# VRS Community Partners Committee Key Messages

**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, August 17, 2022, 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

CPC Co-leaders Kim Babine and Chris McVey recognized and thanked CPC members who completed their terms of service with the August meeting: Jim Durdle, Melissa Grover, Calli Kadlec, Randa Lundmark, and Diana Ristamaki. The application deadline for the 2022-2023 appointments is August 19, 2022.

The August CPC meeting was focused on back-to-school forecasts, resources, and preparations.

## Getting Ready for Back to School: VRS Teams, Community Partners and Schools

* Chris McVey opened the session noting that Minnesota schools are actively preparing for the return of students to classrooms this fall within the extended COVID environment. An incredible 73% of new applications for VR services are for youth!
* Every state’s VR Program must set aside at least 15% of its budget for eligible and potentially eligible transition youth services per the 2014 federal enactment of WIOA (the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act). To help meet this requirement, VRS is actively engaging and coordinating transition counselors and rehabilitation reps with community partners, schools, and employers. VRS has posted four new Pre-ETS Rehabilitation Specialist positions to support teams of staff guiding youth to explore and prepare for employment across the state. The Pre-ETS Specialist positions will be in the following regions: Metro (2), North (1) South (1).
* DEED Commissioner Steve Grove and VRS staff are going out into local communities to listen and improve support for students while continuing to support adults to help all Minnesotans with disabilities explore, prepare for, and achieve their goals for competitive integrated employment.
* A panel of guest VRS presenters provided information on back-to-school tips, tools and resources:
  + VRS Data Unit Supervisor Carrie Marsh reviewed progress to program year 2021’s OKRs (Objectives and Key Results) as it relates to the goal of “Grow early job opportunities for high school students with disabilities and ensure that these services are provided equally across historically underrepresented communities.” VRS is exceeding goals for the ‘all students’ metric and is slightly under goal for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color) students.
  + VRS Counselor LeAnn Kleaver, a transition youth counselor serving the Burnsville/Eagan/Savage school district area provided a snapshot of the BEST program which helps students explore post school employment. The program connects students and employers with paid work experiences before they finish school for greater exposure to different potential career paths. BEST also includes activities like mock interviews, managing adult interactions, job shadows, and business tours.
  + VRS collaborated with community partner Great Work and employer Schmitty & Sons, a local bus company with hundreds of buses to provide a company tour for 11 students for a firsthand look at the wide range of jobs including mechanics, detailing, cleaning, etc. The tour led to summer employment interviews resulting in four students offered fulltime summer work experiences paid at $16/hour and 40 hours per week.
  + VRS Transition Youth Coordinator Alyssa Klein, VRS Community Partners Specialist Sara Sundeen, and VRS Business Specialist Michelle Chmielewski, provided an overview of the Metro Pre-ETS Community of Practice (Metro CoP).
    - The mission of the Metro Area Pre-ETS Community of Practice is to create a seamless system of Pre-ETS services and supports between community partners and Vocational Rehabilitation Services.
    - The Metro CoP began as a pilot in 2021 and currently meets monthly for 90 minutes. Standing agenda items include updates, ‘bite-sized’ trainings, and small group discussions. 43 community partners have participated in the Metro COP to date.
    - Participant benefits include gaining a better understanding of Pre-ETS, sharing ideas and resources, strengthening relationships and communication, improving processes, and strategic collaboration and planning.
    - CPC members discussed the potential of launching additional Pre-ETS Community of Practices for other geographic areas of the state to advance the learning curve and enhance program consistency.
* Back to school preparation priorities for community partners include:
  + **Training:** Several partners are honing their training to meet unique area needs and types of referrals. There is a high priority on training for new staff and partners indicated that VRS website resources are useful supplements to their own training materials.
  + **Outreach and relationship building:** As partners are starting to see and hear more interest in transition youth services, providers newer to Pre-ETS are focusing on doing the important groundwork and outreach activities to build relationships with their service reps and others.
  + **Staffing:** Finding and retaining talent at all levels continues to be an ongoing and tremendous effort. Several partners are already in the process of CY2023 budgeting and looking at staffing positions and configurations that include Pre-ETS. Several community partners have increased their wages 2-3 times over the past few years to attract and retain staff.
  + **Preparations with schools and employers:** Partners are making the most of summer work experience sites with employers to increase fall opportunities. Partners are also organizing and updating folders and setting up meetings with VR counselors to prepare for a great fall start.
* Community Partners identified the following ways VRS can support their back-to-school preparations:
  + Continue to promote, update, and enhance online and in person Pre-ETS training resources.
  + Assist with coordinating the schedules for the key team members across community partners, schools, and VRS. This is a big challenge given the number of teams, the different systems, and geographic variables that need to be addressed to create effective teams and teamwork.

## Next meeting

The next meeting of the VRS CPC is scheduled for Wednesday, September 21, 2022.

## For More Information

For more information on the CPC, please go to the [CPC page on VRS’s website](https://mn.gov/deed/job-seekers/disabilities/councils/cpc.jsp).