



Improving Pre-ETS with Intentional Family Engagement

Families are often one of the best advocates for their students. They can help students engage in various services and support, including critical transition services. Unfortunately, many families are still unaware of the transition services available to their students. This is especially true of pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS). This lack of information and resources can create barriers. One way to overcome those barriers is for schools, service providers, and families to collaborate. Schools and providers must work with families to ensure intentional engagement is a top priority. This engagement depends on equitable and inclusive communication and learning opportunities.

Communicate Regularly and Meaningfully

Communication helps to establish a trusting rapport between all stakeholders. Strength-based communication between school districts, DARS, and families should be purposeful and frequent. Trust takes effort on behalf of all participants. Tips to build strong rapport through communication include:

- Provide a calendar of scheduled activities to keep families updated.
- Notify families of progress with virtual or in-person meetings.
- Discuss celebrations and concerns through phone contact or emails.
- Send digital newsletters with topics and themes to notify families.

Coordinate Learning Opportunities to Familiarize Families with Pre-ETS

Encourage family engagement by coordinating learning opportunities about Pre-ETS. Training can provide learning opportunities for one or more of the five Pre-ETS categories (job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, postsecondary enrollment counseling, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy instruction). School and DARS partners can collaborate to plan family events focused on Pre-ETS. A few examples of this include:

- Hold a student and parent night that provides instruction in self-advocacy.
- Design a presentation for students and families about disability disclosure for work and college.
- Organize guest-speaker webinars for families with information about Pre-ETS topics.
- Host an annual transition fair that includes organizations and businesses that provide resources to families and students about Pre-ETS and postsecondary opportunities.
- Present to the local Special Education Advisory Committee meeting to discuss Pre-ETS.

Collaborate to Ensure Engagement is Equitable and Inclusive

It is important to recognize the variety of cultures and backgrounds represented within a school division. DARS and school partners should ensure that opportunities for engagement are equitable and inclusive. Families with diverse backgrounds may feel undervalued if their values and expectations are not acknowledged. It's important to take time to:

- Understand diverse cultural norms and set the standard.
- Use disability accommodations and language accessibility practices to improve family engagement.
- Encourage active engagement by making sure all participants have the opportunity to have a voice.

Conclusion

Intentional family engagement requires clear communication and opportunities to learn. Ongoing communication helps to form trust between families and other team members. Families feel empowered when they understand what transition services, including Pre-ETS, are. Information and resources provided to families about Pre-ETS equip them with the knowledge to make confident decisions about their student's future.

More information about DARS can be found at www.dars.virginia.gov/drs/transitionservices.htm or by calling 804-662-7000.

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