

# EVALUATING EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES IN TENNESSEE:

## A Literature and Policy Review of Pre-Employment Transition Services



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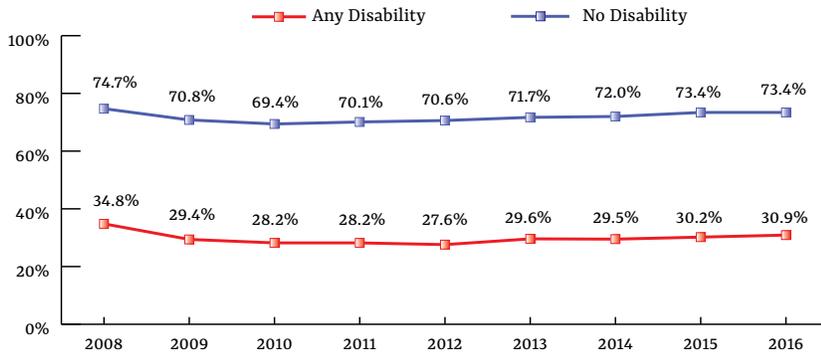
# OVERVIEW

The transition from high school to postsecondary education and employment should be an attainable goal for every youth with disabilities based on their life vision. Unfortunately, youth with disabilities are too often not achieving their goals. This is evident in the current employment rates for youth with disabilities ages 16 to 19, 20 to 24, and all workers ages 16 and over<sup>1</sup>.

United States Employment Rates of People with and without Disabilities (2018)		
	People with Disabilities	People without Disabilities
Ages 16 to 19	22.8%	36.2%
Ages 20 to 24	41.3%	72.4%
Ages 16 and Over	20.8%	68.2%

*Here in Tennessee, the employment gap between people with disabilities and people without disabilities has consistently hovered around 40%<sup>2</sup>.*

## TENNESSEE EMPLOYMENT RATES



The federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), requires a larger percentage of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) funding to be directed towards services for students with disabilities to increase preparation and skills that will help them meet their career goals and ultimately close the employment gap between people with and without disabilities.

The following is an overview of information and resources related to WIOA including:

1. The regulations for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) under WIOA
2. A review of Pre-ETS implementation across the country
3. Resources for delivering Pre-ETS to youth with disabilities

# THE WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT (2014)

## *What is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act?*

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In 1973, Congress passed its first piece of civil rights legislation to protect individuals from discrimination based on disability, including protection of students with disabilities enrolled in public education. Shortly after, the Education for all Handicapped Children (EHA, 1975) was passed to ensure a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment and Independent Education Program to guide the students learning process. Despite the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act) and EHA, research in the 1980s showed that young adults with disabilities were experiencing inadequate postsecondary outcomes. Poor postsecondary integration, high drop-out rates, high unemployment, low rates of postsecondary education enrollment, and low-quality independent living and community participation outcomes highlighted the need for additional legislative reform<sup>3</sup>. In response, the EHA, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 (later amended in 1997 and 2004) defined and required transition services<sup>4</sup>. As a result, special educators became responsible for providing transition services that would improve the postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities<sup>5</sup>. IDEA requires the provision of services and postsecondary goals for students with disabilities starting at age 16 (14 in Tennessee) until their 22nd birthday. To further improve employment opportunities, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) of 2014 was enacted<sup>6</sup>. WIOA mandates that youth with disabilities have additional in-school opportunities in workplace training, career exploration, and on-site work experience. With a renewed focus on transition, WIOA addresses postsecondary barriers and outlines additional services needed for youth with disabilities to engage in a meaningful adult life<sup>7</sup>.



## Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center



WINTAC is a national center funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration that promotes collaboration between VR Agencies and their partners to meet the requirements of WIOA. WINTAC focuses on five topic areas: Pre-Employment Transition Services, Section 511 requirements, competitive integrated employment, the integration of VR into the Workforce Development System, and transition to the Common Performance Accountability System. Resources are provided through three levels of technical support: universal, targeted/specialized, and intensive/sustained.

Resources can be found at <http://www.wintac.org/topic-areas/pre-employment-transition-services> and are most useful for **State VR Agencies**, related agencies, **rehabilitation professionals**, and **service providers** working with students with disabilities.

### *Pre-Employment Transition Services*

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In order to increase student supports, WIOA restructures funding for the provision of VR services. WIOA mandates that VR agencies must allot 15% of its federal funds for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Acknowledging that youth with disabilities continue to fall behind their peers without disabilities in the areas of employment, independent living, and community involvement, Pre-ETS promote adulthood opportunities for eligible students<sup>5</sup>. WIOA outlines five areas of learning that should be collaboratively provided by VR and local education agencies: job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, transition/postsecondary educational counseling, work-place readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy<sup>8</sup>.

**Job exploration counseling** includes activities that aid students in learning more about their career interests and options, as well as local labor market information.

**Work-based learning experiences** include hands-on opportunities for students to develop skills and explore interests through paid or unpaid internships, apprenticeships, short-term employment, and other experiences (e.g., job shadowing, worksite tours).

**Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs** includes activities for students to learn about different opportunities to continue their education and career training after high school.

**Workplace readiness training** includes opportunities and experiences that help students learn about and apply skills for their future employment, including social skills, independent living, job seeking skills, and other “soft” skills.

**Instruction in self-advocacy** includes activities and lessons that help students learn about their rights and responsibilities, as well as how to request accommodations, services and supports needed during their transition to postsecondary education and employment.

## Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)



ODEP, within the Department of Labor, promotes policies and coordinates with employers to ensure that individuals with disabilities have the opportunity for full integration into the workforce. Disability Employment Policy topics include, but are not limited to, diversity and inclusion, federal employers, integrated employment, mental health, personal assistance services, and youth with disabilities. Online training courses, downloadables (including fact sheets and surveys), and blog links are amongst the many resource formats provided on the ODEP website.

Resources can be found at <https://www.dol.gov/odep/#> and are most useful for **government agencies, service providers** and **non-governmental entities**, as well as public and private **employers**.

## *Student Eligibility*

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Pre-ETS are intended for all students with disabilities, and do not require that a student apply for VR services. In order to receive Pre-ETS, a student must meet WIOA's eligibility criteria for a "student with disability." Along with enrollment in a secondary program, eligible students must be between the ages of 14 and 22, and have a documented disability according to the guidelines of the IDEA or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act<sup>9</sup>. Students that are considered "eligible" are those that have applied to and been identified as eligible for VR services. Those that are "potentially eligible" are all students with disabilities, including those that have not applied to or been identified as eligible for VR services. Regardless of disability type, Pre-ETS must be available statewide to all students with disabilities that are in need of such services. Ineligibility can be determined if a designated state unit can present evidence that a student is unable to benefit from services due to severity of the student's disability<sup>10</sup>.

## The Arc of Tennessee



The Arc of Tennessee is a non-profit, advocacy organization that supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The Arc of Tennessee seeks to help those with intellectual and developmental disabilities to lead empowered lives as active, contributing members of their communities. Resources include, but are not limited to, handbooks, tip sheets, and community/family events and workshops.

Resources can be found at <https://www.thearctn.org/Home.php> and are most useful for **students** with disabilities, their **families, stakeholders**, and **advocates** of individuals with disabilities.

## *Collaboration*

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To meet WIOA's requirements and promote student success, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), and school professionals/service providers must establish meaningful partnerships with each other as well as with students with disabilities and their families. In establishing partnerships, VR and schools must collaborate to differentiate between transition services under IDEA and Pre-ETS under WIOA<sup>11</sup>. Pre-ETS must be provided in addition to all other transition learning opportunities or special education services. WIOA clarifies, "...nothing in the Act is to be construed as reducing the responsibility of the local educational agencies or any other agencies under IDEA." Regardless of whether a student receives VR services, the local education agency is still expected to provide all transition services necessary for maintaining a free appropriate public education. Rather than replace or reduce, Pre-ETS are intended to build on transition services to improve outcomes<sup>12</sup>.



## *Competitive Integrated Employment*

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WIOA reflects the belief that, given appropriate services and supports, all individuals have the ability to establish financial independence. WIOA reallocates funding to secure that half of Federal Supported Employment program funds provide youth with the most significant disabilities the services they need to attain competitive integrated employment (CIE)<sup>13</sup>. In doing so, WIOA raises the standards and increases opportunities for successful employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. CIE are work opportunities within inclusive community-based work settings. Wages for both employees with and without disabilities must be at least minimum wage and, given the employees are completing the same task, must be equal. With an emphasis on CIE training, adolescents with disabilities can prepare for competitive adulthood employment. Pre-ETS provide learning opportunities for building the skills required for meaningful, competitive, and inclusive employment opportunities. WIOA sets the expectation that all people, with or without disabilities, have the capacity to achieve success in their chosen careers<sup>14</sup>.

Congress states in WIOA, "The days of students with disabilities leaving school poorly educated, with no employment experience, and no job prospects, must come to an end." The understanding, collaboration, and implementation of WIOA is the means to this "end." Requiring the delivery of Pre-ETS ensures that all students have the opportunity to leave the secondary setting better prepared for adulthood success.

# RESEARCH LITERATURE

## INTRODUCTION

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The last section detailed the policy requirements of WIOA (2014) for personnel delivering Pre-ETS. The following section will review the current research literature on the five Pre-ETS and interagency collaboration between the school and Pre-ETS providers. Examining research literature is a way to understand practices others serving youth with disabilities are using to provide Pre-ETS across the country. Additionally, the research literature provides a snapshot of what has worked, what has not worked, and what needs to occur in the future in order to help students with disabilities achieve their postsecondary education and employment goals.

### Tennessee Disability Pathfinder



In partnership with Vanderbilt University Kennedy Center, the state of Tennessee, and Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities, Tennessee Disability Pathfinder (Pathfinder) serves as a “navigator on the path to community services.” It offers a free statewide database of information, services, supports, and referrals for Tennesseans with disabilities and their families. Pathfinder includes three major components: information and referrals, education and training, and a multicultural outreach program. Online resources include an online database (for services), an online resource library, downloadable resources, a community calendar, information on community events/training, and information on local support groups.

Resources can be found at <https://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/pathfinder/> and are most helpful for **students** with disabilities, their **families**, **agencies**, and **outreach programs**.

When compared to their same-age peers without disabilities, individuals with disabilities have fewer opportunities for achieving adulthood success. However, research has shown that high school opportunities are related to increased post-high school achievement, providing direction for closing to the employment gap<sup>15</sup>. Indicators of postsecondary success include career awareness, paid employment/work experience, self-care/independent living skills instruction, social skills development, vocational education, and work-study opportunities<sup>16</sup>. While IDEA requires that educators use research-based practices to guide instruction, the field of secondary education and transition has struggled to adequately address these indicators. Better connecting educators and VR counselors with research-based instructional strategies and student-centered transition

services will increase the likelihood that students will experience a smooth transition into adulthood<sup>17</sup>. WIOA directs VR and schools to work together to improve adulthood outcomes for students with disabilities. Through the provision of Pre-ETS, students with disabilities have a greater chance of transitioning directly into higher education opportunities and/or CIE<sup>18</sup>. Designed to address specific indicators of postsecondary success, Pre-ETS provide students with disabilities with instruction and participation in (1) job exploration counseling, (2) work-based learning experiences (WBLEs), (3) counseling for postsecondary education (PSE), (4) workplace readiness training, and (5) instruction in self-advocacy<sup>8</sup>.



### National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth



Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy, NCWD/Youth assists state and local workforce development systems to better guide at-risk youth in “navigating the road to work.” Its resources focus on issues pertaining to career development, cross-systems collaboration, education, families, transition, professional and workforce development, and youth development and leadership. NCWD/Youth resources include user-friendly definitions, videos, and webinars.

Resources can be found at <http://www.ncwd-youth.info> and are most useful for **students** with disabilities, their **families**, **special educators**, youth **service professionals**, and **policy & program leaders**.

## *Job Exploration Counseling*

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Job exploration counseling promotes positive outcomes for PSE, employment, and independent living skills for students with disabilities<sup>19</sup>. Also known as career counseling, job exploration counseling provides a wide variety of activities that encourage students to consider various career options and practice informed decision making. Job exploration counseling allows students to consider their unique abilities and needs, while simultaneously considering the challenges and supports of a particular occupation, job, and work environment. When given the opportunity to practice thoughtful decision making during job exploration, students are more likely to determine the most desirable, most appropriate career<sup>20</sup>. VR counselors regard career counseling as one of the most important, most frequently provided transition services. To ensure this service continues to be provided regularly, it is important that all members of the transition team acknowledge career counseling as a priority for student success<sup>21</sup>. Through job exploration counseling, counselors are able to provide youth with disabilities with opportunities for building self-confidence in their capacity to work. A negative perception of how others view one's abilities and/or low self-efficacy can inhibit one's willingness to seek employment. By promoting self-esteem and encouraging a positive sense of self-efficacy, job exploration counseling increases the likelihood of a student's success in postsecondary employment<sup>22</sup>.

## *Work-Based Learning Experiences*

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A growing body of evidence suggests that engagement in WBLEs is an important predictor of postsecondary employment for individuals with disabilities. WBLEs provide eligible students with the opportunity to develop both workplace skills and realistic expectations for employment while in high school. Through WBLEs, students learn about a variety of career paths, explore work styles, identify what field of work they most enjoy, and learn what natural supports are available in different job settings. Established in consideration of a student's interests, experiences, and strengths, WBLEs might include career exploration, job shadowing, job sampling, service learning, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment<sup>23</sup>. Not only do WBLEs have a significant impact on students, but also on the community and its employers. WBLEs give community members the chance to work



with students with disabilities, which can improve perceptions of and increase expectations for individuals with disabilities<sup>24</sup>. In order to provide students with WBLEs, interagency collaboration is crucial. VR agencies, school personnel, community partners, and employers must work together to generate competitive work opportunities for students<sup>25</sup>. While strongly supported by research, significant barriers have previously affected students' access to WBLEs. Minimal exposure to CIE settings, lack of interagency collaboration, conflicting course requirements for earning a high school diploma/certificate, and weak perception of its significant impact have been identified as deterrents to the implementation of work-based learning. Addressing such barriers ensures that students have early access to and practice in CIE<sup>26</sup>.

## National Technical Assistance Center on Transition



Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs and the Rehabilitation Services Administration, NTACT is a Technical Assistance and Dissemination project. NTACT's primary goal is to improve postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities by offering educators and providers trainings and resources to implement evidence-based practices on transition planning, graduation, post-school success, and effective uses of data. Resources include annotated bibliographies, lesson plans, presentations and webinars, and quick guides.

Resources can be found at <https://www.transitionta.org/> and are most useful for **state education agencies, local education agencies, VR agencies**, and other stakeholders working with students with disabilities.

## *Counseling for Postsecondary Education*

The future success of youth with disabilities is greatly impacted by the completion of PSE. While research indicates that the majority of high school counselors view preparing students for PSE as their most important goal<sup>27</sup>, in comparison to their peers without disabilities, students with disabilities have not always been a priority for PSE preparation and counseling<sup>28</sup>. Misconceptions about limited postsecondary access for students with disabilities have led educators to focus on deficits rather than strengths. To the detriment students, PSE counseling has often been falsely considered as misleading or unrealistic for youth with disabilities. However, because of legislative, social, and academic changes, inclusive PSE programs continue to grow<sup>29</sup>. With greater frequency, students with disabilities consider PSE as a realistic opportunity for increasing their chances of obtaining CIE and financial independence. Counseling for PSE ensures that high school students with disabilities are able to explore and determine their most desired, most appropriate PSE



option. Due to the increased enrollment of students with disabilities, postsecondary institutions, colleges, and universities are tasked with strengthening efforts for assisting students with disabilities. For students with disabilities who choose to pursue PSE, the selection of a campus that supports their needs is crucial to their success. Counseling helps students match personal needs and preference with the supports, social experiences, and academic profile of a given PSE setting<sup>30</sup>. Alternative education paths, like short-term training programs and inclusive higher education programs, are also valuable options for students with disabilities. Like traditional programs, alternative programs help students to improve employment and academic skills while providing the often desired college experience. To ensure that students are aware of and have access to all post-high school education opportunities, postsecondary counseling should include education on four-year programs, two-year/vocational programs, as well as alternative education opportunities<sup>31</sup>.

## *Workplace Readiness Training*

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Research supports that the expectation of achieving employment outcomes leads to a higher likelihood of gaining employment<sup>22</sup>. By participating in workplace readiness training, students with disabilities are given the chance to prepare for the possibility, even expectation, of employment in a desired field. While the number of students with disabilities participating in PSE programs continues to increase, it is also important to recognize and prepare those students that will transition directly from high school into the workplace. Workplace readiness training is especially important for youth that want to transition directly from high school into employment. For all students, content knowledge in writing, research, and math supports a smooth transition from high school into employment or PSE. However, infusing life skills support and training in the general curriculum ensures that students will be best prepared for success in adulthood. Working both independently and in a group, advocating for assistance, and engaging in appropriate social skills are necessary behaviors for achievement in any work environment. For transition-age youth with disabilities, providing not only opportunities to learn, but to also practice these skills is pivotal to workplace readiness training<sup>32</sup>. For students experiencing mental health concerns, preparation for handling employment stressors is especially important. Workplace readiness training allows students to develop coping strategies, self-regulation skills, empathic thinking skills, communication skills, and medication management. By reducing the likelihood that an individual will experience worry, anxiety, nervousness, and impaired self-esteem, workplace readiness training fosters future achievement in CIE<sup>33</sup>. While transition planning must involve understanding a student's disability, needs, and challenges, recognizing a student's strengths and abilities must be the primary consideration throughout workplace readiness training<sup>29</sup>.



## Tennessee Disability Coalition



The Tennessee Disability Coalition and its member organizations represent and support the state's diverse population, specifically its community of individuals with disabilities. Comprised of self-advocates, local groups, and forty-seven organizations, the separate entities making up the Tennessee Disability Coalition collaborate to endorse equal access and opportunity, promote economic self-sufficiency, and support independent living opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Currently, the Coalition leads public programs and provides online resources relating to the ADA, families of children with healthcare needs (Family Voices of Tennessee), students in Tennessee with Traumatic Brain Injury (Project BRAIN), and healthcare benefits for working individuals with disabilities (Benefits to Work).

Resources can be found at <https://www.tndisability.org/> and are most useful for **students** with disabilities, their **families**, **stakeholders**, and **advocates** of individuals with disabilities.

## *Instruction in Self-Advocacy*

A strong indicator of PSE and employment, self-advocacy is the capability to identify one's personal needs and request necessary services and/or accommodations<sup>34</sup>. Individuals that are self-advocates are self-aware, knowledgeable about their rights and responsibilities, able to communicate their needs, and attain leadership skills. Instruction in self-advocacy includes teaching strategies for individual choice-making, requesting necessary services and help, and taking ownership of one's own actions<sup>35</sup>. While the ability to self-advocate requires knowledge of personal strengths and needs, many students are not able to identify their disability<sup>36</sup>. Teaching students to understand their classification, to recognize their strengths and needs, to identify which accommodations they need to be successful, and how to request those accommodations will give students the knowledge and confidence they need to assume responsibility of their education<sup>37</sup>. In addition to direct instruction, self-advocacy learning opportunities can also take place in the form of individual or group activities. School-based individual activities might include student assessments such as learning styles assessments, strengths and needs assessments, and preferences/interests assessments that help promote student self-awareness. School and community-based group activities can include peer mentoring, role-play, volunteering, and leadership opportunities<sup>38, 39</sup>. Students that build self-advocacy skills while in high school are likely to retain, use, and benefit from those skills as they progress further into postsecondary life<sup>40</sup>.



# INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION BETWEEN STUDENTS AND FAMILIES, SCHOOLS, AND OUTSIDE AGENCIES

The interagency collaboration literature shows that an interdependent relationship between school systems, rehabilitation professionals, and youth with disabilities and their families is a must<sup>41, 42, 43</sup>. The school system, VR, and outside service agencies have served youth with disabilities for many years; however, the research shows that the outcomes of these students are not leading to high levels of success<sup>42, 44, 45, 46</sup>. A survey of teachers and outside agencies found that poor interagency collaboration is a barrier to successful transition for students with disabilities, and that the impact affects long-term outcomes. Further, interagency collaboration should be defined and the procedures for partnering explicit to be effective<sup>43</sup>.

The literature suggests that VR is the primary entity and an important agency in aiding youth with disabilities to attain employment outcomes. Unfortunately, the literature shows that VR is not reaching its full potential in serving youth with disabilities<sup>21, 41, 42, 46</sup>; however, it is also suggested that VR is making better efforts in schools to help youth achieve their full potential<sup>47, 48</sup>. In a report from the National Council on Disability (2017), findings suggest that VR agencies across the country are increasing their relationships with outside agencies and schools through their third party contracts for Pre-ETS<sup>49</sup>. When implemented appropriately, interagency collaboration may create a foundation for seamless transition that is critical to successful adulthood outcomes for youth with disabilities<sup>50, 51</sup>. That is, successful interagency collaboration between the school system and outside agencies ensures students receive services to exit the secondary school system and enter adulthood well<sup>46</sup>. Interagency collaboration gives youth with disabilities access to agencies outside of the school system that provide opportunities to participate in activities and skills development they can apply in college and post-high school employment settings. When implemented effectively, interagency collaboration as a method for service delivery increases the successful adulthood outcomes of youth with disabilities<sup>8</sup>.

## I'm Determined



Originating from the Virginia Department of Education, I'm Determined is a project that promotes positive behavior for students with disabilities. I'm Determined offers a variety of resources (videos, templates, documents, PDFs and modules) that teach and support student self-determination. The user-friendly website classifies resources into three categories: Educators, Parents, and Youth.

Resources can be found at <https://www.imdetermined.org/> and are most useful for **students** with disabilities, their **families**, and special **educators**.

## *The Role of the School System in Youth with Disabilities' Secondary Transition Education*

The public school system is the entity primarily responsible for the delivery of educational services to high school students with disabilities. Schools are responsible for the financial costs of public education for youth with disabilities. That is, federal funding is given to each State, and each State distributes the funding to school systems to aid in delivering these services<sup>53</sup>. Furthermore, the public school system is legally obligated to cover the financial costs of implementing transition services in accordance with the IDEA (2004) while youth with disabilities are in high school<sup>4</sup>.



Transition services are planned using the Individual Transition Plan, which is required to be developed and implemented by school professionals. Unfortunately, many teachers report no formal preparation for transition planning and implementation<sup>54, 55</sup>. One study found that only half of the teachers reported taking at least one transition course. Teachers frequently planned transition services, but implementation of the services was reported from occasionally to rarely<sup>54</sup>. While efforts are being made to formally prepare teachers for transition planning much more needs to be done to benefit students with disabilities entering adulthood.

### TennesseeWorks



TennesseeWorks is comprised of state agencies, policy makers, legislators, individuals with disabilities, family members, professionals, advocates, and allies in Tennessee. The primary goal is to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities. TennesseeWorks considers state laws, policies, funding, resources, and other potential work barriers and that all Tennesseans, regardless of disability status, are capable of attaining meaningful work. Through empowerment, equipping, and connecting individuals, opportunities for competitive employment are more readily accessible for individuals with disabilities. Online resources are provided in the form of articles, videos, downloadable documents, newsletters, blog entries, media campaigns, and community event information.

Resources can be found at <http://www.tennesseeworks.org/> and are most useful for **students** with disabilities, their **families**, special **educators**, **employers**, **providers**, and **policymakers**.

# *The Role of Vocational Rehabilitation and Outside Agencies in Youth with Disabilities' Life During and After High School*

VR agencies and other Pre-ETS providers deliver employment and post-high school vocational and educational training services to people with disabilities. VR and Pre-ETS providers work in partnership with the public school systems throughout the state to provide assistance in attaining adulthood goals in accordance with the requirements of WIOA<sup>6</sup>. To provide Pre-ETS, 15% of their federal funding is allotted for transition-age students. Pre-ETS are provided by VR counselors, VR Pre-Employment Transition Specialists, contracted outside Pre-ETS providers, and Transition School to Work grant recipients. These providers collaborate with the school system and youth with disabilities in planning and delivering the five Pre-ETS.



## Transition Coalition



Located at the University of Kansas, Transition Coalition delivers research-based professional development opportunities and resources to improve support and instruction for students with disabilities in the secondary education setting. Transition Coalition's professional development opportunities and resources focus on transition and college/career readiness skills. Online resources include modules, study guides, webinars, research-based transition training, and self-study transition units.

Resources can be found at <https://transitioncoalition.org/> and are most useful for **support team** members, special **educators**, **parents** of students with disabilities, and **professionals** who work with individuals with disabilities.

# *The Role of Students and Families in Youth with Disabilities' Life During and After High School*

Students with disabilities and their families must be directly involved in their transition to adulthood. Therefore, students and their families are partners with VR, other providers of Pre-ETS, and the school system. In combination with their family, the school, and Pre-ETS providers, secondary students need to be present and to participate in the activities that will lead them to postsecondary education and employment opportunities. In fact, the IDEA<sup>4</sup> says that students with disabilities must be a key part of creating their plan (Individualized Education Program and the transition plan) for their future. Post-high school, youth with disabilities focus on achieving their goals for postsecondary education, employment, and independent living in collaboration with their family and outside agencies.

## Support and Training for Exceptional Parents



STEP is a Tennessee-based program that promotes self-sufficiency, employment, and meaningful community involvement for all community members, including those with disabilities. The STEP program holds high expectations for student success, addresses issues students face in school and in the community, and emphasizes the importance of family engagement in the special education process. STEP offers training and support in the form of workshops, multimedia training, conferences, one-on-one assistance, as well as downloadable resources (also available in Spanish).

Resources can be found at <http://www.tnstep.org/> and are most useful for **families** and **educators** of individuals with disabilities.

As the most knowledgeable of their own students with disabilities, the importance of family involvement cannot be overstated. Family involvement has been long mentioned as an essential factor for student success in school and post-high school endeavors<sup>56, 57, 58, 59</sup>. In order for family involvement to be effective, families must be treated as partners of the school. This is particularly necessary for low-income African American youth with disabilities. To that end, semi-structured interviews conducted with African American parents and school personnel revealed that the approach to family involvement needs to change to be a positive reciprocal relationship between the family and the school system<sup>60</sup>. Conversely, the limited literature base on Latino families support for youth with disabilities' transition to adulthood suggests that there is a high level of family involvement<sup>57, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65</sup>.

## PACER Center



The PACER Center is an organization founded on the practice of parents of children with disabilities collaborating and supporting one another. With a focus on promoting a high quality of life for all individuals, the PACER Center offers workshops and publications (including books and downloadable handouts) on how to teach transition-related skills to students with disabilities. Promoting accessibility to users from diverse backgrounds, the PACER Center provides live-screened workshops, bilingual workshops, videos, individual assistance, and translated publications.

Resources can be found at <http://www.pacer.org> and are most useful for **students** with disabilities, their **families**, special **educators**, and **professionals** who work with individuals with disabilities.

## INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

IDEA and WIOA require the school system and VR to work in partnership to serve students with disabilities<sup>4, 6</sup>. That is, WIOA suggest that Pre-ETS cannot be successfully planned and delivered without the collaboration of the schools system, VR, and other outside service agencies<sup>6</sup>. The following are barriers and strategies to successful interagency collaboration that have been documented in the research literature.

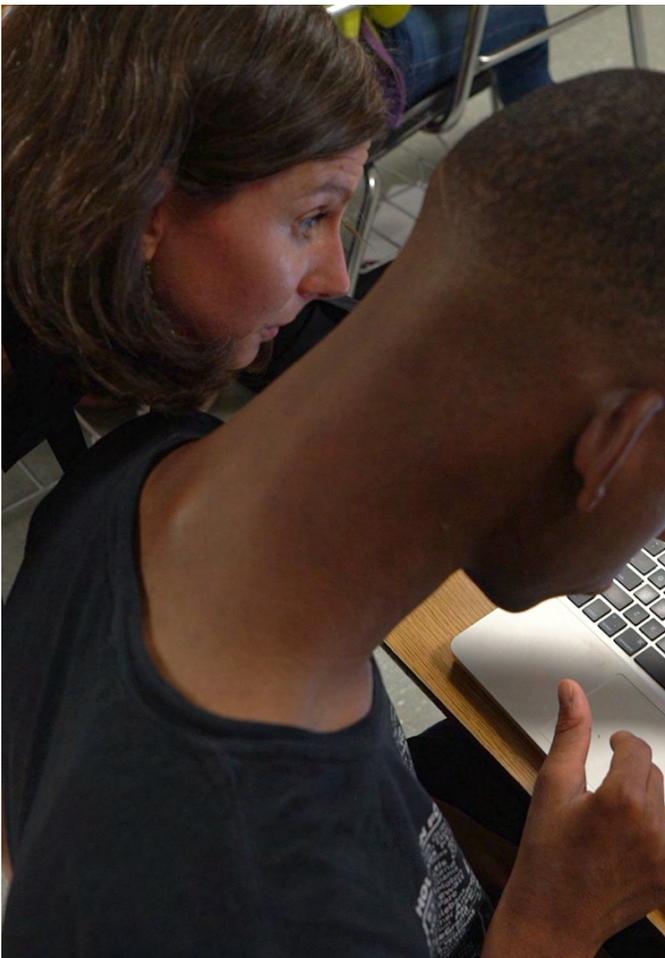
### *Barriers to Successful Interagency Collaboration*

The research literature largely shows that the current involvement of outside agencies and VR, in particular, in the transition process is not aiding youth with disabilities in achieving their postsecondary education and/or employment goals<sup>41, 42, 43, 49, 66, 70</sup>. The research suggests that common barriers to successful interagency collaboration relationships include lack of communication, dedication, and underqualified and un-prepared employees<sup>41, 42, 43, 49, 66, 70</sup>. While the literature makes it clear that there are many barriers to interagency collaboration, promising strategies exist and will be discussed in the following section.



## *Strategies Leading to Successful Interagency Collaboration*

The research suggests that strategies leading to successful interagency collaboration include commitment to the partnership<sup>67</sup>, flexibility and resource allocation<sup>67, 68</sup>, open communication between parties<sup>67, 68, 69, 70</sup>, and professional development<sup>68, 70</sup>. Additionally, removing issues of invasion of space was important in successful partnerships. Finally, one study surveyed a successful interagency partnership, which resulted in team strategic planning, interagency professional development sessions, and an increased ability to disseminate information to students or knowledge of an agency contact<sup>69</sup>. The importance of the improvement of interagency collaboration between the school system, VR, and Pre-ETS providers is essential to the successful transition of students with disabilities into adulthood.



# PRE-ETS ONLINE RESOURCES

*The following are current resources that may be helpful for planning and implementing Pre-ETS for students with disabilities.*

## WINTAC

[WINTAC \(Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center\) - Main Website](#)

[Alignment of VR Performance Indicators Versus IDEA Indicators](#)

[Counseling for Comprehensive Transition or PSE Programs Resources Links](#)

[Guidance and Career Counselors' Toolkit: Advising High School Students with Disabilities on Postsecondary Options](#)

[Counseling on Opportunities for Enrollment in Comprehensive Transition or Postsecondary Educational Programs](#)

[CRP Pre-ETS Guidebook: Strategies for Community Rehabilitation Providers to Collaborate on Pre-ETS](#)

[Instruction in Self-Advocacy Overview](#)

[Instruction in Self-Advocacy Resources Links](#)

[Me! Scale - Student Worksheet](#)

[The ARC Self-Determination Scale](#)

[Job Exploration Counseling Overview](#)

[Job Exploration Counseling Resources Links](#)

[Pictorial Interest Inventory: Job Exploration Counseling Resource for VR, CRPs, and Educators](#)

[Pre-Employment Transition Services Implementation Checklist](#)

[WINTAC Website --> Training --> Webinars: List of Recorded Webinars Intended for VR and CRP Training on Pre-ETS](#)

[Work-Based Learning Experiences Overview](#)

[Work-Based Learning Experiences Resources Links](#)

[Workplace Readiness Training Resources Links](#)

[Workplace Readiness Training to Develop Social Skills and Independent Living Overview](#)

# NTACT

[NTACT \(National Technical Assistance Center on Transition\) - Main Website](#)

[Competitive Integrated Employment \(CIE\) Toolkit](#)

[Quick Guide: Preparing Students for Competitive Integrated Employment](#)

[Interagency Agreement Toolkit](#)

[Age Appropriate Transition Assessment Toolkit](#)

[Evaluation Toolkit](#)

[A Guide to Developing Collaborative School-Community-Business Partnerships](#)

[Transition Planning: Implementing Quality Transition Services](#)

[Effective Practices and Predictors Matrix](#)



# NCWD/YOUTH

[NCWD/Youth - Main Website](#)

[Providing Quality Career Development within Youth Development & Leadership Programs](#)

[Everybody Learns, Everybody Works: Using Universal Design for Learning in Workforce Development Programs](#)

[Helping Youth Build Work Skills for Job Success: Tips for Parents and Families](#)

[Supporting Families of Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Education](#)

[Understanding the New Vision for Career Development: The Role of Family](#)

[Helping Youth with Mental Health Needs Avoid Transition Cliffs: Lessons from Pioneering Transition Programs](#)

[Am I Learning to Lead? Self-Assessment on Self-Advocacy Progress](#)

[Guiding Your Success Tool](#)

[Hitting The Open Road After High School](#)



# PACER CENTER

[PACER Center: Champions for Children with Disabilities - Main Website](#)

[Engaging Families of Youth with Intellectual Disabilities in Systems Change Efforts](#)

[College or Training Programs: How to Decide Tips for Youth](#)

[Frequently Asked Questions About Career Exploration for Youth with Disabilities](#)

[Start Now to Chart Your Youth's Career Path after Graduation](#)

[The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#)

[Set a Postsecondary Education or Training Destination and Map a Course to Get There](#)

[Set an Employment Destination and Map a Course to Get There](#)

[Talk to Your Child About Employment: A Checklist for Parents](#)

[Talk to Your Child About Postsecondary Education or Training: A Checklist for Parents](#)

[Transition to Adulthood: Where Do We Start?](#)

[Transition to Postsecondary Education or Training: What Parents Can Do Now](#)

[Chart Your Own Future: How Your Individualized Education Program \(IEP\) Can Help](#)

# TENNESSEEWORKS

[TennesseeWorks - Main Website](#)

[Pre-Employment Transition Services: Phase 1 - Tennessee Specific Details about Pre-ETS](#)

[Planning a Positive Employment Trajectory --> Link to Download the Word Document](#)

[A Transition Guide To Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities](#)

[Parent Guide to Transition Metro Nashville Public Schools](#)

[The Journey to Life After High School A Road Map for Parents of Children with Special Needs](#)

# TRANSITION COALITION

## Transition Coalition - Main Website

[Planning for the Future: A Workbook to Help Young Adults with Disabilities, their Families, and Professionals to Plan for Living, Working, and Participating in the Community](#)

[WIA is Now WIOA: What the New Bill Means for People with Disabilities](#)

[Tips for Transition](#)

[Work-Based Learning Programs Meeting the Fair Labor Standards Act Agreement: Unpaid Worksites - A Checklist](#)

[Parent Transition Survey: English](#)

[Parent Transition Survey: Spanish](#)

# ODEP

## United States Department of Labor: Office of Disability Employment Policy - Main Website

[Integrated Employment Toolkit](#)

[Tips on How Parents Can Put Their Children with Disabilities on the Path to Future Employment](#)

[Essential Skills to Getting a Job: What Young People with Disabilities Need to Know](#)

[Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success](#)

[Skills to Pay the Bills: Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success - Spanish Version](#)

# I'M DETERMINED

## I'm Determined - Main Website

[How Self-Determined Are You? A Toolbox of Resources to Help Build Self-Determination Skills](#)

[Self-Determination Checklist Educator Assessment](#)

[Self-Determination Checklist Parent Assessment](#)

[Goal Plan Printable for Students](#)

[Good Day Plan Printable for Students](#)

[One-Pager Printable for Students](#)

[Self-Determination Checklist Student Self-Assessment](#)

[Student Rubric for IEP Participation](#)

# STEP

[STEP: Support and Training for Exceptional Parents - Main Website](#)

[Transition Guide: College](#)

[Transition Guide: Employment](#)

[Transition Guide: Job Seeking](#)

[Transition Guide: Self-Advocacy](#)

[Information in Spanish](#)



# TENNESSEE DISABILITY COALITION

[Tennessee Disability Coalition - Main Website](#)

[Dude, Where's My Transition Plan?](#)



# THE ARC TENNESSEE

[The Arc Tennessee - Main Website](#)

[Getting a Head Start with Vocational Rehabilitation - Brochure](#)

[GOING FROM SCHOOL LIFE TO ADULTHOOD The Secondary Transition Handbook](#)



# TENNESSEE DISABILITY PATHFINDER

[Tennessee Disability Pathfinder – Main Website](#)

[Tennessee Disability Pathfinder Agency Search](#)

[Resource Library](#)



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