

# **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.



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## VR Counselor Experiences with Pre-ETS Lessons from the Field

Ellen Fabian & Richard Luecking



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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

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## 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



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## 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

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## 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

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## 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



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## 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?



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## Participants

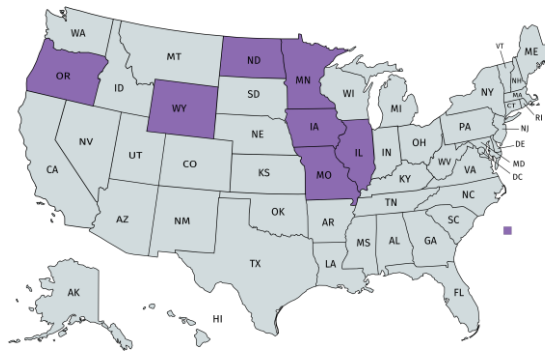
- 52% female
- 14 or 48% were CRCs
- Average years in VR = 12.9
- Average years working with youth/young adults = 11
- Caseload proportions
  - 15% had entire caseload of transitioning youth (including students and out-of-school school)
  - 67% had caseloads of both adults & transitioning youth

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## 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.....



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## 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



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## 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."

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## 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"

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## Not So Positive Impacts

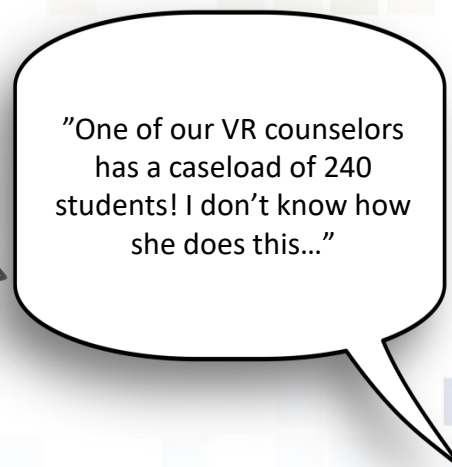


- More reporting requirements
- Larger cases to manage
- Great to focus on students – but comes at a cost to the adults on the caseload
- Inadequate or just unavailable community providers to deliver pre-ETS services
- Essential services that can't be covered – like transportation impede delivery of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

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## What they said...



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## What's your experience in delivering Pre-ETS?

What services do you offer?

Who Delivers PreETS Services?



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## 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*

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## 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

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## What they said...

"I conduct a class once a month at a local school where I use career assessments and exploration to counsel students about college and career training"

"Referrals from younger students allows me to think about Pre-ETS from the standpoint of a career pathway"

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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



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## What they said...

"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"

"Transportation, hands down"

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

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## 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."

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## 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)

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## What they said...

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

"We are not there yet"

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

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

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## 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"

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## 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.

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## 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

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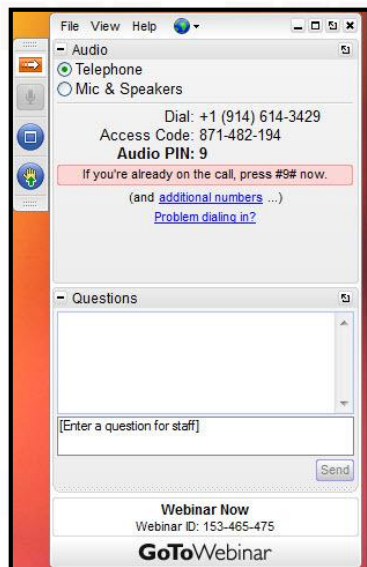


## References

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- 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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## Questions or Comments

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## Upcoming Webinar:

**Managing Community Support Services  
for Individuals with Disabilities &  
Supporting Field-Based Staff**

April 16<sup>th</sup>, 2019  
2:00 – 3:30 PM EST

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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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