

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Vocational Rehabilitation: using services before school ends

State Vocational Rehabilitation is federally funded, free, and legally required to serve your student before graduation. Most families do not open the file until senior year. The families who open it at 14 get two years of paid work experience their student was entitled to.

BY JIM PALASTY · 13 MIN READ · ADULT TRANSITION

5

PRE-ETS ACTIVITIES

The five federally required categories of Pre-Employment Transition Services. Every eligible student aged 14 to 21 can access all of them. Free.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Apply while still in school



STEP 2

Get the IPE in writing



STEP 3

Use all five Pre-ETS categories

Pre-ETS and VR services (what is on the menu)

Job exploration	Interest inventories. Site visits. Interviews.
Work-based learning	Job shadows. Internships. Community placements.
Postsecondary counseling	College. Vocational schools. Apprenticeships.
Workplace readiness	Soft skills. Interviewing. Workplace etiquette.
Self-advocacy training	Disclosure decisions. Accommodation requests.
Benefits counseling	SSI, Medicaid, and HCBS impact of earning wages.
Assistive technology	Devices, software, accommodations funded by VR.
Job placement	Actual jobs with actual employers. Supported.

A STORY WE KNOW



Marcus's parents applied to VR the summer before he turned 15. By his junior year of high school he had done three paid summer internships arranged through his VR counselor: a bike shop, a landscaping crew, and a food bank warehouse. He learned he did not want retail. He learned he liked structure and being outdoors. His IPE at graduation named landscaping as the goal. He was employed six weeks later. The four families I know who applied to VR their senior year are still looking, two years in.

THE CLOCK STARTS WHEN YOU START THE CLOCK

What matters, at a glance

Job exploration

Interest inventories, informational interviews, worksite tours. What actual work he might like. Not what you would like him to like.

Work-based learning

Job shadows, internships, community work experience. Paid where possible. Sensory-supported when needed.

Order of Selection

Many states apply an Order of Selection when VR budgets are tight. Priority goes to Most Significant Disability. Document the significance early.

IPE in writing

The Individualized Plan for Employment is the contract. Written, signed, dated, reviewed annually. Everything you ask for lives in this document or it does not exist.

Timing window

VR can serve while still in school. Two years of paid work experience before graduation is a competitive edge that closes the day the ceremony ends.

Benefits counseling

Free through VR. What SSI, Medicaid, and waived services do when he starts earning. Know before he earns.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Current IEP with transition plan | ☐ Psychological or educational evaluation |
| ☐ Medical summary and medications | ☐ SSI or Medicaid documentation |
| ☐ List of past work or volunteer experience | ☐ Career interests in his voice, not yours |
| ☐ Two references (teacher, coach, employer) | ☐ Your calendar for the year ahead |

YOUR MOVE

When you are ready to open the VR file, here is how you do it

- 1 Call your state VR office. Ask for the intake number. Get the local counselor assigned.
- 2 Prepare the intake packet: recent evaluations, IEP, medical, current supports.
- 3 Attend the intake meeting with your student. His voice in the room from day one.
- 4 Insist on all five Pre-ETS categories in the IPE. Not just the ones the counselor is comfortable with.
- 5 Review the IPE annually. Adjust as goals sharpen. Sign the amendments.
- 6 Bridge to adult VR services at exit. Do not let the file lapse at graduation.

The counselor at intake will not be there in two years. Build the file, not the relationship.

RESOURCES NAMED IN THIS POST

rsa.ed.gov · <https://rsa.ed.gov/>

transitionta.org · <https://transitionta.org/>

choosework.ssa.gov · <https://choosework.ssa.gov/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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