**Course: Connecting With Families and Employers**

**Lesson 1: Partnering with Employers**

**WELCOME:**

Welcome to our lesson on partnering with employers! Early work experiences are important for every student, and especially for students with disabilities. It is not surprising that hands-on work experiences while still in school is a strong predictor of paid jobs after graduation for students with disabilities. Most youth will benefit from immersive, hands-on experiences that allow them to apply their knowledge, practice new skills, and develop a real appreciation of all that work entails. To find these important early work experiences, students need support making connections with businesses and employers in their community. However, many employers don’t know the benefits of hiring youth with disabilities. Employers need information and support to understand why an inclusive workplace culture benefits everyone, including their bottom line. As a Pre-ETS provider, you play an important role in helping students establish relationships with employers so they can gain access to those crucial real-world experiences.

**Slide 2:**

In this lesson, you will learn:

* What the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act or WIOA says about partnering with employers
* Best practices in recruiting and partnering with businesses on providing early work experiences for students with disabilities
* Practical tips and strategies to implement those best practices
* Which key partners can help you form relationships within the business community
* Common concerns raised by employers and strategies for addressing those concerns
* Finally, throughout the lesson, we’ll share examples of what a successful employer and provider partnership could look like

**Slide 3:**

WIOA makes it clear that the business community is an essential partner in the effective delivery of Pre-ETS. The legislation encourages collaboration among the state workforce development agency, local workforce development boards, American Job Centers, and individual employers to develop work opportunities for students. In fact, one authorized activity included within WIOA is establishing multistate or regional partnerships that include private businesses.

**Slide 4:**An important first step when building relationships with employers is to become familiar with the labor market in your area. Who are the biggest employers in your area? A hospital? A college or school district? A specific company or industry? Are there restaurants that frequently have job openings? You might already know some of these answers, but you may learn about opportunities you weren’t familiar with through some additional exploration. Your local chamber of commerce is a great place to start. They can help point you in the right direction. Even using job boards like Simply Hired, Indeed, or Monster can be helpful too, particularly if you know specific jobs in which a student might have interest. If there is a larger employer like a hospital, hotel, or mall, explore all the different jobs included there. You might be surprised at the variety of experiences available in one setting.

As you work individually with students on identifying job interests, compile information on opportunities for specific jobs that are of interest. Gather stats on salary, education/experience requirements, physical demands, and what the typical environment looks like. Come prepared with as much information as possible to help best match students to jobs.

The O\*Net website is a good resource to get an overall snapshot of trends across occupations both nationwide and here in Tennessee. For example, let’s say a student has expressed interest in becoming a dental assistant. You can use the O\*Net website to see labor market trends, typical salary, and any education or training requirements. O\*Net also includes state-specific information, so you can select Tennessee to see what the employment outlook for dental assistants looks like in our state.

**Slide 5:**

Think about your circle of family and friends, neighbors, or other members of your community. Can you think of someone who owns a business or is a manager in a company? Do they hire people with disabilities? People often obtain jobs through their networks and word-of-mouth. Many of us already know someone who could employ a youth with a disability. When beginning to establish relationships with employers, your own network is a great first place to look. Likewise, students often have their own networks that are worth considering. What people in the community do they know beyond their immediate family? Help students understand how to use their networks to find work opportunities. For example, if you’re providing Pre-ETS in the classroom, consider facilitating a discussion or an activity intended to help them think about their relationships in the community.

Remember to do your research before meeting with a specific business. Look at reviews of the business. What are people saying about the business? Are they on social media? Take notes from reviews and posts to carry with you when you meet with companies about potential job opportunities.

**Slide 6:**

In addition to any personal connections you might have, numerous organizations and groups provide chances to connect with members of the business community. Joining or collaborating with these organizations can help you learn about opportunities that might not be shared through traditional avenues. Let’s review a few key partners and discuss some ways they can be helpful.

* *Chambers of Commerce.* These are associations of businesses that promote the economic interests of local communities. You’ll usually find a fairly broad cross-section of industries represented in these organizations. Consider joining your local chamber to gain access to networking events and other opportunities. Ask if you can speak to their group during a meeting or event. It’s an important way to provide the business community with information and resources on the value of providing work experiences to youth with disabilities.
* *American Job Centers.* These centers are workforce development centers located in all 95 counties in Tennessee. They provide support for anyone looking for a job, including individuals with disabilities. In addition to on-site workshops around resume writing and interviewing skills, they can provide job placement services. Some of them even have programs for summer employment for youth. Connecting with your local American Job Center can be a great way to find job opportunities for students.
* *Workforce Development Boards.* There are nine workforce development areas in Tennessee. A workforce development board brings together leaders in the local community, particularly from the business community. These workforce development boards promote the workforce and economic development in a region, and foster connections among different members of the business community. Typically, workforce development boards might also include representatives from local community colleges and vocational programs.

We’ve included more information about each of these groups in our supplemental materials.

**Slide 7:**

Here’s a few other organizations with whom you might consider partnering or even joining:

* *HR Associations.* Groups like the Society for Human Resource Management can help you keep on top of economic trends in your area. Usually, they also include some type of online directory of employers.
* *Trade/Industry Associations.* For any students who are interested in a specific trade or industry, explore associations in their area of interest in your community. This can be a great way to find apprenticeships and job opportunities.
* *Civic Groups.* Groups like the Lion’s or Rotary Club or the Kiwanis or Optimist Club include influential members of the community. Particularly in rural communities, these civic groups can offer valuable connections to potential job opportunities.

You could even undertake a community mapping activity to visually represent all available partners who can help with identifying job opportunities for students. Include the groups we just discussed, along with all businesses, companies, restaurants, and hospitals that could be potential places for your students to gain work experience. Have students join in this activity. They can create a map based on their interests, even incorporating personal connections such as people they know from their faith community, neighborhood, or volunteering. This can help them link their personal network with other community resources. You can tailor these resources based around the student’s interests. Students can label a printed map or use a software program to develop an electronic map. They could organize resources and places in a table or get creative and use photo collages or PowerPoint presentations. Check out our self-advocacy course for much more information on how to do a community mapping activity with your students.

**Slide 8:**

Another innovative way to engage employers is through a community conversation. Community conversations are two-hour events bringing together a variety of individuals from the community, such as family members, educators, employers, people with disabilities, and others. Community members who attend are asked to share their perspectives on the resources, supports, programs and opportunities in their community that could be drawn upon to expand employment opportunities for young people with disabilities. Hosting a community conversation is another effective way to build relationships with employers, learn more about their concerns around hiring individuals with disabilities, and ensure they understand the value of including people with disabilities. We’ve included a practical guide on how to host a community conversation in the resources for this course.

**Slide 9:**

Although helping students obtain paid employment is one of the key goals in establishing relationships with employers, keep in mind all the different ways employers and businesses can provide valuable work experiences for students. Particularly if an employer is hesitant about hiring youth with disabilities, start with smaller, less time-intensive experiences. Employers might be more comfortable:

* Participating in or co-sponsoring a job fair
* Sponsoring a job shadowing day
* Offering mock interviewing or resume writing practice
* Serving as a mentor for a student
* Speaking to a classroom of students about their field

All these experiences are important components in the continuum of work-based learning for students. Through participation in these opportunities, employers and businesses will be exposed to youth with disabilities to more fully appreciate the strengths and skills they can bring to a workplace. Our course on work-based learning provides additional information about the variety of work experiences students can participate in during high school.

**Slide 10:**

Let’s look at an example of Pre-ETS in practice. Anna, a junior in high school, loves organization and thinks she wants to work in an office setting, perhaps doing data entry or filing. Her parents, teacher, and provider feel she would benefit from getting some real-world experience in an office setting. Earlier in the school year, her provider had arranged for a nurse and ultrasound tech from a nearby hospital to speak to the class since numerous students were interested in medical careers. The hospital is one of the largest employers in the area. Anna’s provider reaches out to the ultrasound tech and nurse to see if they know of any office jobs there. She is put in touch with the administrative office. They all work together to develop an unpaid internship for Anna working across a few different administrative offices across the hospital. Remember to use whatever contacts you already have and keep in mind all the different ways relationships with employers can build over time. Many workplaces, like a hospital, have many different types of job opportunities for students.

**Slide 11:**

You will want to develop a script to use when you approach prospective businesses, also known as an elevator pitch. An elevator pitch is an overview of the program that is short, to the point, and compelling. It is essential to share with the employer the key strengths of the students and to provide some reference or marketing materials that you can leave at the end of the meeting.

**Slide 12:**

Vanessa Johnson is the program director housed at Tennessee Tech. Let’s take a quick look at her elevator pitch to businesses.

[Vanessa] “I have an elevator pitch. I usually take students with me so that our students can provide that information to them as well. And you know employers, you have to find the right time to go and talk to the employers. If they’re in the middle of the lunch rush or super busy, it’s really hard to get that, but if you could find that one-on-one time and set that up with them. I typically start with people in the community that I know and then we branch out to people who we don’t know, but once we start branching out to those other community based businesses, I can give accounts from certain businesses that said you know, that was a great program to work with and I can give them references and we can talk about what our students are doing over there and what it’s providing for their business environment, what kind of interactions they have with other employees. And usually, those references and those experiences are really good and they like to hear that, they’re a little more open to hearing more information about it, our students are able to provide information about what they want to do in their career and why this is gonna be so helpful for them to try it out.”

Consider some things Vanessa does well. Her speech is short, to the point, and includes students. As business relationships are developed, it’s important that students are a part of selling themselves to employers.

**Slide 13:**

Here are some quick and impactful facts to share. Some studies suggest that:

* Employees with disabilities have lower turnover and absentee rates than employees without disabilities
* Employees with disabilities have equal or better safety records, job performance ratings, and job assignment flexibility.

These points specifically address concerns employers often have around liability and the effect of hiring youth with disabilities on the operations of the workplace itself. Since your time with employers might be limited, create business friendly materials, such as a one-page fact sheet and point them to other resources if they want to explore further.

We have included an example fact sheet in our supplemental materials, along with links to other resources where you will find additional information on the benefits of including people with disabilities in the workplace.

**Slide 14:**

Although it is helpful for you to tell businesses the benefits of hiring youth with disabilities, it is equally important for employers to hear the experiences of other employers. Randy Lewis of Walgreens created the REDI program focused on providing training to individuals with disabilities. If you’re able to bring a computer with you, try to show this video or other success story videos we have included in the supplemental videos to prospective employers.

[Randy] “My name is Randy Lewis. I’m the former senior vice president of supply chain logistics for Walgreens. I led that division for 16 years. We knew that we wanted to hire people with disabilities so we started working with school systems and that was not scalable but it was moderately successful. Then we tried some enclaves where people bring in employees and they manage them. That was okay but then we had an opportunity to build a new center and we thought about going big and hiring our own employees. We had an objective of hiring one out of three which was something we had never seen done and we looked around for a lot of examples and there was nobody we could even find in the world that had done a mission-critical site with that intent, but we aimed high and it was successful. And we learned from that that it was not about the automation or the technology, it was more about will.”

How were you successful?

[Randy] “We learn from mistakes and we move forward. That’s what got us through it. We said, if this doesn't work, we'll adapt but at least we'll try it because we know we'll have an impact on the communities, we know that we hope that we'll get a great workforce and we know it'll be loyal and it'll be worth it. The one out of ten new hires is the objective in stores and we hire thousands of people every year in our stores so that can have a huge impact on communities, on lives and hopefully, attitudes. It's not about so much knowing everything, it's the willingness to try. What we hoped to be true turned out to be better than we ever imagined.”

Why should businesses hire people with disabilities?

[Randy] “Here's what we learned. When we started, we didn't know what we didn't know. We spent thousands of dollars to get a hiring system to get us the best workforces, all businesses do. And we know it's not perfect because a lot of people we hire don't work out. What we found out, there's a lot of people who can't get through the screen that we have that make fantastic employees. That's what this is about and not to be fooled that all the things that we put in place give us the best work force. They give us the best work force that gets through

all the screens, not that can do the job.

Why would employers be reluctant to hire people with disabilities?

[Randy] “Well, I think lots of employers are reluctant to hire people with disabilities for a variety of reasons and those tend to stem from not knowing about that workforce and having serious doubts, can they really perform? Everybody asks about performance. We studied about 400,000 hours, 35 jobs across four centers, did it all with statistics, had statisticians coming in, published the data, performance is the same. Now surprisingly, safety is better

in a population of people with disabilities, retention is better, less absenteeism.

So its performance is the same but oh by the way, we get a dedicated workforce

that more than working.”

What incentives do employers have to hire people with disabilities?

[Randy] “Certainly in every state we worked in there are different incentives but there are incentives. Some of those around training, some of those about hiring people from disadvantaged groups, on and on and there's a lot a lot of help out there. That's one of the things that we look for, not so much for to make the decision but for the support once we made the decision. We open up our stores with partners to train people in all the jobs in the store. And at the completion of that training, we select from those folks who have demonstrated that they could show up, they can do all the jobs. Those go to the top of the list for our next group of employees. We do not know how to hire and find and retain people with disabilities but there are partners out there that do that will help us. They're the ones that are doing just waiting for our call and waiting for that opportunity.”

**Slide 15:**

In your elevator pitch, explain how creating an inclusive workplace culture benefits all employees and contributes to overall success. An inclusive workplace involves full integration of diverse people into a workplace or industry, including people with disabilities. Companies who prioritize building an inclusive culture will improve morale of everyone in the workplace and are seen as socially responsible. They will also improve their financial performance. Here are a couple key points on how customers feel about businesses and companies that are inclusive:

* + 87% of customers prefer to do business with companies that employ people with disabilities
  + And 92% of customers are more likely to repeat business to companies known to hire people with disabilities.

Social responsibility can provide a compelling reason for employers to partner with schools to provide early experiences for youth with disabilities. Employers will contribute to a skilled and motivated pool of future employees by providing these experiences. They can help ensure that education is more relevant and valuable for students. Including this information in your pitch and materials to employers can make a great case for why hiring people with disabilities makes good business sense. Consider offering different types of employer recognition to help enhance these benefits and provide free publicity. Let’s return to the example of Anna, the student who was able to find an internship at a local hospital. After her experience, Anna wrote an article for the school newspaper about what she learned. Anna’s teacher and provider shared the item with the hospital who disseminated it on their social media. The school district also shared it in their newsletter to parents and on social media.

**Slide 16:**A relationship with an employer does not end once the hire is made or the job shadowing day is scheduled. Partnering with employers is an ongoing process. The more successful the work experience, the more likely they will be able to hire other students in subsequent years. Setting clear expectations from the beginning is crucial. If a business decides to hire a student with a disability or provide them early experience other than paid employment, they might still be unsure of what supports students might need and how they can make their workplace inclusive. Here are some things to discuss with employers before any experience where a student is on site at a business, whether for a job shadow, internship, or paid employment:

* Length of experience
* Lunch/meal needs
* Who will students check in with each day?
* What are the expectations for dress in the workplace?

Establish consistent communication channels. Some employers might prefer phone conversations. Others may communicate mainly via email. Make sure these parameters are set early, and regular check-ins are scheduled with whichever communication method is preferred.

**Slide 17:**

Finding out a student’s preferences, interests, support needs, and strengths related to work can help you find placements that will lead to successful job performance and retention. As in other areas of transition, ongoing assessment will help you identify exactly which types and levels of supports will be needed at a particular point in time. For example, make sure you know about your students’ job interests, their strength and endurance abilities, their preferred hours of employment, areas for growth for behavior, the use of adaptations, and their available support systems. On-the-job supports will look different for each individual. Some students with disabilities may benefit from having visual supports, such as a task analysis breaking down the steps of a task, a picture schedule to remain on-task, or a visual timer to increase work endurance. Other students may benefit from role-playing potential social interactions with their teacher or provider before they start. In other cases, technology can help students master new skills. The level and type of support should always be individualized student by student. Talk with the teacher if you haven’t had much interaction individually with the student who will be at the work site. Teachers and parents can provide a clearer picture of what the student will need and what environment will work best for them.

**Slide 18:**Talk to the teacher if you haven’t had much interaction individually with the student who will be at a work site. Teachers and parents can help provide a clearer picture of what the student will need and what setting will work best for them. Additionally, teachers can help students tie in their experiences at work to what they are learning in school, a key indicator of high-quality work-based learning. Work-based learning will be more powerful when tied to instruction.

Think back to Anna, the student who has found an internship at a nearby hospital. Anna works very independently, but she is very shy and does not like to talk to people she doesn’t know. At the hospital, she will be working with a wide variety of people. Anna’s teacher and provider work together to develop some role-playing activities to help prepare her to ask for help. They also meet with her supervisors at the hospital and share this information with them. They develop a plan to build in natural supports in the workplace, including co-workers who agree to be a point of contact for Anna if she has questions.

**Slide 19:**

Here’s Valerie with another example of Pre-ETS in practice. Kevin, a student receiving Pre-ETS, is participating in an apprenticeship as an HVAC technician his senior year. However, after Kevin’s first week, he told his father and provider he didn’t want to go back and work as an HVAC technician. They realized he was facing challenges remembering all the steps in diagnosing a failed system and removing an old unit. At school, he usually uses a picture schedule to track his progress. Kevin’s provider meets with his supervisor, and they work together to develop a picture-based task analysis for the tasks he’s working on.

Kevin’s example highlights a few reminders when planning and implementing early work experiences. Even though Kevin had a clear idea of what job he wanted and had even shadowed an HVAC technician, it was important for him to actually be in the work environment performing the tasks to get a good sense of what the job would really be like. You cannot assume that when placing students in work experiences, everything will go well all the time. Remember: work experiences are also learning experiences for students. Dig deeper when a student says they don’t like a job. Kevin’s provider spent time figuring out what was not working about the apprenticeship.

**Slide 20:**

Let’s talk through some specific concerns that come up frequently with employers and suggestions for how to address those concerns. Some of these concerns will be expressed when you’re first connecting with employers and trying to develop a work opportunity. Others might arise after a student is already on the job site.

* *Liability.* This is one of the biggest concerns employers cite for not hiring individuals with disabilities. They have concerns about safety and the cost of accommodations. For any job experience on site (whether a time-limited experience such as job shadowing or a lengthier opportunity like a paid summer job), discuss any safety and liability policies. Bring out the business case facts we discussed earlier. Remind them that people with disabilities have equal or better safety ratings than people without disabilities. They don’t have workplace accidents any more than other employees. Furthermore, most reasonable accommodations cost very little or nothing. Also make sure to confirm what liability policies your school has that cover students.
* *Ability of students.* Employers might hold stereotypical views of individuals with disabilities, and express concerns about their ability to do the job. The best counterpoint to this may be continued exposure to students, so they grow more aware of the skills and strengths students bring to the job. It’s also important that students are only placed into a work experience with careful planning and consideration. All of us are more successful in some environments as opposed to others. It’s no different for students with disabilities. Make sure students are in jobs where you and the student both feel confident they will thrive. Success stories can serve as powerful testimonials of the abilities of youth with disabilities. Check out some example success stories in our supplementary videos. Let’s listen to a provider discussing how they have addressed employer concerns.

[Cathy Houser-Co-Director/Employment Specialist JobWise] “When I talk to an employer sometimes accommodations come up and they're always concerned that it's going to cost a lot of money or that the employee will be a liability issue. And we explain to them that there is no difference in the liability for a person with a disability and a person without a disability. When asked about accommodations, most accommodations are not very expensive. And I worked with a young man who was a college graduate, was had quadriplegia but he was seeking a professional position and that was the concern about his wheelchair and his service dog but when I went in and talked to the employer, we discussed it. I said the dog will go with him because it is a trained service dog. You will probably need to raise his desk, some kind of blocks, Brico blocks would, just so it's above his wheelchair so that he can go under it. He will bring his own keyboard because of the sound, he wants to hear that and as paperless as you can make it. He's been very successful in this professional position and a lot of times, it's just putting, making a handle a little larger so it's easier to grip, written or picture instructions. Really and truly most of the time, accommodations are very inexpensive and because we encourage students to learn what accommodations they might need in self-advocacy that employers should be prepared to work with them.”

**Slide 21:**

* *Time investment.* Be realistic with employers. When providing a work experience for a student with a disability, there might be some additional time investment on the front end, particularly around training. However, this is the case for any internship or short-term work opportunity. Help them understand how the benefits accrued will outweigh the time put in at the beginning.
* *Impact on workplace culture/operations*. Some employers might express concern about how comfortable other employees will be around students with disabilities. One way to ease concerns is to offer to speak at a staff meeting or training prior to an experience. If speaking to staff is not an option, provide guidance to employers on what they can say to staff.

**Slide 22:**

Let’s listen to an employer discussing her perspective on including people with disabilities in the work environment.

[Elizabeth Johnson-Volunteer Coordinator, John P. Holt Library Brentwood] “Daniel is a student from an inclusive higher ed program and he is the first intern that I have worked with coming from an inclusive higher ed program and he's wonderful. He is here for two, four hour shifts per week. He helps us shelving media items in the adult media room and in the children's library. He is meticulous, he makes sure that everything is exactly where it needs to be. He asks questions if he doesn't know where something goes. He's friendly, the library staff is very fond of him and we're lucky to have him as part of our team of volunteers. We have about 150 active volunteers who help us with shelving materials, pulling items that have been placed on hold, sorting through donations, and he has been a huge asset. We're very very happy to have him here.

What supports do you provide Daniel at the library?

[Elizabeth] “One of the supports that I provided to Daniel was introducing him to as many staff members as possible at the beginning of the internship. I wanted him to feel comfortable with approaching staff members to ask questions. I wanted him to feel comfortable greeting staff members and vice versa. I do that for every volunteer who's here just so that they're familiar with the employees

and I think it helps build a sense of camaraderie. Staff members and volunteers working together to improve the patron experience, to create a culture here at the library where everyone's accepted and that there's a positive vibe.”

What are some challenges you have faced when providing this internship experience?

[Elizabeth] “One of the challenges that Daniel and I worked through

was moving on to a next task when he's completed the one that he was just working on. For example, when he is done shelving items

in the adult media room, he would have returned the cart and at the beginning of the internship would wait for directions from staff, regarding what to do next, and I coached him and encouraged him

to feel like he can grab the next cart and move on to the next task.

It was really important that he have confidence in himself, confidence in his ability to transition from one thing to the next and I've noticed a huge improvement in that area.”

How did the job coach support you?

[Elizabeth] “The job coach was incredibly important at the beginning of the internship. Due to the nature of my job, I am not able to supervise a volunteer past the initial training. So, when we bring on a volunteer, I spend typically about one to two hours training the volunteer but past that they are expected to work independently. So, the job coach was able to physically be there, to answer questions, to assist with

whatever may have come up and I felt really really reassured that the job coach was here at the beginning. I think that was a crucial part of the internship experience.”

How does Daniel impact the work environment at the library?

[Elizabeth] “Daniel impacts the work environment here because he reminds us that every person is important, every person has value, every person wants to use his or her skills to help the world and to feel like they are important to their community. And I think, I think that many of our staff members have really enjoyed being around Daniel.

I think that as a society our acceptance of people with disabilities,

regardless of whether it's a physical disability, an intellectual disability, a mental disability, I think that there's been a shift and it's a really really really good thing. We all wanna feel like we're using our skills in an important and effective way to help this be a better world.”

In addition to sharing these videos, ask an employer who’s already hired a young person with a disability or provided one of these work experiences to share their perspective in person. With each successful experience, ask their permission to share their information with potential new business partners.

**Slide 23:**

Thanks for watching our lesson on partnering with employers! Every student should graduate from high school having had multiple opportunities to experience the world of work. It is one thing to learn about different careers in the abstract; it is quite another to gain firsthand experience related to that career. Too often, students are prevented from participating in these opportunities because they lack connections to employers. A key priority when delivering Pre-ETS should include partnering with businesses, and helping them understand the benefits of an inclusive environment for all employees.

**Lesson 2: Connecting with Families**

**WELCOME:**

Welcome to our lesson on connecting with families! Engaging families in a meaningful way will improve the delivery of Pre-Employment Transition Services (referred to as Pre-ETS). Families are a critical partner throughout the transition planning process. They bring a unique perspective on their son or daughter’s abilities, preferences, strengths, and challenges. Families need to not only understand what Pre-ETS are, but also why they are so beneficial for their student’s future.

Family expectations and involvement serve as predictors of post-school employment. For example, youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities whose parents expected them to hold a job after graduation were five times more likely to have paid employment in their community shortly after graduation than youth whose parents did not hold similar expectations. High expectations and family involvement set the stage for successful competitive employment in adulthood.

**Slide 2:**

In this lesson, you’ll learn:

* Effective ways to communicate with families what Pre-ETS are and how their transition-age student can benefit.
* Strategies for involving families in the delivery of Pre-ETS.
* Practical ideas on how to build and maintain a positive relationship with families
* Some common challenges faced when collaborating with families and strategies to address those challenges.
* Lastly, we’ll include real life examples to illustrate how providers of Pre-ETS and family members overcame challenges.

**Slide 3:**

Let’s look at some key ways families can support Pre-ETS.

Families can:

* Share relevant information about their child’s work and volunteer history to inform services or any types of job development.
* Provide input on the strengths and needs of their son or daughter. They see their child in a different setting than either providers or teachers and may see strengths others have overlooked.
* Provide insights into their son or daughter’s likes, dislikes, and interests.
* Share conversations they have had with their child related to what they want to do after high school.
* Identify potential contacts who can provide job opportunities
* Encourage participation in local volunteer and other community activities
* Assign everyday household chores

If there are any goals the student is working on at school, try to identify ways the student can work on those skills at home as well. Parents can help their child write a resume or develop a one-page profile, but they can also build on important skills related to problem-solving or decision-making that are just as crucial to workplace success. The more committed parents are to Pre-ETS, the more their son or daughter will be able to benefit from services.

**Slide 4:**

No matter your position, you can help families understand the value and importance of letting a student participate in Pre-ETS. Consider sending home easy-to-understand, family-friendly materials explaining the benefits of Pre-ETS. Here are some helpful tips on making materials accessible for families:

* Ensure the reading level is accessible for a wide variety of readers. The generally accepted reading level is at a 5th grade level. Many online tools can provide info on the readability of a document. We’ll include these links in our resources for this lesson.
* Make sure there are no terms included on any materials parents might not be familiar with. As professionals, we get used to our own language, and forget that others might not understand what we’re referring to when we throw out lots of acronyms and terms! Here’s a helpful tip: ask someone unfamiliar with education or Pre-ETS to read materials and see if they can understand them.
* Ensure the materials you share with families are available in their native language.
* Think about the common questions you hear from families about Pre-ETS, and create a Q&A tip sheet addressing those concerns.
* Share with families how you are going to keep them informed during the process, and how they can be involved. For example, are you going to send activities or worksheets home that will supplement what students are learning during school? Will you build in any opportunities to meet with families in person?

We’ve created a couple examples and templates of family-friendly flyers. You’ll find them in the supplemental materials for this course. Let’s hear from Valerie for more information on providing family members with resources.

**Slide 5:**

Parents need to be informed about why employment is essential for their son or daughter, and what supports can help them after school. Consider creating accessible tip sheets for families around supports after high school they might have questions about, such as the Employment and Community First (ECFCHOICES) waiver program or the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. We’ve included examples of these in our supplemental materials. Providing family members with resources such as these can break down common myths families might have about their son or daughter pursuing employment after high school.

**Slide 6:**  
Consider Carla, a 16-year-old junior with autism. Her Pre-ETS specialist sent permission forms home with all the students who were eligible for services. Carla is very motivated to attend community college after graduation and would like to work on that goal with her provider. The flyer provided a definition for each of the Pre-ETS, but no other information was included and the flyer was in English. Carla’s mom can read some English, but her primary language is Spanish.

From what she understood after reading the flyer, she thought Pre-ETS was an after-school program. She didn’t fully understand what services were offered. Because her work schedule requires that she pick Carla up right after school, she didn’t think an after-school program would be feasible.

The school district and pre-employment transition specialist arranged for the flyer to be translated in Spanish. They sent it home with Carla and arranged a meeting to talk to Carla’s mom with an interpreter present. Once they explained Pre-ETS more fully and the benefits Carla could gain, her mom eagerly signed the permission form.

**Slide 7:**

Keep in mind that each family has its own culture. Students come from diverse backgrounds. Their family members might speak a language other than English, as did Carla’s mom. Some students might live with grandparents or other relatives instead of their biological parents. Others might come from the foster care system or be raised by a single parent. Families play a large role in shaping students’ beliefs about work. Where does a student’s other family members work? What did their career journey look like? Just as supports and services need to be individualized for each student, each family is unique.

When working with individuals from diverse backgrounds, don’t assume that simply translating a flyer into another language is the only step you need to take. It is an important step, but not the stopping point. Some families might come from places where special education looks drastically different than in the United States, or where such services don’t even exist. Beyond simply translating words, concepts may need to be explained and introduced.

**Slide 8:**  
Language and culture are not the only barriers you might face when communicating with parents. Sometimes you have limited time to convey the value of these services. “Elevator pitches” are succinct descriptions you can give to someone that take about the same time as an elevator ride. We encourage students to work on their “elevator pitches” to gain employment opportunities. But what about your elevator pitch for Pre-ETS?

The importance of these services for students with disabilities might not be as apparent to others as it is to you. Consider what your elevator pitch would be to a parent when promoting Pre-ETS. Let’s say you’re at a parent night or school fair and have just a couple of minutes to discuss the benefits of Pre-ETS. What are the most important points about Pre-ETS they need to know? How can these points be conveyed in a clear, concise way? Keep in mind the tips we discussed for creating accessible materials for families. The elevator pitch and any family-friendly materials should convey the same basic concepts about Pre-ETS.

**Slide 9:**

One way you can build relationships with families is by holding an orientation or information session about the Pre-ETS their child will receive. These face-to-face interactions are often the best way to get families invested and address any concerns they might have. Let’s listen to a Pre-ETS provider explain how she designed a family night:

We’ll talk about other opportunities to connect with families in person later in the lesson.

**Slide 10:**

Try to involve families as much as possible *throughout* the entire process. Once families are invested in Pre-ETS, keep them engaged and informed while services are being delivered. Maintain clear and consistent communication. Make sure you know the best way to get in contact with the families of your students. If you need to check in with a parent, would phone or email be better for that particular parent?

Ask these questions early on to establish the type of communication that will work best with each family. Since educators and other school staff often have more contact with students, collaboration with schools will be key to building strong relationships with families.

For example, ask the teachers with whom you work how they’ve been successful in communicating with parents and how they have involved families in general. Ask them to send home any materials you are working on with the students. Family involvement should be part of your initial conversations and planning around the delivery of Pre-ETS with school staff.

**Slide 11:**

Let’s hear from a family member discussing the importance of collaboration.

**Slide 12:**

One of the challenges of engaging families is finding opportunities to meet with them in person. We’ve already mentioned orientation sessions as a way to sell parents on the benefits of Pre-ETS. Some school districts host transition fairs or family nights. Find out if any of the schools you’re working with have these events and ask how you can participate. Perhaps you can be a featured speaker or staff a booth where you can share materials. If you have an event at the school for students, such as a job fair, make sure to let the parents know and invite them to attend.

You might think parents don’t attend out of a lack of interest, but it may be because they are not able to attend. It’s easy to forget that transportation is often a barrier for families as much as for students. They might have their own health or medical issues. Although we can’t solve all of these challenges, being aware is the first step as these familial factors directly impact the success of our students.

An IEP meeting is another great way to connect to families in person. Although it might be more challenging logistically, it’s important to attend these meetings. At an IEP meeting, you can talk to parents about progress their child is making or plan for early work experiences.

**Slide 13:**

Much like engaging employers, another innovative way to engage families is through a community conversation. Community conversations are two-hour events bringing together a variety of community members, including family members, educators, employers, individuals with disabilities, and others. Community members who attend are asked to share their perspectives on the resources, supports, programs and opportunities in their community that could be drawn upon to expand employment or college opportunities for young people with disabilities.

Hosting a community conversation is an effective way to get family members in a community to share their concerns and their student’s support needs. Even if family members of the particular students with whom you work are not present at a community conversation, learning from other family members about common concerns and challenges faced will be valuable. Schools can be a great collaborator in hosting one of these events. See our supplemental materials for a practical guide on how to host a community conversation.

**Slide 14:**

Some families may have limited involvement, even after trying some of the strategies we’ve suggested so far. Not every family will be an active participant for a variety of reasons. Some family members might not feel they have the time or resources to be an engaged participant in the process. Some families are intimidated by the process or don’t feel they have anything to offer during meetings. Or your students might come from foster care or a situation where they don’t have a stable guardian.

Every student and every family is unique; there is no formula guiding all situations. If families don’t hold high expectations for their son or daughter, you can play a role in reaching out, developing relationships, and helping them catch a different vision for their daughter or son. Work on building trust with family members who might have had negative interactions with the school system.

For families who are challenging to reach, connect with the student’s teacher. Problem-solve with the teacher what the best mode of communication might be. Be flexible with the location and time of any meetings. Try as many different types of communication as possible, including letters, email, and phone.

**Slide 15:**

Let me close with a few more ideas. When meeting in person with families, such as at an orientation, transition fair, community conversation, or family night, invite individuals with disabilities who have a job to speak about how employment has positively impacted their life. Invite their family members to speak as well.

Success stories are the best way to showcase how Pre-ETS can benefit students with disabilities. The more family members hear about what is possible from others like them, the more they will understand the importance of being engaged.

Consider also creating opportunities for parents to connect to and network with each other. Although it’s important for families to hear from providers, educators, and speakers who are experts on a certain issue, they are the experts in their son or daughter’s life.

We can learn from families as much as they can learn from us. It might be better to see any orientation, family nights, or community conversations as opportunities to hear from families in addition to providing them with information. Are there support groups in the area families can join?

Families need to learn from one another. Again, not all these things are easy to implement, but are important to consider or discuss in collaboration with the school.

**Slide 16:**Thanks for listening to our lesson on Connecting with Families. Too often, families are viewed as passive partners in the transition process. But they are often the most influential part of a student’s life and an integral part of their future. Families can help support workplace readiness skills and be part of conversations around postsecondary education opportunities. They can use their network to help young people find jobs.

Engaging families early on and throughout a student’s high school career is an important factor to consider when providing Pre-ETS. Empowering families to be advocates for their son or daughter can help open doors to post-school success for young people with disabilities.