DEED / Vocational Rehabilitation Services

VRS Community Rehabilitation Program Advisory Committee

Friday, March 22, 2019 – 9:00 am – 3:00 pm

VRS St Paul Fairview Office

# VRS CRP Advisory Committee – Meeting on March 22, 2019

Key Messages for the Greater Vocational Rehabilitation Community:

*Note: Key Messages are first distributed via .govdelivery approximately one week after the meeting and posted on the DEED website. They are also included at the end of the official full session notes.*

**Strategic Topic: Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)**

**Background and Context for Dialogue:**

* The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) signed into law on July 22, 2014, included a new mandate that requires states to invest 15% of their VR funds in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). The five required Pre-Employment Transition Services are:
  1. Job Exploration Counseling
  2. Work-Based Learning Experience
  3. Postsecondary Education Counseling
  4. Workplace Readiness Training
  5. Instruction in Self Advocacy
* VRS continues to seek community partners’ assistance in providing these five required services, as well as appropriate “coordination activities” which are above and beyond the five required services, for eligible and potentially eligible students across Minnesota.
* While the mandated percentage was effective with the law’s enactment in 2014, the first supporting regulations were not published until mid-2016 so states did their best to interpret and meet the 15% Pre-ETS requirement while awaiting further implementation guidance from the federal funder Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

**Current Situation:**

* Three years later, RSA continues to provide more direction and information on what is required/authorized, as well as what is not allowable, as part of the 15% Pre-ETS funding requirement for the VR Program, and VRS continues to assess and adapt to meet the emerging and clarified requirements.
* We know many students with disabilities do not have much opportunity to explore different employment options, so we need to make every Pre-ETS dollar count. We want to create more opportunities for more students to interact with employers and explore vocational options. We want to find and tap into more work-based learning experiences through expanded connections including trades and apprenticeships.
* The advisory committee discussed ideas for less intensive ways to work with schools and reach more students with options for career exploration and work-based learning experiences.

**Upcoming Contract Amendment Period:**

* This spring, VRS will be offering community partners an opportunity to amend their P/T contracts through an open application period. Webinars and other local support options will be available to assist providers in the process. In the meantime, VRS is continuing to refer students for Pre-ETS under existing contracts.
* VRS staff are also actively looking for ways to simplify reporting and invoicing requirements. Director of Community Partnerships Kim Babine reminded community partners that billing for assessments is specifically prohibited under Pre-ETS.

**The Disability Employment Services System Adapts to the Emerging Regulations:**

* Moving forward, VRS is approaching Pre-ETS differently and expanding the target populations for services. While VRS will continue to serve those with intensive service needs, new efforts will be made to work with schools and other partners to provide Pre-ETS for those students with disabilities who don’t necessarily need the more intensive service but who could still benefit from services.
* The goal is to help more potentially eligible students with disabilities get connected with job/career exploration and work-based learning experiences while continuing to keep the remaining service category one open in Minnesota.
* To assist with this adaptive Pre-ETS work, VRS will be hiring new staff resources, located around the state, to work with schools and develop new sources of referrals for students with less intensive needs. The new Pre-ETS positions will augment existing services with more work-based experiences for additional students while VRS counselors continue their work with the more intensive service caseloads.
* Increasing Pre-ETS impact will require careful and coordinated effort by VRS and the entire disability employment services system. It requires an adaptive mindset that manages Pre-ETS resources in a way that uses limited resources to reach more students with disabilities without overwhelming the system and piling on our waitlist.
* To help us gauge what is working best for students with disabilities in Minnesota, VRS is exploring ways to proactively gather feedback from both students and employers on their experience with Pre-ETS services. VRS will continue to collaborate with community partners to gather and share information to enhance Pre-ETS offerings and impact.