

## VRS Community Partners Committee Key Messages

**Meeting Date:** Wednesday, June 15, 2022, 9:00 to 11:00am

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CPC Co-leaders Kim Babine and Chris McVey convened the CPC for its first meeting since March noting that first quarter meetings were focused on preparations for the VRS Master Contracts Cycle that is currently in progress. Director of Community Partners, Kim Babine and her team are fully immersed in negotiations and other contract development processes with approximately 170 new contracts in various stages. All current master contracts will expire on June 30, 2022.

VRS Director Dee Torgerson announced that the [Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development](#) (DEED) is launching a **“Summer of Jobs” campaign** amid record open job openings. Minnesota has 214,000 job vacancies, a record high and data also shows that unemployment rates are dropping, despite the high number of vacancies. The “Summer of Jobs” campaign is aimed using DEED’s resources to better connect employers to job seekers. That includes job shadowing the best jobs in the state, and tapping into pools of workers that sometimes get overlooked including immigrants, people with disabilities and people leaving correctional facilities. Three main sectors of focus are healthcare, truck driving and manufacturing. Dee invited committee members to send in stories and examples that can be shared as part of the campaign.

The June CPC meeting was focused on an introduction to the draft 2022-2027 VRS Youth in Transition Strategic Plan and advisory comments, questions, and input. Highlights are summarized below.

### Overview of the 2022-2027 VRS Youth in Transition Strategic Plan

- CPC Co-leader and Youth in Transition Strategic Planning Lead Chris McVey provided background and context for the strategic planning work. The VR program’s focus on youth was significantly increased with the 2014 passage of The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) which defined five required Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and established the 15% federal funding investment requirement. As implementation has continued, WIOA has served as a major catalyst for change for Minnesota’s VR and Education programs.
- DEED VRS began work to create a strategic plan to define, organize and support Pre-ETS and Transition youth efforts over the next five years last summer leveraging a team of 20 people representing all levels and geographic areas and assisted by consultants in a process that included input from staff and stakeholders.
- Early in the strategic planning process, the planning team worked to create a shared understanding of the present reality and future possibilities that was informed by analysis by the VRS Data Team, summaries from focus groups and interviews, and other background information.
- Some of the major themes of the Youth in Transition analysis are:
  - 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

- Partnerships with MDE/schools, businesses and providers are critical
- Different levels of service exist around the state
- 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
- Being able to work in a virtual environment is important
- Next, Chris provided an overview of the draft VRS Youth in Transition strategic plan components:
  - **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.
  - To advance the mission and vision, the strategic planning team developed four strategies, each with a designated VRS ‘champion’ and detailed action plans to guide implementation over the next 3-5 years. The four strategies are:
    - **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 (*VRS Champion: Alyssa Klein*)
    - **Strategy B:** Strengthen relationships with community partners, increase choice of and access to services (*VRS Champion: Kim Babine*)
    - **Strategy C:** Increase focus on performance and evaluation (*VRS Champion: Carrie Marsh*)
    - **Strategy D:** Build VRS Pre-ETS/Transition staff development (*VRS Champion: Jennifer Koski*)
  - The advisory committee provided comments, questions and input on the draft plan emphasizing the urgent need to facilitate relationship building between VRS staff and community partners due to the extended virtual working environment, tremendous amount of change, and high levels of staffing attrition that have had a combined effect of strained relationships over the past few years.

- The committee was enthusiastic about the opportunity for VRS to provide vital coordination among VRS staff, schools, and providers, as well as the potential for increased performance information and Pre-ETS training resources.
- The co-leaders and strategy champions/presenters thanked committee members for their initial input and noted the desire for ongoing collaboration as the VRS Youth in Transition Strategic Plan 2022-2027 is finalized and implementation begins this summer.

### **Next meeting**

Next meeting of the CPC is on Wednesday, July 20, 2022.

### **For More Information**

For more information on the CPC, please go to the [CPC page on VRS's website](#).