



Career Supports for Students with Disabilities:

A Partnership Guide for VRS and Education

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What is VRS?

[Vocational Rehabilitation Services \(VRS\)](#) provides employment services to youth and adults with disabilities. VRS has staff assigned to every high school and 18-21 transition program in Minnesota. [State Services for the Blind \(SSB\)](#) is the VR agency that serves youth and adults who are blind, low-vision or DeafBlind.

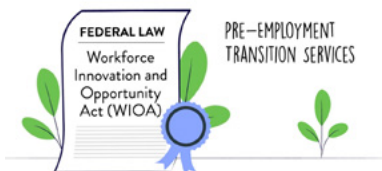


State Level Memorandum of Understanding

The Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED), through a state-level Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), are committed to jointly serving students with disabilities. The MOU recognizes that the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) require education agencies and vocational rehabilitation agencies to plan and coordinate career supports and services for students with disabilities.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

WIOA requires VRS and high schools to collaborate to make [Pre-Employment Transition Services \(Pre-ETS\)](#) available to all students with disabilities who are between ages 14 and 21. Ideally the career needs of all students with disabilities will be met within these five services:



- ✓ 1. Job Exploration Counseling
- ✓ 2. Work-Based Learning Experiences
- ✓ 3. Postsecondary Education Counseling
- ✓ 4. Workplace Readiness Training
- ✓ 5. Instruction in Self-Advocacy



To qualify for Pre-ETS, students must be enrolled in an education program and have one of the following:

- ✓ An individualized education program (IEP)
- ✓ A 504 plan
- ✓ A record or note from a mental health or medical provider

Role of Education

Educators are the primary provider of Pre-ETS. They teach skills and provide tools that students will need to succeed in life after high school:

- Schools provide special education, transition and related services as [documented in the IEP](#).
- Minnesota statute requires all students to have a [Personal Learning Plan \(PLP\)](#) no later than grade 9.



The elements of PLPs align with Pre-ETS:

PLP Element	Pre-Employment Transition Service
Career exploration	Job exploration counseling
Experiential learning	Work-based learning
College access and all forms of postsecondary training	Postsecondary education counseling
Career and employment related skills	Workplace readiness training Instruction in self-advocacy

Role of VRS

VRS provides career services to students who:

- Qualify for Pre-ETS and have a need in one of the five Pre-ETS categories; or
- Qualify for VR and have a need for Pre-ETS and other, more comprehensive VR services.

All students with disabilities ages 14-21 qualify for VRS Pre-Employment Transition Services. To receive services, students must enroll with a VRS Pre-ETS representative or counselor (who are assigned to every high school in the state). VRS will then assess what career services can be accessed through schools, identify gaps, and provide what is still needed.

- **Pre-ETS representatives** provide or arrange for services to students who only need one or more of the five Pre-ETS services.
- **Counselors** provide Pre-ETS and other more comprehensive services to students who qualify for the full VR program.
- There is no wrong door! Schools can make referrals to Pre-ETS representatives or counselors, and they will determine what level of services are appropriate.

Role of Community Providers

VRS contracts with community rehabilitation programs (CRPs), CareerForce partners, and Centers for Independent Living (CILs) to assist in providing Pre-ETS services. As appropriate, VRS staff will discuss the [provider options](#) with students, families, and school staff to help them make an informed choice about who to work with. Providers can meet with students during the school day or after hours depending on what works best for students and schools.

Role of County/Tribal Agencies

Some students also access county/tribal agency services, including [Medicaid waivers](#). If a student is receiving these services, which assist with a range of support needs from daily living needs to employment supports, it is important for county/waiver case managers to be involved in student planning as well. Contact the [Disability Hub MN](#) with questions about county or tribal services.



Step One for the Education and VRS Partnership: Fall Planning Meetings

VRS and school staff should meet in the fall to ensure a strong partnership and plan for coordination of services. All school staff would benefit from knowing about VRS, including:

- Administrators (Principals, Special Education Leadership, Career and Technical Education Directors)
- Special education teachers/case managers
- General educators
- Alternative Learning Center (ALC) staff
- School counselors
- Work-based learning and other Career and Technical Education (CTE) staff
- 504 coordinators
- Social workers
- School mental health coordinators
- Nurses
- Family liaisons
- Paraprofessionals and other support staff

Agenda for Fall Planning Meetings:

- ✓ Meet the VRS Pre-ETS representative and counselor assigned to the school
- ✓ Review VR and Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)
- ✓ Discuss the availability of Pre-ETS for students with disabilities, and gaps that VRS can fill
- ✓ Identify a primary point(s)-of-contact at the school for coordinating services
- ✓ Learn the application process for VR and Pre-ETS
- ✓ Solidify a process for making referrals to VRS
- ✓ Establish a process for VRS to receive required disability verification or documentation
- ✓ Create a schedule of dates that VRS will be available to meet with students
- ✓ Ensure there is space and internet connectivity for VRS staff when they meet with students
- ✓ COVID consideration: How will VRS connect with students virtually?
- ✓ Discuss how VRS staff can be invited to IEP meetings, as appropriate
- ✓ Review roles of community providers and county/tribal agencies and how best to collaborate with them
- ✓ Identify a process for ongoing communication and partnership



REFERRAL PROCESS

CREATE A SCHEDULE OF DATES FOR
VRS TO BE AVAILABLE TO STUDENTS

PLAN FOR CONTINUED
COMMUNICATION AND PARTNERSHIP



Partnership Example:

Martin County West Schools and VRS

Partnerships come in many forms and there's no single "right way" to do the collaborative work that is so crucial to success. Here's just one example of a partnership in southern Minnesota.

One day every month Ryan Lais, a VRS Pre-ETS Representative, and Paige Broich, a VRS Counselor, arrive at Martin County West Senior High to talk with students. The school's principal, David Traetow, often greets them at the door.

"They are so welcoming," Ryan says.

"They make us feel like family. A lot of

times, as VRS staff, we're pushing to get schools to collaborate, but I find I'm being pushed by them. They want us there, which is awesome to experience."

Mr. Traetow adds: "I can't imagine schools not welcoming VRS. If it were practical, we'd like them here every day. It's such a great opportunity."

This successful partnership is built on the following key components:

- Frequent communication and planning together
- Ensuring all students who need VRS are referred and providing space for VRS to meet students (or during the pandemic, assisting VRS with connecting to students virtually)
- Inviting VRS to IEP meetings
- Utilizing VRS' business partnerships to assist students in gaining community-based work experiences

Melissa Cutler, special education teacher, says the partnership with VRS works for students because everyone is "always working together collaboratively, figuring out innovative ideas for how to make things better".



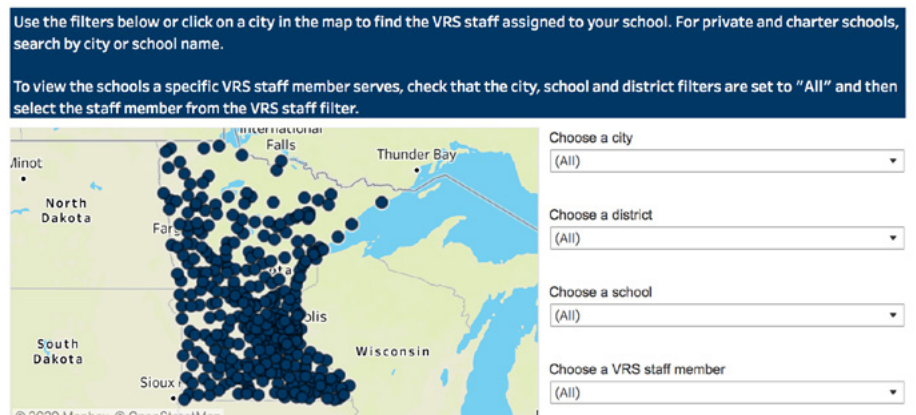
Meet the MCW team. Top row: Kia Ringnell, MCW special education teacher; Ryan Lais, VRS Pre-ETS representative; Melissa Cutler, special education teacher. Middle row: Michele Baker, MCW principal; David Traetow, MCW principal (recently retired); Paige Broich, VRS counselor. Bottom row: Robb Larson, special education teacher.

For More Guidance

- Visit the [VRS website](#) at [mn.gov/deed/vrs-student](#) and click “Information for Schools”
 - Find the [names and contact information](#) for the Pre-ETS Representative and VRS Counselor assigned to your school.
 - Watch a [4-minute video](#) on the benefits of school and VRS collaboration.
 - Review the [Minnesota Pre-Employment Transition Services Toolkit](#) which has definitions, activities, curriculum, and other resources for implementing Pre-ETS.
- Find more information and resources in [Pre-Employment Transition Services: A Guide for Collaboration Among State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies and Education Partners](#). This guide was created by Workforce Innovation National Technical Assistance Center (WINTAC), the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) and TransGen.

Use the filters below or click on a city in the map to find the VRS staff assigned to your school. For private and charter schools, search by city or school name.

To view the schools a specific VRS staff member serves, check that the city, school and district filters are set to “All” and then select the staff member from the VRS staff filter.



Student Outreach Materials

- [VRS Student Career Services Video](#)
- [VRS Student Career Services Flyer](#)

Contact a Statewide Transition Specialist:

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The pre-employment transition services provided under the VR program are funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Education with a state match. For federal fiscal year 2020, the total amount of federal grant funds used for these services is \$6,374,138 (78.7 percent). The state appropriation indirectly supports the pre-employment transition spending and amounts to \$1,725,148 (21.3 percent).