

# **TWC and Texas A&M University's Capacity Building Project**

**Providing High-Quality Pre-ETS  
for Students Ages 14 to 16**



# Background Information

- Vocational rehabilitation agencies have been able to provide services to youth with disabilities for more than 50 years, since the passage of the Barden LaFollette Amendments of 1943 (P.L. 78-113).
- The need for state and local education and vocational rehabilitation agencies to collaborate in their support of transition-aged youth was recognized and emphasized in the parallel transition-related language and mandates contained in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-476) and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 (P.L. 102-569).



# Background Information

- The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) required VR agencies to set aside 15% of federal funds for Pre-ETS services for students who are potentially eligible for VR services.
- Legislative mandates do not always automatically translate into improved services.
- Nationally, collaboration between schools and VR agencies has been far from commonplace and is limited largely to the basic referral of students to VR.



# Background Information

- To improve collaboration between VR and schools, Texas Education Agency and Texas Workforce Commission entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed in 2017.
  - The MOU aims to promote collaboration between the two agencies in delivering VR transition services from secondary school to postsecondary education programs and to competitive integrated employment.



# The Initial Capacity Building Project:

- **In 2018, Texas A&M received a contract from TWC to build statewide capacity**
- **Three Phases**
  - Needs Assessment and fact-finding
  - Regional training and local team development
  - Statewide training and expansion/improvement of transition teams



# Successes:

- Identified regional strengths and issues/needs
- Built local transition teams
- Improved opportunities for learning from others
- Promoted the work of certain transition personnel
- Improved transition from schools to VR system



# Additional Needs Identified:

- Nationally and in Texas, VR services typically start when students reach 16 years old.
- Research and practices show that many students with disabilities need VR services earlier than 16.
- TWC's VR leadership identified this need and started a new initiative to start transition services with students at younger ages.



# The Current Capacity-Building Project:

## Building Capacity for Working with Younger Students



# Background

- **The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires Vocational Rehabilitation programs to focus their efforts to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities, ages 14-22.**
  - Although services are often provided to students in the 14-16 age range, we have struggled to lower our average age served.
  - Providing Pre-ETS at a younger age creates the opportunity to build skills over time and more opportunity for mastery.
  - This is a big change for VR. In the past, it has been the norm to serve students starting at age 16.
  - We cannot make this change alone. TWC and TEA have an MOU in place that provides structure for working together to connect students with VR services, including Pre-ETS.



# Objectives:

- Understand each other's systems: information sharing between educators and VR professionals.
- Understand successful strategies when working with 14–16-year-olds
- Training for VR counselors: applying the VR process when working with younger students, case management
- Develop shared strategies/collaboration: teams of educators and VR staff will be guided through discussions and group time designed to help build collaboration around working successfully with 14–16-year-olds.



# What You Told Us About Working With Younger Students: Service Barriers

- Lack of career goals
- Maturity level
- Parents aren't ready to think about transition
- Parents fear losing benefits
- No time in students' schedules
- Lack of transportation
- Lack of service providers
- Limited access to CTE
- Poor communication between VR and schools
- Students aren't aware of their disabilities
- VRCs become "dream killers"



# What You Told Us About Working With Younger Students

- Raising parent expectations leads to better post-secondary outcomes.
- Starting early helps students set achievable goals.
- Good working partnerships lead to better outcomes for schools and VR services.
- Providing Pre-ETS early allows students to explore careers and gain work experience.
- Staff training and support increases access to CTE pathways
- Schools and VRCs are looking for ways to improve services for this age group.
- They respond to engaging, age-appropriate materials.



# Next Steps:

- **Training Conferences in each TWC region**
- **Statewide Training Conference October 24-25, 2023**
- **Regional Showcases to highlight best practices**
- **Statewide Training Conference in the fall of 2024**
- **Analysis of focus group data to identify additional training and support needs**

