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Fast Facts

PreETS.org — Virginia's Collaborative Model for Pre-Employment Transition Services

The Administrator's Role in School Division Cooperative Agreements with Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS)

Why Cooperative Agreements Matter

Cooperative agreements between school divisions and DARS help ensure that students with disabilities experience coordinated, seamless transition services as they move from high school into employment, postsecondary education, training, and adult life. These agreements outline how schools and DARS work together to support students through transition planning, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), and vocational rehabilitation services.

The Critical Role of Administrators

Administrators set the vision, structure, and expectations that make interagency collaboration effective. Their support can help schools to establish division-wide expectations, ensure staff understand the cooperative agreement, support interagency collaboration, promote equitable access to services, and align resources and staffing. This reinforces transition practices that are proactive, consistent, and focused on student needs.

Administrators Help:

Establish Division-Wide Expectations

Administrators help establish transition planning as a priority. They also help make sure that collaboration with DARS becomes a regular part of the division practices instead of depending on one staff member.

This includes:

- Supporting early transition planning
- Encouraging student and family engagement
- Promoting competitive integrated employment outcomes
- Reinforcing evidence-based transition practices

Ensure Staff Understand the Cooperative Agreement

Many educators are not aware of the details in the school division's cooperative agreement with DARS. Administrators help ensure that:

- Transition specialists understand referral procedures
- School counselors and teachers understand Pre-ETS and VR services
- Staff know when and how to involve DARS counselors
- Teams understand shared responsibilities

Support Interagency Collaboration

Effective transition planning requires ongoing collaboration between schools, DARS, families, community agencies, and employers.

Administrators can:

- Allocate time for collaborative meetings
- Encourage joint training opportunities
- Include DARS staff in transition focused events
- Promote communication between school and adult service systems

Promote Equitable Access to Services

Administrative leadership helps make sure all students with disabilities, including students with significant support needs, have access to transition services and DARS.

Administrators should monitor:

- Referral patterns
- Student participation in work-based learning
- Access to community experiences
- Family engagement
- Outcomes across schools and student groups

Align Resources and Staffing

Administrators help create the framework needed for strong transition services by:

- Supporting transition specialist positions
- Providing professional development
- Encouraging collaboration across departments
- Allocating resources for community-based instruction and work experiences

What Strong Administrative Leadership Looks Like

Strong administrators:

- Understand the purpose of DARS collaboration
- View transition as a division wide responsibility
- Encourage student voice and active participation
- Support community-based experiences
- Use outcome data to guide program improvement
- Promote interagency partnerships beyond compliance

Questions Administrators Should Ask

- Are students being referred to DARS early enough?
- Do staff understand the cooperative agreement?
- Are students accessing meaningful work-based learning experiences?
- Are families informed about DARS services?
- Are transition outcomes being tracked and reviewed?
- Do students with significant disabilities have equal access to opportunities?

Bottom Line

Cooperative agreements between school divisions and DARS work best when administrators take an active role in supporting collaboration. Transition specialists help coordinate the work, but administrators create the systems, culture, and expectations that allow partnerships to thrive.

When administrators lead with intention, students experience stronger connections between school and adult life. This results in improved employment, education, independence, and community outcomes.

Learn more by visiting the [DARS website](#) or by calling 804-662-7000.

