

## Guest Editorial

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# Introduction to the special issue: Examining the impact of pre-employment transition services

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The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) heralded a seismic shift in how state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies provide transition-related employment services to students and youth with disabilities. WIOA's focus on competitive integrated employment as the preferred and primary outcome for people with disabilities placed a major emphasis on supporting the successful transition of students with disabilities from school to work. Specifically, WIOA established that state VR agencies: (a) provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities, (b) serve a wider range of students with disabilities who are "potentially eligible for VR services," (c) coordinate employment-related services delivery with state educational agencies and other partners, and (d) set aside 15% of state VR budgets to pay for these services (WIOA, 2014).

At the time this special issue goes to press, ten years have elapsed since WIOA's passage. A decade of Pre-ETS planning and implementation efforts provide a timely milestone from which to parse out what has and has not been accomplished through this landmark legislation and to envision pathways for future refinement through policy implementation and reauthorization. Therefore, a primary goal of this special issue is to explore the state-of-the-art practice and scholarship related to Pre-ETS that is evolving within the field. Our secondary purpose as co-editors is to share promising innovations, to

document progress, and most importantly, to provide clear policy recommendations with policymakers, state leaders, researchers, and practitioners. Throughout this issue, we have noted a common theme emerging across articles. Although Pre-ETS planning and implementation is almost always complex and sometimes downright cumbersome, it also represents an extraordinary opportunity to make headway in improving the employment outcomes of youth with disabilities. It is imperative that we fully take advantage of this opportunity by critically examining Pre-ETS provision, improving service delivery, and fostering innovation. These efforts should inform both current state and local WIOA implementation, as well as future reauthorization of federal legislation.

In our introductory discussion paper, "The promise and the challenge of pre-employment transition services: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act at ten years old," we explore the key themes of this special issue in more depth. Rooney-Kron and colleagues (2024) provide a scoping review of research literature conducted to date focused on the provision of Pre-ETS to transition-age students with disabilities. Poppen and colleagues (2024) present findings from their development and field testing of the Transition Self-Assessment Tool, an online evaluation and strategic planning assessment to help VR improve service delivery. Whittenburg and colleagues (2024) provide a broad view of states' Pre-ETS delivery patterns using RSA-911 national administrative data. Fleming and colleagues (2024) present findings from their state-level implementation of the Transition Readiness Toolkit, an

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assessment tool to help state VR agencies make better-informed data-driven decisions about Pre-ETS delivery. Awsumb and Carter (2024) report findings from a survey of 96 Pre-ETS providers in Tennessee regarding their insights and experiences in the planning, delivery, and outcomes of Pre-ETS. Castruita-Rios and Estala-Gutierrez (2024) examine factors related to VR engagement of transition-age Hispanic youth with disabilities who received Pre-ETS using an exploratory cross-sectional design. Rowe and colleagues (2024) draw from their experience providing technical assistance to states through NTACTION to propose how Pre-ETS could be more effectively leveraged for youth with disabilities by using the states of learning framework to optimize sequential transition experiences. Lau and colleagues (2024) examine facilitators and barriers to Pre-ETS implementation across a two-state sample using both quantitative and qualitative measures to anchor their recommendations for the field. Finally, Wehman and colleagues (2024) offer a comprehensive set of recommendations for how Pre-ETS could more effectively provide a foundation for achieving competitive integrated employment for individuals with disabilities.

Taken as a whole, these articles represent a comprehensive set of insights into a system in flux, as well as offer best practices in refining and guiding effective Pre-ETS delivery. As guest co-editors, we are grateful for the opportunity to share this issue with readers and look forward to the conversations that stem from it. We want to acknowledge Dr. Paul Wehman, founding editor of the *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, for his extensive support and guidance in shaping and realizing this special issue. We also would like to thank each of the authors who contributed their time, expertise, and ongoing research efforts to highlight the potential of Pre-ETS and the need for greater attention and coordinated efforts to it. Our hope is this special issue illuminates both where we currently are in terms of Pre-ETS implementation and points the way forward to the types of innovation, programming, and systems change that will allow us to significantly improve the trajectories of youth with disabilities as they move from school to work.

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