

Capacity Building Focus Group Data
TWC Region 6: South Texas

Positive Highlights

- Early career exploration builds excitement for future options like Project SEARCH.
- Administrators with CCMR expertise can be good resources for students.
- One district described their Pathway Academy, which partners with college programs, technical schools, local law enforcement, etc. to create opportunities for students.
- SEAL, summer camps, and district-sponsored summer programs can provide Pre-ETS.
- Meeting with parents before ARDs improves the quality of transition planning.
- Districts are learning how to highlight endorsements that provide Pre-ETS within state-credit classes.
- Focusing on endorsements and lowering dropout rates increases administrative buy-in.
- Districts are starting career fairs in middle school.
- Community Rehabilitation Providers are delivering Pre-ETS within the school day in many districts.
- With funding and resources, SPED teachers can support CTE teachers to increase SPED access to CTE.

Common Themes

Collaboration Between School Districts and VR

Challenges:

- Limited understanding of each others' roles, systems, and requirements
- Poor communication, planning, and follow-through for ARDs.
- High staff turnover rates and high caseloads in both systems
- Poor communication within both systems
- Referral process is slow
- Fear of "double dipping"
- Confidentiality concerns

Opportunities:

- Increase outreach and referrals for 504 students
- Embed Pre-ETS services in the classroom
- Focus on self-advocacy at this age
- Begin planning and service coordination earlier
- Build in time for VR and teachers to discuss services and clarify students' needs
- Capacity building meetings for TEDs and VRCs at ESCs
- Plan during summer breaks and include VR in back to school professional development
- Provide space for VR at high schools

Working with Parents

Challenges:

- Difficult to get consent for younger teens
- Parents and students don't understand the VR process.
- Parents aren't ready to think about transition, so they don't follow through with referrals.
- Parents don't want students to know they have a disability.
- Fear of losing benefits
- Parents are overwhelmed by information, acronyms, and jargon.

Opportunities:

- Including VR presentations in parent training and career fairs
- Coordinate referral efforts between schools and VR to support students/families.
- Connect parents with SMURFs for benefits counseling.

Working with Younger Teens

Challenges:

- Need age-appropriate presentations and teaching materials
- Limited time in their schedules due to required courses
- Students aren't aware of their disabilities.
- Lack of career goals or unrealistic goals
- Limited awareness of post-secondary options other than four-year degrees
- Limited understanding of their accommodations

Opportunities:

- SEAL and other summer opportunities
- Starting the process sooner helps students clarify their goals.
- Person-centered planning
- Work with counselors to incorporate employability skills in master schedules.
- Clarify services available to potentially eligible students and when to refer to VR.

Collaboration with CTE and General Education

Challenges:

- CTE teachers aren't actively engaged in transition planning.
- Concerns about CTE requirements and certifications can limit access to courses
- CTE teachers need training in working with students with disabilities.

Opportunities:

- CTE and job shadowing opportunities
- Collaborative CTE plans
- Invite stakeholders, including administrators, CTE, and counselors, to collaborate with SPED and VR.

Coordination of Services Beyond the LEA-VR Team

Challenges:

- Providers are confused by forms, contracts, and outside information.
- Requirements, forms, and services change frequently.
- Limited providers in rural areas
- Providers need continuing education, including how to teach this age group.

Opportunities:

- Schools districts serving as SEAL sites
- Teachers working with SEAL and former teachers working as Pre-ETS providers can increase quality of services.
- Providers are able to address barriers to employment such as hygiene, professional attire, and communication skills.
- Career exploration and counseling on post-secondary education opportunities at this age can increase buy-in and can help students see the value of work.