

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) require schools and vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies to collaborate to provide transition services for students with disabilities. In addition to federal requirements, prior research indicates interagency collaboration is a key predictor of post-school success, particularly when preparing students for employment (Mazzotti et al., 2021). Despite the clear benefits, collaboration between educators and VR providers has not always been effective (Zhang et al., 2023). This research brief describes the types of collaborations needed, existing barriers, and recommendations for enhancing collaboration.

## What Collaborations Are Needed Between Educators and VR Providers?

Collaboration between educators and VR providers has gained significant emphasis in recent years due to WIOA (2014) requirements for pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS). Pre-ETS provide targeted support to students with disabilities as they transition from high school to post-secondary education or employment. The five core areas of pre-ETS include: (a) job exploration and counseling, (b) work-based learning experiences, (c) counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary education programs, (d) workplace readiness training, and (e) instruction in self-advocacy. Effective delivery of pre-ETS involves collaboration between educators and VR providers (see Table 1). Ongoing efforts to enhance these collaborative processes are essential to maximizing the effectiveness of pre-ETS and improving employment and post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

## What the Research Says

Two recent studies (Pacheco et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023) examined interagency collaboration within transition service delivery for students

**Table 1**

*Pre-ETS Collaboration Methods*

Method	Description
Shared Responsibilities	Educators and VR providers both deliver pre-ETS services to students.
Interagency Coordination	Coordinated efforts between school districts and VR agencies.
IEP Involvement	VR providers participate in IEP meetings and goal setting.
Shared Goal Setting	Jointly establishing student-centered outcomes and transition goals.
Exchanging Information	Regular communication about students' skills, interests, and needs.
Joint Training	Cross-training for educators and VR providers on best practices.
Coordinated Service Delivery	Collaborative delivery of services to avoid duplication and fill gaps.

with disabilities. Using focus groups (i.e., group interviews) with VR providers and special educators, researchers identified significant barriers to and facilitators of effective collaboration. In terms of barriers, both studies revealed lack of communication or difficulty with communication as a key obstacle to effective collaboration. Other barriers to collaboration included administrative and school policies, confusion among community partners (e.g., educators, VR providers, employers) about procedures and activities, and student/family factors such as lack of transportation and motivation to participate in pre-ETS (Pacheco et al., 2022). Zhang et al. (2023) further noted issues such as limited access to the communities served, time constraints, and insufficient support for collaboration.

To address these challenges, the studies highlight both immediate needs and actionable recommendations. Specifically, Zhang et al. (2023) identified a critical need for increased collaboration among all stakeholders and suggested additional training and education to enhance partnerships. Pacheco et al. (2022) suggested improving intake and discovery processes, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and establishing clear methods for communication and follow-up. When collaboration was effective, participants reported feeling supported by their administration, with colleagues and external providers serving as valuable resources (Zhang et al., 2023). These findings underscore the essential role of interagency collaboration in improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities and emphasize the ongoing need to refine strategies that promote effective partnerships between schools and VR agencies.

## Guidelines for Practice

To improve the quality and impact of transition services for students with disabilities, educators and VR providers can work together to strengthen their collaboration in supporting students with disabilities during their transition to employment. Based on findings from the literature (i.e., Pacheco et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2023), interagency teams should consider implementing the following practices:

### *Enhance Communication Processes*

Establish regular, structured meetings to discuss student progress and coordination. Use collaborative platforms or tools (such as shared digital folders) to keep information accessible and updated. Develop and follow communication protocols to ensure consistent follow-up and minimize misunderstandings.

### *Define and Document Roles and Responsibilities*

Create detailed role and responsibility charts for each team member to clarify who handles specific tasks. Document each person's contributions and update roles, as needed, to avoid overlapping responsibilities and streamline efforts. Provide clear guidelines on expectations to ensure each professional understands their unique responsibilities within the team.

### *Offer Joint Training Opportunities*

Organize inter-agency training sessions focusing on collaboration skills, transition processes, and cultural competency. Provide sessions specifically geared toward understanding community resources and family engagement practices. Include team-building exercises to build trust and rapport, facilitating smoother communication and cooperation.

### *Establish Collaborative Community Connections*

Build partnerships with community organizations to expand access to services and enhance community integration. Arrange joint events and workshops with community organizations, helping educators and VR providers connect and share resources. Encourage VR providers and educators to engage with community-based initiatives that offer employment opportunities or skills training for students with disabilities.

## References

- Mazzotti, V. L., Rowe, D. A., Kwiatek, S., Voggt, A., Chang, W., Fowler, C., Poppen, M., Sinclair, J., & Test, D. W. (2021). Secondary transition predictors of postschool success: An update to the research base. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 44(1), 47-64. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143420959793>
- Pacheco, T. L., Morgan, R. L., & McKnight-Lizotte, M. C. (2022). Collaboration between secondary special education teachers and community rehabilitation service providers: A focus group analysis. *Developmental Disabilities Network Journal*, 2(2), 64-82. <https://doi.org/10.59620/2694-1104.1046>
- Zhang, D., Li, Y.-F., Roberts, E., Orsag, M., & Maddalozzo, R. (2023). An investigation of the collaborations between educators and Vocational Rehabilitation counselors in providing pre-employment transition services. *Inclusion*, 11(2), 135-146. <https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-11.2.135>

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## Additional Resource

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT:C)  
<https://transitionta.org/interagency-collaboration/>

