

Texas A&M University's Capacity Building Project

The 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).



- 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 often limited to basic referral of students to VR.



- 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



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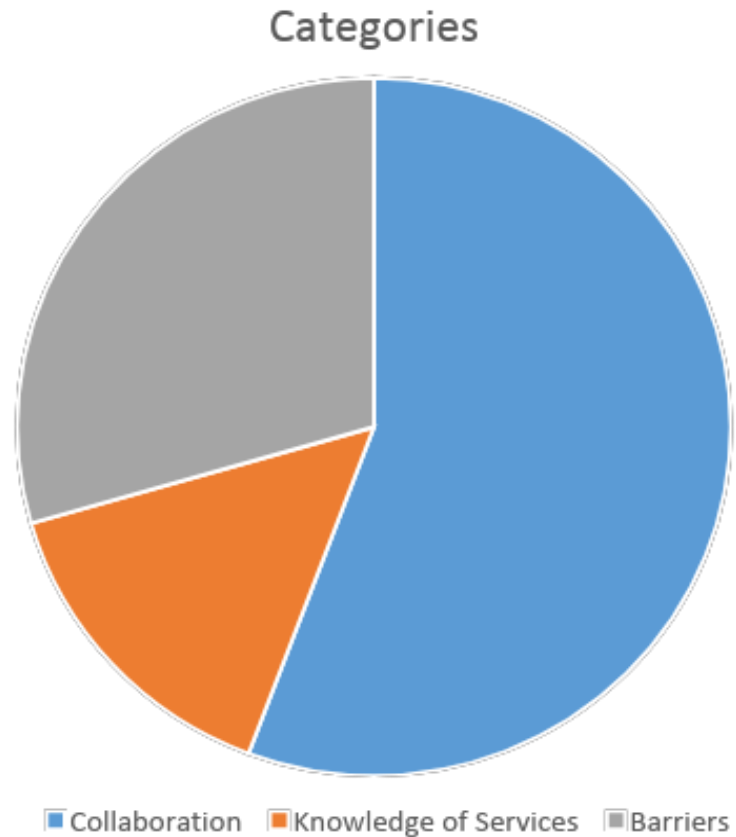
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Focus Group Findings:

(123 educators and 130 VR counselors in 8 regional focus groups)

- **2,192 comments addressed collaboration**
- **583 focused on knowledge of services**
- **1,159 comments addressed barriers**



Collaboration

- **Seen as both a strength and a need**
- **Focused on limitations in the ability to collaborate**
- **Also focused on interaction between families, students, TWC, teachers, and administrators and the need for everyone to be on the same page for effective transition planning**



Knowledge of Each Other's Systems: Policies, Roles, and Responsibilities

- What are everyone's roles, and how do we balance compliance with individual needs?**
- Identified a need for training in each other's systems, rules, and jargon**
- Frustration with the complexity of our systems**



Barriers to Service Provision

- **Access**
- **Resources, including staff and funding**
- **Capacity to deliver resources**
- **Variability of resources across the state**
- **Methods to remove barriers**



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 18-22 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 for the Current Project

- 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 Service Barriers for this Age Group

- 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"



Opportunities You Identified for this Age Group

- 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**

