

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) is a legislative mandate focused on improving the employment outcomes of secondary students with disabilities. WIOA requires that funding from the State/Federal Vocational Rehabilitation System be used to ensure that state vocational rehabilitation agencies (e.g., Illinois Department of Human Services [IDHS]) in collaboration with schools provide pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) to all students with disabilities who qualify, or could potentially qualify, for vocational rehabilitation services. Under WIOA, teachers and vocational rehabilitation counselors must engage students in five required pre-ETS: (a) job exploration counseling, (b) work-based learning experiences, (c) counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or post-secondary educational programs, (d) workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and (e) instruction in self-advocacy. This brief will provide an overview of student eligibility, the five required pre-ETS, additional pre-ETS that may be available, and pre-ETS coordination activities.

Who is Eligible for Pre-ETS?

According to the WIOA, students are eligible for pre-ETS if they:

- identify as having a disability
- are enrolled in a secondary, postsecondary, or other recognized education program, who
- are not younger than the earliest age for the provision of transition services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act unless the state elects a lower minimum age for receipt of pre-employment services and is not younger than that minimum age; and
- is not older than 21; unless the individual state

law provides for a higher maximum age for receipt of services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and is not older than that maximum age; and

- is eligible for, and receiving, special education or related services under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; or
- is an individual with a disability, for purposes of section 504.

What are the Required Pre-ETS?

According to the WIOA, there are five required pre-ETS.

1. Job Exploration Counseling

Job Exploration Counseling is foundational in the career decision making process. During this exploratory phase an individual participates in activities to help generate vocational interests, identify personal values, and explore careers in order to develop one's vocational identity. This process is often conducted by administering a series of assessments and interviews. Job Exploration Counseling can be formal or informal and completed individually or as a group. Job exploration activities not only improve self-awareness but also help the individual develop an understanding of the labor market and potential career pathways.

2. Work Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs)

WBLEs utilize real work in order to teach students job skills in natural settings (Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center [WINTAC], 2016). WBLEs facilitate connections between what students learn in the classroom and the application of those skills in the real world (WINTAC, 2016). There are seven major types of community WBLEs including career exploration, job shadowing, service learning, internships, work sampling, apprenticeships, and paid employment (Luecking, 2020). Other

examples of WBLEs include career related competitions, informational interviews, student-led enterprises, simulated workplace experiences, and workplace tours (WINTAC, 2016). A variety of resources exist on self-determination. Review the “additional resources” section to gain insight on how to teach essential self-determination skills.

3. Counseling for Postsecondary Outcomes

Counseling in postsecondary education can lead to greater success when entering postsecondary programs and more positive outcomes upon completion. Postsecondary educational opportunities may vary across states but typically include: university programs; vocational-technical programs; community colleges; military; and other training opportunities in career pathways (Mazzotti & Test, 2020; WINTAC). Counseling on these postsecondary opportunities may include support and training in higher education opportunities and application processes, navigating disability services, career development through postsecondary education, and financial aspects post-high school (Jamieson et al., 1998).

4. Workplace Readiness Skills

Workplace readiness skills, also referred to as “soft skills,” promote appropriate social interactions, reinforce the importance of work behaviors, and improve workplace performance. Workplace readiness skills reinforce the importance of timeliness, build an understanding of how people are perceived by others, and are necessary for employability (Workforce Innovation Technical Assistance Center, n.d.). The purpose of workplace readiness training is to teach transition aged youth with disabilities the necessary social and independent living skills needed to successfully gain and maintain competitive integrated employment.

5. Instruction in Self-Advocacy

Self-advocacy can be described as a sub-skill of self-determination. Self-determination is a set of behaviors that an individual engages in making vital changes in one's life, directed by individualized goals and influenced by environmental variables (Burke

et al., 2020). Instruction in self-advocacy refers to teaching the ability to effectively communicate wants and needs and making informed decisions to live independently and contribute to the community. Individuals can self-advocate when they understand (a) knowledge of self, (b) knowledge of rights, (c) communications, and (d) leadership (Test et al., 2005). As students transition into life out of high school (e.g., work or college) they may be required to advocate for their own rights and accommodations (Roberts et al., 2016). Examples of self-advocacy skills are participation in the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) and transition process, recognizing strengths and weaknesses, and understanding how to access available resources and requesting accommodations (Carter et al., 2020).

What Additional Pre-ETS Exist?

According to WIOA, if funds remain, Vocational Rehabilitation agencies may provide the following services to improve the transition and employment outcomes of students with disabilities:

- implement effective strategies that increase independent living and inclusion in their communities and competitive integrated workplace.
- develop and improve strategies for individuals with intellectual and significant disabilities to live independently, participate in postsecondary education experiences, and obtain and retain competitive integrated employment.
- provide training to vocational rehabilitation counselors, school transition staff, and others supporting students with disabilities.
- disseminate information on innovative, effective, and efficient approaches to implement pre-ETS.
- coordinate activities with transition services provided by local educational agencies under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

- apply evidence-based findings to improve policy, procedure, practice, and the preparation of personnel.
- develop model transition demonstration projects.
- establish or support multistate or regional partnerships that involve States, local educational agencies, designated State units, developmental disability agencies, private businesses, or others; and
- disseminate information and strategies to improve the transition to postsecondary activities of those who are traditionally unserved.

What are Pre-Employment Transition Coordination Activities?

According to the WIOA, pre-ETS funds may be used for the following pre-employment transition coordination activities:

- Attending individualized education program meetings for students with disabilities, when invited.
- Working with the local workforce development boards, one-stop centers, and employers to develop work opportunities for students with disabilities, including internships, summer employment and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year, and apprenticeships.
- Working with schools, including those carrying out activities under section 614(d) of the IDEA, to coordinate and ensure the provision of pre-employment transition services.
- When invited, attending person-centered planning meetings for individuals receiving services under title XIX of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1396 et seq.)

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