

Capacity Building Focus Group Data
TWC Region 4: East Texas

Positive Highlights

- SEAL is working well in many communities
- Pre-ETS are taught for course credit with CRPs in some districts
- Summer camps, STEM camps, and day camps available for students
- Good relationship between schools and VR
- Virtual ARDs help, especially when documents are signed virtually
- Early training in financial literacy, social skills, soft skills, and career exploration improves outcomes

Common Themes

Collaboration Between School Districts and VR

Challenges:

- Schools and TWC using different platforms for communication Google vs. Microsoft)
- Staff turnover in TWC/VRS and LEA
- Need ongoing continuing education on how TWC/VRS works
- Follow-up after referral and after students apply via Start My VR
- Teachers aren't aware that TWC/VRS referrals may include 504, SPED, and other students with disabilities. This makes it harder for VR to reach students beyond SPED.

Opportunities:

- Increase communication between schools and VR (both ways)
- Invite TVRCs to district inservice every fall
- Create a single release of records (consent form)
- Embed Pre-ETS lessons into CTE and core academic courses
- Starting early increases the likelihood of seamless transition

Working with Parents

Challenges:

- Need parent education
- Fear of losing SSI and Medicaid benefits and fear of disclosing financial information
- Lack of follow through, low turnout at parent meetings
- Unrealistic expectations for the future or lack of expectation for employment

Opportunities:

- Zoom meetings, video conferences, social media outreach, and recorded webinars for parents
- Connecting with VR and service providers at transition fairs and events
- Parents sharing their students' success stories with other parents
- Starting benefits planning early and refresher yearly for parental understanding
- Schools helping coordinate parents' first meeting with VR

Working with Younger Teens

Challenges:

- Lack of transportation and lack of interest in driver's license
- Limited resources, transportation, and job opportunities in rural areas
- Need for social skills and soft skills instruction
- Don't see the value of work
- Limited understanding of their disabilities
- Don't know what they want to do, and don't connect their current actions to their future goals

Opportunities:

- Older students sharing their experiences with younger teens
- This is a good time to teach self-efficacy, self-determination, and goal setting
- Introduction to career fields and possibilities for a brighter future
- Start conversations about disability awareness, disclosure, and self-advocacy early, and include how disability affects the student outside of school

Collaboration with CTE and General Education

Challenges:

- Access to students- schedules are tight and unable to pull them out of class
- Emphasis on certifications or dual credit decreases access to students
- Students with LD aren't being referred to VR because teachers don't see it as a barrier to employment
- Lack of understanding of VR services and eligibility criteria

Opportunities:

- Strengthen working relationships between educators and VR staff
- Potential to increase referrals to VR
- Educating administrators about VR can increase access to CTE and Pre-ETS instruction
- Tying Pre-ETS and VR to CCMR outcomes increases district buy-in

Coordination of Services Beyond the LEA-VR Team

Challenges:

- Providers not following procedures for providing services
- Schools think CRPs are TWC employees, not for-profit subcontractors
- Relationship between school and providers often undermines TVRC's relationship with the school

Opportunities:

- Increasing understanding of the roles and responsibilities of TVRCs, LEAs, and CRP decreases confusion and improves service provision
- Increase pace of service delivery
- Hold collaborative meetings to share information and coordinate services between LEAs, TWC, CRPs, and other community service providers