Let's Talk Pre-ETS in Tennessee

A quarterly guide for improving postsecondary employment outcomes for students with disablities.

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Rehabilitation Services Division

An Appreciative Welcome

It has been about a year since we started to understand how COVID-19 would change how we operate. As time went on, we saw the impact on schools and students. However, in the midst of these struggles and barriers, creative, potentially permanent paths emerged for providing services to students. I want to commend the school systems, community resource providers, businesses, and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) staff for the continued and collective effort to provide services to students. While we initially experienced a major dip in the number of students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), we are now witnessing a steady exponential uptick in the number of students receiving services. For that, I respectfully say thank you!

COVID-19 emphasized a need for clear consistent supportive communication and recently, a Pre-ETS Specialist made a recommendation to create a Pre-ETS newsletter. I thought it was a great idea and way to keep everyone informed with a consistent message. It also offers an opportunity to highlight the great work, success stories and staff working to provide Pre-ETS. So, this is the first installment of the Pre-ETS newsletter, *Let's Talk Pre-ETS in Tennessee*, and I hope you find it useful and encouraging to your work.

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Vocational Rehabilitation Transition Director

Tennessee Department of Human Services

Tennessee Department of Human Services News

Julie Johnson Takes the Helm as Director of Vocational Rehabilitation

The Tennessee Department of Human Services (TDHS) Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program has a new director, **Julie Johnson.**

Julie brings nearly 20 years of experience working with people with disabilities and their families at TennCare. She played a key role in both the CHOICES and Employment and Community First CHOICES programs at TennCare.

Julie is most excited about leading VR's transformation projects. Those projects are modernizing VR services.The goal is to improve the customer experience to better support people with disabilities in achieving their career goals. Julie lives in Spring Hill, Tennessee with her family and enjoys camping and hiking at Tennessee State Parks.

Program Updates and Reminders

Service and Program Reporting

Each month it is very important to ensure individual service reports are submitted on time in order that the actual service records can be entered for the month and that invoices and be submitted and paid in a timely fashion. As you might imagine, receiving thousands of reports each month, with multiple services for each student, takes quite a bit of time for our team to enter and report to the Rehabilitation Services Administration. This is especially true at the end of each quarter (March, June, September, and December). We want to make sure we are capturing the work being done for Pre-ETS accurately.

With that, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) individual service reports are due the 5th business day of each month and the Transition School to Work (TSW) individual service reports are due on the 15th day of each month to your Pre-ETS Specialist. Please make sure you are meeting these deadlines.

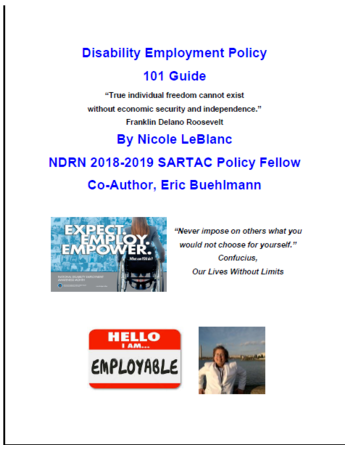
Pre-ETS Summer Services

With so much uncertainty occurring this school year, the access to students and the provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services has been impacted. While we are extremely grateful for the services provided, and many of them being done so virtually, we encourage you (where possible) to pursue offering summer Pre-ETS camps, summer services, and/or Work-Based Learning Capstone Experiences to students and school districts. The summer months provide a great opportunity to have a more focused concentration on various employability skills and allow instructors to go into greater depths than may be able to be achieved during a traditional school day. In addition, community-based instruction and opportunities to generalize learned classroom skills into the community are more

accessible during the summer months, along with summer work experiences. If you would like to provide a Pre-ETS Summer Camp but would like a thought partner to join you in the initial development, please reach out to one of our Pre-ETS Specialists or a regional Pre-ETS Supervisor. We can also provide some assistance in getting communications you may develop approved and distributed.

Resources

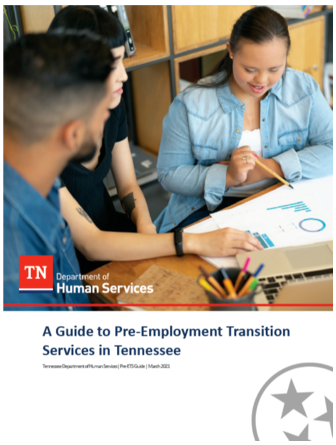
Self-Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center



The Self-Advocacy Resource and Technical Assistance Center have a *Disability Employment Policy 101 Guide* that is a resource developed by and for self-advocates about their values related to employment. It also includes explanations about key concepts in plain language (e.g., sub-minimum wage, sheltered workshops, etc). It may be a useful tool to help structure instruction when discussing self-advocacy through Pre-ETS.

Click Here to download the guide.

A Guide to Pre-Employment Transition Services in Tennessee



The Department of Human Services, in collaboration with Transition Tennessee is pleased to announce the release of the *Guide to Pre-Employment Transition Services in Tennessee*. For anyone who is new to Pre-ETS, this guide serves as an overview of what Pre-ETS are, along with helpful tools and resources. To achieve the outcomes we all want for youth in Tennessee with disabilities, a significant focus must also be on the collaboration and partnerships that must exist so that the delivery of Pre-ETS can be the most effective.

Click Here to download the guide.

New Transition Tennessee Course: Strategies for Effective Instruction

Transition Tennessee has released a new Pre-ETS course titled, *Strategies for Effective Instruction*. The course includes four video lessons on:

- Collaborating with Teachers
- Choosing a Curriculum
- Connecting with Students and Managing Learning Environments
- Virtual Instruction

As always, a library of related resources and supplemental materials for this and other Transition Tennessee courses is also available. You can get access to these lessons by visiting TranstionTN.org and creating a free account if you have not already. While you are there, be sure to check out the Pre-ETS Curriculum searchable database.

Provider Highlights and Success Stories

The STAR Center

The STAR Center has been a great partner to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program for many years. The Center "provides services for education, employment, and quality of life for all ages and needs." Recently they have launched a new website and hashtag #ICanWorkToo where they are taking a moment to celebrate individuals with disabilities in the workforce. The I Can Work Too project is about stories of perseverance, hope, success, and triumph.

We encourage you to take a moment to view their new videos (*click below*) and discover the stories of two recent Project SEARCH Graduates.

Click to watch Caleb's Story.

Click to watch David's Story.

Pre-ETS Staff Highlight

Flora McBride

In each newsletter, we'll spend some time giving a little insight and recognition to members of our VR Pre-ETS team. For the first newsletter, it seemed fitting to highlight Flora McBride, one of our Pre-ETS Specialists in West TN that works out of the Jackson area.

In addition to recommending that we begin a Pre-ETS newsletter, Flora has served in various roles with the TDHS Vocational Rehabilitation

program for 24 years. One characteristic that always stands out with Flora is her unwillingness to be defeated by stressful time. In these moments, she constantly reminds herself and others that “I’m a warrior, not a worrier.” What a great mantra to live by!

“I really enjoy my job and the work I do, especially interacting with the students, TSWs, and CRPs. I love hearing about the success stories of the students, and/or when TSWs are sharing something new and exciting that is going on in their area,” was Flora response when asked “What do you love about your job and what has put the biggest smile on your face recently?”

Recently Flora made the recommendation to host a Virtual Parent Night with a local school district. The event provided an opportunity for VR staff to discuss Pre-ETS and general VR services with parents and also connected attendees with Benefits to Work Specialists. This is just one example of Flora’s talent for coming up with new pivotal ideas and working with others to provide students with the services they need. It is clear that being able to work with others to provide service is what brings Flora her greatest smiles.

Thank you for your 24 years of service, Flora.

If you’d like to share your thanks for Flora’s service to our state, Flora can be reached at Flora.McBride@tn.gov.

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TN Department of Human Services

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