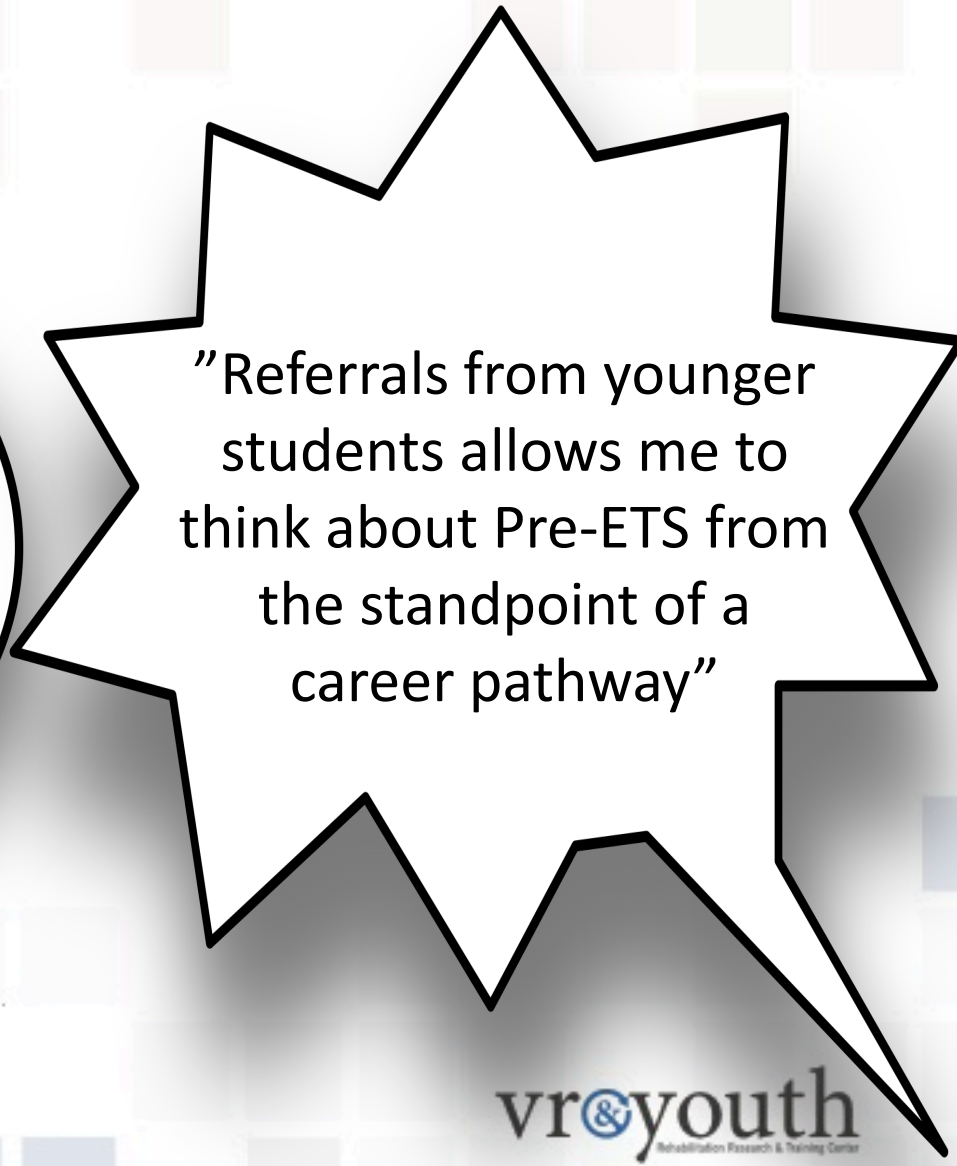
- Most VR respondents directly delivered *two* of the Pre-ETS: Post-secondary Counseling and Job Exploration Counseling
- Most respondents contracted out *2 Pre-ETS services* (to schools or CRPs): Work readiness training & work-based learning experiences
- Several respondents indicated they used Pre-ETS services as a continuum or pathway to VR services – students start early and progress
- These findings are consistent with other reports
  - *Miller, Sevak, & Honeycutt, 2018*

What local issues influence Pre-ETS?

- States with Order of Selection encountered additional challenges in expanding the pool to potentially eligible students
- Rural states in our sample cited inability to cover costs of transportation impeded some Pre-ETS, particularly Work-based learning experiences (WBLEs)
- States with Summer Youth Employment, Project Search tended to rely on these existing providers to assist with delivery of Pre-ETS

What they said…





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What are the challenges to delivering Pre-ETS?

- Families are not familiar with VR – didn't follow through on the Pre-ETS application process
- Increased caseload burden & paperwork!
- Lack of available community and school resources to deliver Pre-ETS services
- Transportation

What they said…

"Transportation, hands down"

"Two things…1) increased documentation creates more paperwork and the time to complete it; 2) Balancing the demands of the rest of the non-student, i.e., general case load"

"I am stretched very thin and spend a disproportionate amount of time serving this population"

What they said…

"The biggest barrier is lack of time to serve all these students through Pre-ETS – and paperwork associated with this activity is also a barrier"

"Challenges rather than barriers" – staff and resources. The challenge to serve is always bigger than staff and resources available."

What are the strategies to address barriers?

- Specialized caseloads or specialized transition counselors to meet the “expanded” eligibility pool
- Existing transition programs within or external to schools (such as Project Search) facilitated the adaptation to Pre-ETS
- “No wrong door” - having VR, workforce, CTE & other services under one roof
- Creative transportation solutions (travel training, Uber/Lyft, VR-sponsored stipends so that students could self-arrange transport services)

What they said…

"We are not there yet"

"I plan ahead to make better use of "windshield time" – make sure my time at a school is fully booked

"More flexible with my schedule – meet with students and families in the evenings – try to make time for more personal contact"

I try to make Pre-ETS more motivational and fun – getting students out into the community helps them see connections between school and work"

What they said…

"I find it most useful to meet with students whenever they want to and we are now all housed in one place – at our Work Source Office"

Lessons Learned

- SVRAs still in early stages of adaptation to WIOA, and the evidence not clear yet as to which services to which students contribute to successful outcomes.
- The better the relationships among LEAs, CRPs, and VR, the easier the adjustment to delivery of Pre-ETS.
- Specialized caseloads or specialized counselors can lighten the load and ensure expanded Pre-ETS services.

Lessons Learned

- Some VR agencies adapt Pre-ETS services as career pathways – offering job exploration and self-advocacy to younger students; then moving toward work-based learning experiences in community integrated settings
- Largest state distinction was rural vs. urban: transportation & available resources

References

- Fabian, E., Neubert, D., & Luecking, R., (2018). State VR Agency Counselors' Perceptions of their role in implementation transition services under WIOA. Retrieved from: https://vrpacticesandyouth.org
- Miller, R., Sevak, P., & Honeycutt, T. (2018). State vocational rehabilitation agencies' early implementation experiences with pre-employment transition services. Retrieved from: https://vrpracticesandyouth.org
- Neubert, D., Luecking, R., & Fabian, E. (2018). Transition practices of vocational rehabilitation counselors serving students and youth with disabilities, *Rehabilitation Research, Policy & Education, 32(1)*, 54-65.

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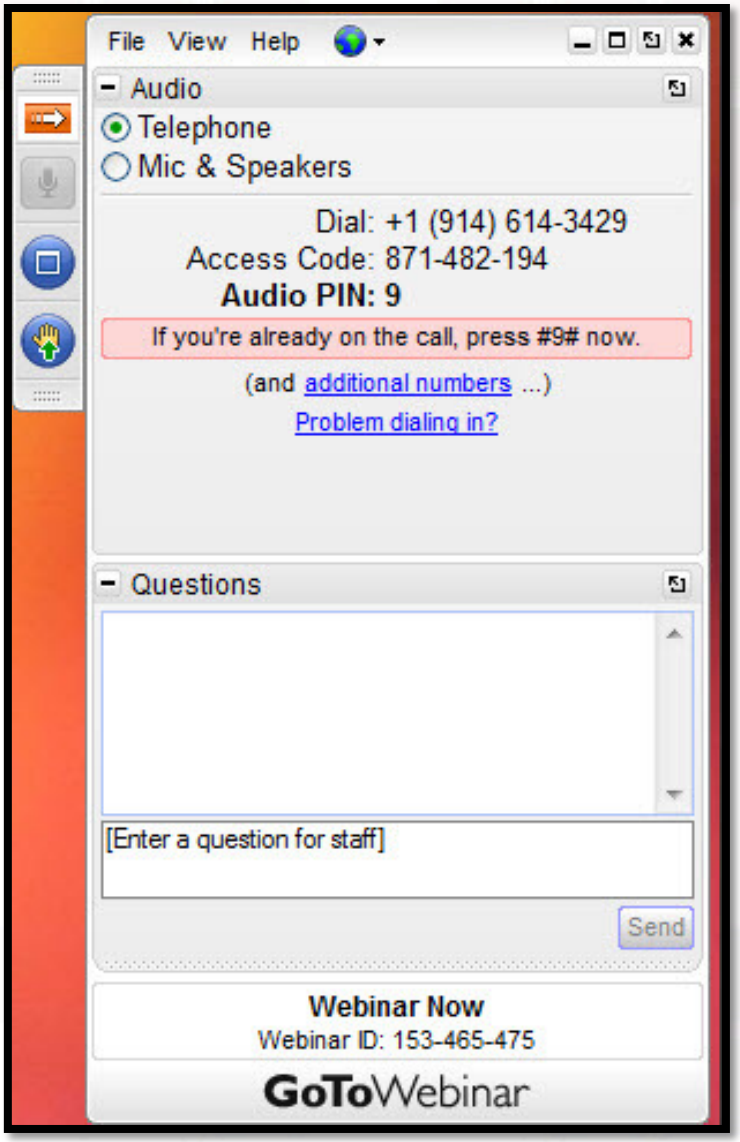

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Upcoming Webinar:

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About TransCen, Inc.

TransCen, Inc. is a national organization offering web-based and in-person training for state agencies, school districts, provider organizations, and others interested in meaningful work and community inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

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