

What Youth Want Professionals to Remember



- Listen to Youth • Start Early • Focus on Strengths
- Create Real Opportunities • Teach Self-Advocacy
 - Build Life Skills • Communicate Accessibly
 - Promote Belonging • Work Together
 - Believe in Youth Potential

Youth Recommendations for Improving Pre-ETS, VR, and Transition Services



The following recommendations emerged from discussions, listening sessions, and feedback provided by students, youth, young adults, and family members regarding Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), transition planning, and related education and workforce systems.

#1 Start Pre- ETS Early

While formal VR-funded Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) are generally available beginning at age 14 (or according to individual state policies), students and youth along with their family members emphasized the importance of introducing career exploration, self-advocacy, workplace readiness, and future planning concepts much earlier. Many of the concepts included in the five required Pre-ETS activities are already naturally embedded within upper elementary and middle school experiences through activities such as career days, personality and interest inventories, extracurricular activities, leadership opportunities, and classroom learning. Students want schools, families, and community partners to build upon these existing opportunities through stronger collaboration and earlier awareness so they have more time to explore interests, build confidence, and prepare for adulthood.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



How can I help students learn about careers and future planning earlier?

#2 Strengthen Understanding and Collaboration

Many students and their families are unaware of available services and often do not understand the different roles of Pre-ETS staff, VR counselors, teachers, school counselors, and other support professionals. They want clearer explanations, stronger outreach, and regular conversations about who these individuals are, how they work together, and how each can support their future goals, employment, education, and independence. Students also notice when systems are disconnected and want educators, VR counselors, families, and community partners to communicate better and coordinate services around shared goals to ensure a more seamless and effective support system.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



How can I improve communication and coordination with students, youth, families, schools, and partners?

#3 Recognize Strengths, Goals, and Potentials

Youth want strengths-based, person-centered supports that recognize their abilities, interests, aspirations, unique support needs and contributions. They want to be seen as capable individuals with potential for growth and success not defined primarily by disability categories, evaluations, or paperwork. Youth get to choose how they want to identify.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



Am I focusing on each youth's strengths, interests, and goals?

#4 Make Youth Voice Central

Students want meaningful opportunities to actively participate in IEP meetings, transition planning, Pre-ETS activities, and decisions that affect their education, employment, and future goals.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



Are students actively helping shape decisions about their future?

#5 Connect Pre-ETS to Real Career Exploration

Students and youth consistently emphasized the importance of hands-on, real-world experiences that help them explore career interests and better understand employment possibilities.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



Am I providing meaningful, real-world career exploration opportunities?

#6 Include Self-Advocacy & Disability Rights Education

Youth want more opportunities to learn about self-advocacy, self-determination, accommodations, accessibility, and disability rights.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



Am I helping youth understand their rights and advocate for themselves?

#7 Focus on Independent Living Skills

Students want transition planning and Pre-ETS activities to address a broad range of independent living skills that contribute to success beyond employment.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



Am I supporting independent living skills students need for adulthood?

#8 Use Youth-Friendly Accessible Communication

Students and Youth want information about Pre-ETS, VR, education, employment, and transition services shared in ways that are accessible, understandable, engaging, and relevant to young people and their families.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



Is my communication clear, accessible, and engaging for students, youth and families?

#9 Create Inclusive Systems That Promotes Belonging

Students and youth want schools and VR systems to create environments where all feel safe, respected, supported, and empowered to succeed in education, employment, and life.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



Am I responding to students and youth with empathy, flexibility, and understanding?

#10 Demonstrate Understanding, Flexibility, & Responsiveness

Students and youth emphasized that many experience complex life circumstances that can affect their education, employment, and transition outcomes.

Questions for VR Professionals to Consider



Am I responding to students and youth with empathy, flexibility, and understanding?



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