# VRS Youth in Transition 2022-2027 Strategic Plan

## Background

In the summer of 2021 DEED VRS started creating a strategic plan focused on defining, organizing and supporting Pre-ETS and Transition efforts. Consultants from Management Analysis and Development (MAD) worked with a 20-person team representing all levels and geographic areas of VRS Youth in Transition work to develop these elements:

* Situation assessment = shared understanding of the present reality and future possibilities
* Mission = why the organization exists
* Vision = desired future state
* Strategies = broad approaches to achieving the goal
* Action plans = detailed activities to carry out the strategies

The consultants gathered input from staff and stakeholders and met with the strategic planning team four times to identify key themes from the situation assessment summary, draft a mission for the Youth in Transition work in VRS, identified a 3 – 5-year vision for the future, and created four strategies to implement the vision.

A small team of lead staff for each strategy continued to work with strategic planning team members to develop detailed action plans for implementing the strategies.

## Situation assessment themes

At the beginning of its work, the strategic planning team reviewed information presented by the VRS data team and a summary of interviews, focus groups and other relevant background information presented by MAD. Referring to all of this, they discussed what stood out to them as they considered developing a strategic plan for VRS Youth in Transition work. Key discussion points included:

* Partnerships with MDE/schools, businesses and providers are critical to success
* Different levels of service exist around the state
* The environment of more jobs than employees to fill them presents opportunities for students
* Schools and providers are struggling to hire and retain staff
* Many students need transportation and other supports, and being able to work in a virtual environment is important
* Numbers of referrals to VRS have increased and caseloads are rising
* Interagency efforts, such as E1 MN, are helping connect more youth to services
* Continued VRS hiring, including the Pre-ETS specialists, will help to coordinate the work and create best practices for serving youth

## Mission

Empower youth with disabilities to explore, prepare for and achieve their goals for competitive integrated employment.

## Vision

VRS and school staff work together to engage students, families, guardians, and others important to the student’s success in inclusive, equitable, person-centered services that help students make informed choices about their career journey.

A broad array of community partners works alongside VRS in providing access to and appropriate choices among strong, community-based services.

VRS uses data to tell the story of employment services for youth with disabilities. Staff have access to critical information, reflecting the diverse range of students, in order to inform service delivery decisions.

VRS has “the right people in the right jobs,” and hires and develops staff whose own diverse experiences reflect the diversity of students they serve. Staff have a clear understanding of their roles and teamwork needed, and are given the tools, training and supports they need to be successful in those roles.

## Strategies

### Strategy A: Streamline, strengthen and share a statewide VRS-school coordination process that emphasizes diversity, equity, inclusion, access, and opportunity for all students with disabilities

#### Strategy – brief description

VRS and MDE have a statewide process outlined for how VRS and schools work together to:

* Provide outreach about VRS services to students (and parents/guardians) with IEPs, 504 plans and those who otherwise have documented disabilities. Includes outreach activities beyond the classroom and into community organizations.
* Provide consistent, robust and equitable transition and Pre-ETS services using the Youth in Transition Toolkit. Includes increasing the level and types of work-based learning experiences that allow students to move along career pathways.
* Track referrals and progress of students enrolled in VRS.
* Problem-solve when interagency partnership issues arise.

#### Actions

1. **Pre-ETS Partnership Process Mapping:** This will outline step-by-step processes and the roles and responsibilities in providing outreach and person-centered services to students between schools and VRS and will be embedded into the Youth in Transition Toolkit.
2. **Youth in Transition Toolkit (housed on Disability Hub MN):** Provides the guidance on how person-centered transition and Pre-ETS services should be provided by all professionals (school, VRS/SSB, county, and provider staff) to students with disabilities.
3. **Implement Workforce One (WF1) student tracking system:** This will allow all students *referred* *to* VRS to be entered into WF1 (i.e. prior to them applying for services) and for designated school staff to pull reports from WF1. These reports will be helpful to VRS and schools to see where students are at in the VRS process.
4. **VRS Youth Equity Workgroup (VYEW):** Working to identify and implement specific strategies to ensure that Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) young people with disabilities have equal access to and experience the intended impact of VRS services. Strategies may include: outreach, program information, staff training, collaboration with community based organizations serving BIPOC and historically marginalized/underserved groups and development of culturally/ethnically tailored service delivery models.
5. **Regional Pre-ETS Specialists:** These staff will provide more localized support to VRS and school staff in providing Pre-ETS services. They will help in implementing the other actions in this strategy.
6. **Youth Council:** DEED-VRS will work with E1MN state-level partners to consider developing an E1MN-Youth Council. This would provide leadership opportunities for youth with disabilities across the state to provide feedback, input and guidance related to interagency efforts that support youth in transition.

### Strategy B: Strengthen relationships with community partners, increase choice of and access to services

#### Strategy – brief description

VRS is committed to partnering with a broad coalition of qualified and quality service providers so that individuals who receive Vocational Rehabilitation services may choose a service provider that fits their needs. VRS is committed to developing relationships with Community Partners that are owned by and staffed with women, individuals with disabilities, BIPOC individuals, refugees and immigrants, veterans, and LGBTQIA+ individuals to provide services that are culturally informed, affirming, and appropriate to the served individual’s lived experience.

#### Actions

1. **Recruit new community partners:** This will include outreach and recruitment with potential community partners that provide employment services to students and may be willing to provide Pre-ETS services, including services that are culturally informed, affirming, and appropriate to the served individual’s lived experience. VRS will streamline procedures for becoming a VRS community partner, and develop resources for partners to understand VRS and how to provide Pre-ETS services.
2. **Increase Capacity of Existing Community Partners:** VRS will develop expectations and resources for existing community partners to increase their capacity to provide Pre-ETS services, including services that are culturally informed, affirming, and appropriate to the served individual’s lived experience. This will also focus on robust work-based learning opportunities that allow students to explore, prepare for and enter in-demand career pathways.
3. **Facilitate Relationship Building Between VRS Staff and Community Partners:** This will improve interaction between community partners and teams so VRS staff know the community partners well and can offer comprehensive informed choices. As part of this, VRS will develop a system whereby Community Partners can provide up-to-date information about staff expertise, services available, geographical service area, etc. VRS will also maintain and strengthen the Metro-area Pre-ETS Community of Practice (CoP) and consider options for expanding the CoP to other regions in the state.
4. **Retain Community Partners:** This includes developing data and fiscal forecasting so that VRS can communicate the need for Pre-ETS services, and community partners can make data-driven decisions about increasing their capacity to provide Pre-ETS. VRS will also develop a suite of training resources for community partner staff on VRS contracted services, how the VRS process works, authorizations and billing, reports, and communication requirements. VRS will share evaluation, quality assurance, and best practices resources for community partners and the Pre-ETS services they provide.

### Strategy C: Increase focus on performance and evaluation

#### Strategy – brief description

This strategy will ensure VRS staff have timely and relevant information at their fingertips and use that information to help guide service planning and delivery. Relevant information may include data from the client management database, from staff, or participants themselves.

#### Actions

1. **Focus on Performance:** This action will develop ways to measure VRS efforts, including:
   * Developing and tracking pre-ETS strategic plan progress measures.
   * Establishing initial performance benchmarks and tracking progress, such as:
     + How many potentially eligible students enroll in VRS?
     + How many students have a WBL experience while in HS?
   * Identify best practices for VR staff related to reaching above goals.
2. **Develop reports and training:** VRS will develop specific training and tools for pre-ETS and transition staff, such as for caseload management and data quality, and for managers, such as for performance management and data quality.
3. **Communication:** This action will establish quarterly pre-ETS data agenda item at regional managers meeting (or as needed) and develop a plan to communicate performance to school districts and other stakeholders.
4. **Evaluation:** This will focus on evaluating employment and post-secondary enrollment outcomes – what works, such as the impact of service types, enrolling potentially eligible students in full VR, involvement of a county case manager, etc. It may also track student progress while in Pre-ETS services, and evaluate the frequency and characteristics of students who return for VRS services long-term.

### Strategy D: Build VRS Pre-ETS/Transition staff development

#### Strategy - brief description

To achieve the envisioned results, VRS will create and sustain a multipronged, equitable, person-centered approach to support Pre-ETS and Transition staff development. The new Pre-ETS specialist positions will provide opportunities for a more hands-on learning approach that includes statewide managers and specialists, as well as the local field offices. Live and asynchronous training will be available to fit learning needs and will be enhanced by developing a more robust mentorship structure.

#### Actions

1. **Pre-ETS/Transition Onboarding:** This action includes a needs assessment to learn more about the onboarding/new employee training experience for Pre-ETS and transition staff and a review of existing onboarding training for staff providing Pre-ETS and transition services, considering the staff person’s role and what training they need for their position. It will enhance the existing onboarding system through a more robust mentoring program that includes structure and training for mentors.
2. **Staffing:** VRS will provide a transparent process for teams and managers to be able to assess their staffing needs to get Pre-ETS/Transition work done, and to understand the skill set needed to be successful in the Pre-ETS and Transition roles. Hiring will prioritize recruiting and retaining staff that represent the diversity of the individuals and communities VRS serves. Pre-ETS Specialists will be hired, and their roles and staffing structure developed and shared. Resources will be developed for clarifying roles and teamwork relationship expectations for Pre-ETS and transition services.
3. **Skill Development Training:** VRS will review existing training for proficiency and ongoing staff development, and develop additional resources and training to support ongoing development, including mentor training/structure and a transition guidebook/toolkit, which supports a person-centered approach
4. **Competencies and Standards/Expectations:** In order to develop a shared understanding of the skill sets needed to be successful in the Pre-ETS roles, this will review/analyze competencies for staff providing Pre-ETS and transition services, develop QA standards/expectations for Pre-ETS services, and clarify expectations to best know how to support Pre-ETS/transition staff and have goal posts for performance.