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Tabitha Pacheco
Utah State University

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A FOCUS GROUP ANALYSIS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY KNOWLEDGE HELD BY
SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY REHABILITATION
SERVICE PROVIDERS

By

Tabitha Pacheco

A creative project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

in

Special Education

Approved:

Robert Morgan, PhD
Major Professor

Timothy Riesen, PhD
Committee Member

Melanie Dawson, PhD
Committee Member

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, Utah

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Abstract

This research study describes the current understanding of high school special education teachers and community rehabilitation providers (CRP) staff regarding the direct transition services available through each party, the challenges and barriers encountered by each party, and recommendations for improving collaboration between special education teachers and CRP staff to improve student outcomes. Current research emphasizes the importance of interagency collaboration and that collaboration can improve student post-secondary outcomes. The method included three focus groups. Thematic analysis revealed key themes in the areas of experiences, questions, barriers, collaboration, and recommendations. The results and recommendations from this study may provide guidance for special education teacher and CRP staff training. Future research should expand upon these themes across more participants and include Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors.

Introduction

Interagency collaboration as part of the IEP transition plan is key to ensuring students have successful post-secondary outcomes (Taylor, Morgan, & Callow-Heusser, 2016). As outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities are measured by their participation in the following areas: (a) postsecondary education or training, (b) employment, and (c) if necessary, independent living. A transition team should work together to develop a plan to guide a student towards successful results in these areas. A transition team should include experts who can support a student in these areas. IDEA clearly states in Sec. 300.43, that transition services be a coordinated set of activities and includes related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and functional vocational evaluation. The language of this section indicates that coordination and collaboration with outside agencies is a requirement for successful transition planning and positive post-secondary student outcomes. IDEA specifically states that schools must invite agencies that will be paying for or providing transition services (IDEA, 2004). Research has been conducted on the collaboration between special education teachers and vocational rehabilitation (VR) (Taylor et al., 2016) and studies have shown the improved outcome of students when outside agencies are involved in the transition process (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). Generally, research has concluded that outcomes are improved with collaboration (Test et al., 2009). One of the key agencies involved with young adults with disabilities who make the transition from special education programs is the community rehabilitation provider (CRP). Domin and Butterworth (2013) defined CRPs as such, “Community rehabilitation providers (CRPs)

and their staff are the primary source of employment supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Defined as community-based organizations that provide employment and day supports to individuals with disabilities, CRPs vary widely in their size, the population they serve, and the services they provide.” As part of a successful IEP and transition plan, every student with a disability should have goals related to transition. Outside agencies, such as CRPs, should be an integral part of creating and implementing transition goals because CRPs are in the best position to carry out the direct services in the community. Traditionally, the VR case manager acts as the go between for schools and community rehabilitation. Special education teachers may not be aware that VR is not directly providing services to the students. VR finds CRPs to provide services to help the student meet the transition goals. The progress and data are reported to the VR case manager who then communicates the information to the IEP team.

Like many service provider systems, VR agencies are overburdened with diminishing budgets and expanding caseloads. In Utah, the average VR case manager has 100 students on their caseload (A. Langone, personal communication, August 30, 2018). When the VR case manager attends the IEP meeting, they may not know personal details of the students or CRP needs and cannot answer questions presented by the IEP team. This lack of communication could result in special education teachers and CRPs not coordinating and collaborating on the instruction and experiences given to the student. Because VR is often responsible for funding transition services, special education teachers may not know they can work directly with CRPs. This could reduce the number

of options presented to students and reduces interagency collaboration in transition planning.

There are now several Utah CRPs that offer Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) services under VR grant funding. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies are now required to set aside 15% of their federal grant to provide Pre-ETS to eligible students due to Section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act) as amended in July 2014 by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). This means that students do not have to be connected with VR or the Division of Services for People with Disabilities (DSPD) to be served by these providers and the service is free to students. According to Section 113(c) Provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services, there are five core components of Pre-ETS which are job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs at institutions of higher education, workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and instruction in self-advocacy (34 CFR §361.60). To meet this federal mandate in Utah, the Utah State Office of Rehabilitation (USOR) is offering grants to contract with community organizations, community rehabilitation programs, school districts, and private partners to provide Pre-ETS services to eligible students (Department of Workforce Services and Utah State Office of Rehabilitation, 2018). According to the USOR website there are four CRPs who have Pre-ETS contracts in Utah; Ability First, Easter Seals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain, Logistic Specialties INC (LSI), and Columbus Community Center “Columbus Connects” (Utah State Office of Rehabilitation, 2017).

The CRPs that have received a Pre-ETS grant through the USOR have the funds to provide services to students without the school first having to go through VR to approve funding for the student. However, in an interview with the Utah State Board of Education Transition Specialist (L. Gripentrog, personal communication, August 29, 2018) she stated, “What I’m finding is that there is a big disconnect between the providers that want to serve students but are not able to connect to teachers. Schools are in need of additional transition services for students, but most teachers and special education directors do not know anything about Pre-ETS.” Given that special education teachers have limited communication with overburdened VR counselors and even less knowledge of CRPs, increased awareness and channels of communication are needed. Special educators and CRPs need open opportunities to communicate to better serve students with disabilities in transition to adult services. I only found one article, Grossi & Thomas (2017), about the direct communication of special education teachers with the community rehabilitation providers (CRPs) working directly with the student.

Literature Review

In my research on special education teacher and CRP collaboration I conducted a search of relevant literature. To conduct my search, I used ERIC via EBSCOhost, Academic Search Ultimate via EBSCOhost, articles recommended by committee members, and University of Utah online libraries. I included search terms in varying order such as; *community rehabilitation provider, special education teachers, transition, significant disabilities, vocational rehabilitation, outside agencies, interagency collaboration*. I found 43 articles that were peer reviewed. Of those articles 39 were focused specifically on collaboration with VR, with no mention of CRPs. Other articles

were specific to a certain subgroup such a disability classification. Other articles focused on general collaboration between IEP teams and families with little focus on outside agencies. Only one article included both search terms *community rehabilitation provider* and *special education teachers* but was not focused on collaboration. The paucity of literature shows that more research is needed on this topic as most research on interagency collaboration has been focused on collaboration with vocational rehabilitation. Three articles I found most relevant to my project are included in the following literature review. One article surveyed transition teachers and VR counselors on collaboration in transition planning (Taylor et al., 2016). Another study examined the implementation of an interagency collaboration model called CIRCLES (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). The final article was a study on schools that had on-site employment resources such as employment specialists or career coaches (Grossi & Thomas, 2017).

With legislation allotting grant funds specifically to be used on Pre-ETS, eligible students have the opportunity to receive transition instruction and services at no cost to them or their schools. Model programs such as CIRCLES have been implemented (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015), schools have inserted employment specialists on site (Grossi & Thomas, 2017), yet barriers to interagency collaboration still exists (Taylor et al., 2016). Special education teachers are not aware of all the services accessible to their eligible students. Special education teachers need to be aware of Pre-ETS services available through CRPs in order to provide the greatest amount of opportunities for their students to be successful.

Taylor et. al (2016) investigated the collaboration amongst vocational rehabilitation counselors and special education teachers. The participants in this study

included 78 VR counselors and 220 special education transition teachers. The respondents from both groups of participants were located in Utah, Oregon, Maryland, and Florida. The participants took surveys that addressed perceptions on VR involvement in the transition process and asked respondents to rate the importance of interagency collaboration practices. The survey was online and consisted of questions regarding demographic information, VR involvement, and collaboration practices. All responses remained anonymous and a random code was assigned to each participant to allow for follow up (Taylor et al., 2016). The researchers had three purposes in conducting this study. They wanted to know first, what transition teachers and VR counselors reported as transition roles, involvement, and satisfaction of VR participation. Second, the researchers wanted to determine if identified collaboration practices were realistic to implement, and finally, the researchers wanted participants to recommend how interagency collaboration could be improved (Taylor et al., 2016).

The findings showed that both the VR counselors and special education (SE) teachers identified the most important practice for improving collaboration between parties as providing training for SE teachers on the transition process including specific information about access to VR. The online survey also found that both groups of participants agreed that the second most important practice was providing training to transition teachers on preparing students with key knowledge and skills, e.g., self-determination, student involvement, family involvement, agency involvement, etc. According to Neubert et. al (as cited in Taylor et al. 2016), “transition to postsecondary education and job placement was more successful when SE transition teachers and VR counselors worked collaboratively” (p. 163). However, when participants were asked to

indicate the feasibility of collaborative practices, neither group reported collaborative efforts could be improved (Taylor et al., 2016). The authors concluded that interagency collaboration is important to both transition teachers and VR counselors, but feasibility is perceived to be limited (Taylor et al., 2016).

In a study by Povenmire-Kirk et al. (2015), the authors shared the results of implementing a model called Communicating Interagency Relationships and Collaborative Linkage for Exceptional Students (CIRCLES) as a method of increasing interagency collaboration during transition planning. CIRCLES was created in rural North Carolina 20 years ago (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). The CIRCLE model includes three levels of teams: Community Level Team (CLT), School-Level Team (SLT), and IEP Team. The CLT includes outside agencies such as VR and CRPs. The SLT is made up of providers, including those from the CLT, who directly work with the student. This is different than traditional transition teams, as the direct service providers often email progress and data to the special education teachers or pass information through a VR case manager. The SLT meet once a month with the students and special education teachers to discuss transition goals. This allows for the special education teachers to have personal contact with the direct service provider and ask specific questions about the students' progress and goals (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). The information gathered by the special education teacher from the SLT is then used to write the transition plan on the IEP. The district level staff is responsible for scheduling CLT and SLT meetings, freeing up time for special education teachers.

The researchers studied 48 high schools in two different states and conducted focus groups with the district staff who convene the CLT and SLT meetings. The

researchers generated themes from the focus groups to determine the barriers and challenges and the successes in implementing the CIRCLES program. The study identified five barriers and challenges in implementing CIRCLES: (a) awareness among agency and school staff, (b) preparing the students and families for SLT meetings, (c) providers needing student information prior to meetings, (d) issues with follow-up after SLT meetings, and (e) practical issues (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015). The study also identified four areas on success in implementing CIRCLES: (a) networking and collaboration between outside agencies and school staff, (b) improved communication about services, (c) empowering students and families by having them lead meetings, and (d) helping change student's lives (Povenmire-Kirk et al., 2015).

Both the Povenmire-Kirk et al. (2015) and the Taylor et al. (2016) studies recognized the importance of collaboration between school staff and outside agencies, such as VR. The studies both showed barriers in communication between agencies and a lack of awareness of what the other was doing. The CIRCLES model did include CRPs as part of the SLT which included direct communication with the special education teachers. This is different than other research literature that focused more specifically on interagency collaboration with VR.

In another related article, Grossi and Thomas (2017) researched the results of embedding an employment specialist or Career Coach into the school to serve as a point of contact for outside agencies and to focus on providing employment opportunities to transition age youth. The researchers shared the results of a 5-year study of the effects of having employment specialists on site at schools. The findings from this study were shared at a workshop at the National Association for Persons in Supported Employment

(APSE) Conference, where attendees answered questions to analyze the results of the study. Workshop attendees included employment providers, transition teachers, advocates, and VR staff. Three questions were generated from the study that were used in the workshop. During the workshop they discussed: (a) what employers need to understand about schools and the transition process, (b) the benefits for schools working with employment provider and, (c) the benefits of employers working with schools (Grossi & Thomas, 2017).

The researchers shared an example of a current school-to-work collaborative in Indiana. The students participating the School-to-Work Collaborative had disabilities (specific learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, and autism) and were struggling to meet diploma requirements. One of the unique aspects of the Indiana School-to-Work Collaborative was having a career coach employed by the CRP embedded in the school. A positive factor pointed out was that by having the career coach on site, coaches gained greater understanding of the school culture and got to know the students and families leading to quality work experiences and employment (Grossi & Thomas, 2017). The study also shared lessons learned from the Indiana School-to-Work Collaborative such as time required for planning, organizing, and working out logistics of work performed by the career coach. The study compared the connections to adult services between the school sites implementing the School-to-Work Collaborative and control sites, which were districts that did not have employment resources on site (Grossi & Thomas, 2017). The findings from the site comparison showed that after the first 2 years of implementation, the schools participating in the School-to-Work Collaborative were more likely to connect students with employment providers and VR.

In the literature review, all three articles stated the importance of interagency collaboration and that collaboration improved student post-secondary outcomes. Collaborating with VR is necessary, as it is often the primary funder for many transition services; however, VR generally does not provide direct services and their role is to serve as the middleman between the student and the CRP. With new funding allowing CRPs to provide Pre-ETS that are free to students and schools, it is no longer necessary to funnel interaction with CRPS through a VR case manager. Direct communication between the special education teachers and CRP may prevent information from being bottlenecked with the extremely busy VR providers. Focus groups with special education teachers and CRPs to increase understanding of Pre-ETS available may be a necessary first step to interagency collaboration because it would create awareness, identify advantages, and reveal potential problems. Before special education transition teachers can improve communication and collaboration with CRPs, it must first be determined if special education teachers are aware of CRPs and the services they provide. Data from the focus groups on special education teachers current understanding of CRPs and the Pre-ETS services available, can lead to the creation of training materials to educate special education transition teachers and provide valuable information to CRPs on what outreach is needed to advertise available services to special education transition teachers.

Purpose Statement and Research Question

The purpose of my study was to gather data on the current understanding of high school special education teachers and CRP staff regarding the direct transition services available through each party. By conducting focus groups with high school special education teachers and CRPs in the three Utah school districts who currently have

contracts in place with CRPs, I sought to expand the scope of the existing research. The research question was: Given three focus groups each consisting of three secondary transition teachers and three CRP professionals, what will participants report as their current understanding of services available for their students, as measured by themes from focus group transcriptions?

Method

Participants and Setting

Five secondary special education teachers and five CRP staff participated in focus groups for this research project. I conducted three focus groups. Participants were invited to attend the focus group designated for their school district/CRP contract location. The criteria for participating in the study was that the participants must be part of the district and CRP that have current Pre-ETS contracts in place. When I started my research the school districts with Pre-ETS contracts in place were Alpine, Tooele, Ogden, Weber, and Salt Lake. The CRPs with approved contracts in place were Ability First, Easter Seals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain, Logistic Specialties INC (LSI), or Columbus Community Center “Columbus Connects.” I selected participants from these school districts and CRP organizations based on their assumed background understanding on Pre-ETS.

To initiate recruitment, I contacted teachers at the designated school districts and staff at the CRPs to share the intent of my research and need for participants to conduct focus groups. The initial email (Appendix A) to the school districts and CRPs for focus group participants shared the purpose of the research, the composition and criteria of the participants for the focus groups, that the research provided anonymity, and that

participants were free to participate or withdraw at any time. Recruitment regulations established by the Utah State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) were followed. I used a polling tool to schedule a focus group time that worked for most participants. Each participant was sent a Qualtrics survey to complete that included consent to participate and demographics (Appendix B). I sent the participants confirmation emails, thanking them for their participation, reminding them of the date and time selected for the focus group, and provided them the Zoom link to the online focus group.

The first focus group I moderated was with two Alpine School District teachers and two Pre-ETS CRP staff from Easter Seals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain. The second focus group had one teacher from Salt Lake City School District and one CRP representative from Columbus Connects. The third focus group consisted of two special education teachers from Weber School District and two staff from Logistic Specialties INC (LSI).

All of the focus groups took place using the online video platform called Zoom®. The participants used a computer of their choice to attend. In the Zoom video chat, at their discretion, each participant had the opportunity to turn on their video camera and use their microphone to respond to focus group questions.

Focus Group

Focus groups are a method to capture the views and experiences of participating individuals in a conversational manner. According to Kitzinger (1995), focus groups are one form of group interview that capitalize on communication between research participants in order to generate data. Focus groups explicitly use group interaction to encourage participants to talk to one another. The method is useful for exploring people's

knowledge and experiences and can be used to examine not only what people think but how they think and why they think that way. The questions are open-ended to allow for fluid discussion between the teachers and CRP staff and for personal experiences to be shared.

Procedures

Each focus group was scheduled for 60-90 min. I began by introducing myself and my role as the moderator. I then explained my research and its purpose. Next, I had the participants introduce themselves by sharing their name and role. I then briefly discussed protocol for the focus groups. I used a PowerPoint, shared on the Zoom screen, with the written protocol:

- One person talking at a time
- Be open to new ideas
- Be vulnerable
- Be engaged- cell phones off
- Be respectful of confidentiality

I prepared five semi-structured questions but allowed myself the flexibility to adjust the order of questions based on group discussion or to ask probing questions or additional questions that occurred as a result of the organic conversations sparked from the original question prompts. The discussion on each question continued until it appeared that the topic was exhausted. The questions and prompts I guided the participants through were:

1. Teachers- What is your experience working directly with community rehabilitation providers (CRP) who are providing services to your students and

CRP staff what is your experience working directly with your student's special education teachers?

2. What would you like to know about (the other)? Go ahead and ask them.
3. What stressors or barriers do you have to deal with in your profession that you would like teachers/CRPs to know about so that they better understand you and your role?
4. How would closer collaboration benefit a student's transition services?
5. I will now give you 10 minutes to work together to generate the top three things you would recommend as a group to strengthen the relationship between CRPs and special education teachers. In 10 minutes, be ready to present your three recommendations to the rest of the group.

At the end of each focus group I summarized the key points of the discussion and asked the participants to confirm that I accurately captured their ideas and gave an opportunity for participants to clarify. To conclude the focus group, I thanked the participants for their time and insight. I let the participants know when the research was expected to be completed and that I would share the final results. The focus groups were recorded in their entirety using the recording system embedded in Zoom. I transcribed the focus group discussion into a spreadsheet (Appendix C) that captured each participants' answers.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the focus group transcriptions to identify themes in the responses to each focus group question. This method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes and patterns within data is called thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic

analysis of focus groups was an appropriate method for this study since there was limited published literature on the topic and the views of special education teachers working directly with CRP staff were not known. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six phases to thematic analysis:

1. Familiarizing yourself with your data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

To complete the phases of thematic analysis I transcribed the recordings and read the transcripts. I created codes for the data then searched for themes and collated the themes to the codes (Table 2). I used the themes to write the final results (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Results

Demographics

Table 1 displays information for special education teachers and CRP staff focus group participants. All the special education teachers who participated in the focus groups had current Utah teaching licenses. Sixty percent of the teacher participants had severe disability endorsements and the other 40% had mild/moderate disability endorsements. The special education teachers had 3 to 25 years working with transition age students. Sixty percent of the teachers reported themselves as a classroom teacher providing full day instruction to students, 20% reported being a classroom teacher providing instruction to students for part of the day or a specific subject, and the other

20% of participants reported their role as a transition specialist working primarily with new teachers. Sixty percent of the teacher participants primarily worked with students in a post-high school setting with students ages 19-21 and 20% of the teacher participants worked with high school students ages 15-18. The teacher participants rated themselves as 80% “somewhat familiar” with Pre-ETS and 20% “familiar”. All teacher participants stated they were allowed direct communication with outside agencies to report on student progress towards IEP goals and 80% responded that they were allowed to initiate services with outside agencies and invite agencies to IEP meetings.

The CRP staff had experience working with transition age students ranging from three to twenty years. Forty percent of the participants reported they primarily worked with students in Middle school/Jr High (ages 12-15 years), High School (ages 15-18 years), and Post-High School (ages 19-21 years). Forty percent of the participants reported they only worked with High School (ages 15-18 years) and Post-High School (ages 19-21 years) students. The other 20% specifically worked with High School students (ages 15-18 years). Eighty percent of the CRP respondents rated themselves as very familiar with Pre-ETS and that they worked with Pre-ETS students on a regular basis or knew what services were available to students. Forty percent of the CRP participants were in administration roles and the other 60% were direct service providers. Eighty percent of the CRPs who participated stated that, in their role, they were allowed to communicate directly with their students’ special education teachers.

Themes

Themes emerged from the three focus groups based on identification, coding, and analysis of the transcripts (Table 2). In the area of experiences working directly with the

other party, the following themes emerged: (a) CRPs were attending more IEP meetings and this was where teachers and CRP staff were interacting, (b) CRPs were coming into the schools, (c) interaction varied depending on the staff, teachers, and school, and (d) overall CRPs and special education teachers had had positive interactions with the other party and reported the experiences lead to customized and individualized services for students. One of the CRP focus group participants stated, “I have spent a lot of time in IEP meetings over the last couple of years. We get invited more frequently now than ever before to the students IEP meeting...” One of the teachers commented, “My CRP was phenomenal, but I know there have been some in the past who didn't really get things going. The good thing right now is that my interaction is that we are part of this new project that focuses on employment for all students. It is really looking at customized employment, which is awesome.”

The CRPs did not have many questions for teachers, but the questions from teachers were similar across focus groups. The themes that emerged from the questions asked from teachers were (a) funding and costs, (b) eligibility and assessments (c) paperwork, and (d) VR requirements and role in Pre-ETS. One of the teachers asked how they could better coordinate efforts between agencies.

So, through the CRPs is there a way that we can kind of unite our efforts better? I know you need to get the students yourself but the reports I get from you I'm like ‘yep I already know that, I've already been doing that with the student for 2-4 years.’ I could have answered the questions and saved some time. Is there a way for us to better work together?

Another teacher expressed their confusion with the roles of CRPs, asking

I think there is still confusion about, and not just with Columbus Connects, but with CRPs, VR, DSPD about who is funding it, who's supporting this area, and who's role and responsibility is it really, because you know we as teachers do what we can, but then also we start doing things that we realize this is actually the CRP role, so I guess, the question would be described in a nutshell 'what is your role and connection with VR and the schools. Where is your link?'

The focus group participants listed many stressors and barriers they would like the other agency to acknowledge in relation to role in Pre-ETS. Several comments reoccurred across focus groups including; (a) finding community partners, (b) administrative buy in, (c) finding job placements that align with student interests, (d) overlap and confusion with paperwork and responsibilities, (e) lack of teacher training on Pre-ETS and CRPs, (f) student transportation, (g) scheduling, (h) lack of student motivation and self-advocacy skills, and (i) red tape within school systems. The overarching themes that these barriers can be categorized into are (a) barriers within the policies and procedures of school systems, and (b) lack of understanding of Pre-ETS by the community, teachers, and students. One of the special education teachers in the third focus group made a comment that really highlighted the system barriers,

...our students are very focused on earning credit and graduating and their grades can be affected when you want to try and take them out of school to do the kind of things that we want to do which are transition activities...you're always having to weigh and balance out the risk, kind of the cost risk benefit, for them missing a day of classes...that really is a system barrier in education is if a student missing a

class than a lot of times they don't want to participate in the transition activity because they don't want to not get credit and not graduate.

In regards to lack of understanding of Pre-ETS one teacher stated,

...They (community partners) have no conceptual understanding of how this is going to work. So, we have this barrier of not only are we trying to support an individual to gain the skills and obtain employment, but we also have the job of educating the community, educating employers about how is this possible. Helping them to gain a vision of it.

Research has shown that outcomes are improved with collaboration (Test et al., 2009). The participants in my research focus groups asked how would closer collaboration benefit a student's transition services? The following themes were that improved collaboration may lead to (a) not repeating work, (b) CRPs and schools working on their areas of strength, (c) not working in silos, (d) sharing of resources, (e) direct communication not sideways, (f) increased understanding of Pre-ETS and CRP resources (g) better outcomes for students, and (h) ability to coordinate with other departments. One of the CRP staff shared a direct benefit she perceived from collaboration on Pre-ETS,

I think the reason this is customized is so that the students benefit from coordinating with the CTE administrator, coordinating with work-based learning, you now are getting their credit hours towards graduation so they're not having to choose between do I do this transition piece and set myself up for the rest of my life, or that takes me out of these classes, or I have to decide sort of between

graduating quicker and doing this. We don't want them to make those choices, because we think that this learning is integrated. So, the idea is, look if you do this, then we will work with your special ed teachers and the CTE and whomever else to make sure that, that work, or effort, or experience translates back into your even on your diploma for example as credit hours.

Another teacher commented on how increased collaboration can lighten the work load by sharing responsibilities:

We work with some teachers where they are doing a great job at providing some of those Pre-ETS services, but maybe they don't have time to do all of them, so we collaborate and we let them do their thing with the ones you do have time for and do really well and we can help with the others that you don't have time for, such as taking individuals out into the community into companies to explore or taking them on college tours which you really don't have time to do, but if teacher does really well with work place readiness, like resumes and applications and how to interview and stuff like that, then do that and you can take that off our plate and we can take job exploration off of your plate.

Each focus group of teachers and CRPs collaborated to create recommendations that could improve communication between parties. These recommendations from on-the-ground practitioners should be considered when creating potential joint trainings or changes to current communication procedures.

Recommendations

The final prompt in the focus groups allowed participants time to work together to generate the top three things they would recommend as a group to strengthen the

relationship between CRPs and special education teachers. The recommendations can be sorted into three overarching themes: (a) improved communication, (b) clarity of roles and responsibilities, and (c) increased awareness of Pre-ETS.

In all three focus groups, communication was recommended to improve relationships between agencies. Specific ways to improve communication included CRP staff contacting the special education teacher any time they began working with a new student, even if that student services were initiated through VR or parent referral. The participants also suggested regular updates on student progress, not just at annual IEP meetings. The focus groups also stated that both parties should make efforts to communicate, but the weight of the communication efforts should be with CRPs as they have more flexibility in their daily schedules. Intake processes may vary from CRP to CRP, but it was suggested that an interview with the special education teacher should be included as part of the initial intake and discovery process.

Another recommendation that overlapped in the different focus groups was the need to clarify roles and responsibilities. A common barrier theme was the frustration in overlapping paperwork and confusion in who was doing what. The focus group participants recommended that a formal roles and responsibility chart be created that included methods for communication and follow up. Special education teachers would also like to better understand how funding and eligibility works for the Pre-ETS program.

The third recommendation was an overall increase in awareness of Pre-ETS and how CRPs can meet student transition needs. When I began my research in Spring 2018 there were only five CRPs with contracts in place with VR in the state of Utah. In the Fall of 2018, the number of contracted CRPs increased to thirteen. While there has been

increase in Pre-ETS services available, based on the focus groups there are still many teachers, schools, and districts who do not fully understand Pre-ETS and CRP roles in providing Pre-ETS services. Both CRP staff and special education teacher focus group participants expressed the desire to have more students access available Pre-ETS resources.

Discussion

Given the results, the findings from this study can add to the research literature on interdisciplinary knowledge held by special educators and CRPs. As such, the findings will help promote future collaboration, information sharing, and potential joint training. The results of this study are not intended to be a representation of every special education teacher and CRP in the state. Instead, the results of these focus groups should be used as a starting point for others to further research ways to improve collaboration between special education teachers and CRP staff to improve student transition outcomes.

Limitations

There are three limitations to consider in this study. First, the sample size of this study is small compared to the total number of educators and CRP staff in the state. Themes identified from a small sample are not expected to be generalizable to a larger population. Themes identified in the current study await future research to assess their generalizability. Second, the focus groups were limited to school districts and CRPs who already had partnerships in place. If teachers in other districts and CRPs who do not yet have agreements with districts in place were interviewed, the themes from the focus group questions could be different. Future research may want to target districts and CRPs who are not contractually obligated to assess degree of collaboration, knowledge of the

other discipline and disciplinary practices, and other variables. Third, the availability of Pre-ETS funds to CRPs is a relatively new program and may not represent barriers experienced as the practice grows more widespread and mature. In Utah, as of October 2018, only three CRPs are currently accessing these funds. However, the Transition Specialist for the state of Utah Board of Education expects this number to grow (L. Gripenotrog, personal communication, August 29, 2018). As more CRPs begin to work directly with school districts, the awareness of services and collaboration between CRP staff and special education teachers may organically improve.

Implications

Districts and CRPs could use the results of these focus groups to create training to improve collaboration between teachers and CRP staff. These trainings could be presented in district or school level professional learning, or at a statewide conference targeted to transition service professionals. Additionally, researchers may use the themes identified in the focus group to conduct further studies on successful ways to implement programs that encourage CRP and special education teacher collaboration in schools. This could lead to studies researching the effects on student outcomes when teachers and CRPs directly collaborate.

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Table 1

Demographics

Teacher Responses	Teacher 1	Teacher 2	Teacher 3	Teacher 4	Teacher 5
Current UT teaching license	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Years of experience	6	6	3	25	15
Mild/moderate, Severe, or Other endorsement	Severe	Severe	Severe	Mild/moderate	Mild/moderate
Role	Classroom teacher providing full day instruction to students	Classroom teacher providing full day instruction to students	Classroom teacher providing full day instruction to students	Classroom teacher providing instruction to students for part of the day or a specific subject	Transition Specialist
Ages of students	Post-High School (19-21)	Post-High School (19-21)	Post-High School (19-21)	High School (15-18)	Other (new teachers)
Familiarity with Pre-ETS	Somewhat familiar	Somewhat familiar	Somewhat familiar	Somewhat familiar	Familiar
Can initiate services and invite outside agencies to IEP meetings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Did not answer
Direct communication allowed regarding student progress	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

CRP Responses	CRP 1	CRP 2	CRP 3	CRP 4	CRP 5
Years of experience	9	6	6	20	3
Primary services provided to students	Individual or 1-1 services, Customized employment, Supported employment, Other (Work-based Learning)	Individual or 1-1 services, Customized employment, Supported employment	Individual or 1-1 services, Other (Pre-ETs)	Customized employment	Individual or 1-1 services
Role	Administration	Direct service provider	Administration	Direct service provider	Direct service provider
Ages of students	Middle school/Jr High (12-15), High School (15-18), Post-High School (19-21)	High School (15-18), Post-High School (19-21)	Middle school/Jr High (12-15), High School (15-18), Post-High School (19-21)	High School (15-18)	High School (15-18), Post-High School (19-21)
Familiarity with Pre-ETS	I work with the Pre-ETS students on a regular basis or know what services are available for students	Somewhat familiar	I work with the Pre-ETS students on a regular basis or know what services are available for students	I work with the Pre-ETS students on a regular basis or know what services are available for students	I work with the Pre-ETS students on a regular basis or know what services are available for students
Direct communication allowed regarding student progress	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Table 2

Coded Themes

Experiences	Questions	Barriers	Collaboration	Recommendations
CRPs come to the school	Funding and costs	Finding community partners	Not repeating work	Sharing contact information
In passing	Eligibility and assessments	Administrative buy in	CRPs and schools working on their areas of strength	Including teacher in intake process
At IEP meetings	Paperwork	Finding job placements that align with student interests	Not working in silos	Quarterly staff meetings with CRPs
Varies based on staff	VR requirements and role in Pre-ETS	Overlap and confusion with paperwork and responsibilities	Sharing of resources	Removing unnecessary paperwork
Positive and supportive		Lack of teacher training on Pre-ETS and CRPs	Direct communication not sideways	Effective method for sharing information
Customized and individualized		Student transportation	Increased understanding of Pre-ETS and CRP resources	More communication
		Scheduling	Better outcomes for students	Clarification of responsibilities
		Lack of student motivation and self-advocacy skills	Ability to coordinate with other departments	Increased visibility of CRPs
		Red tape within school systems		Increased advertising of CRP resources
				Exposure to CRPs

Appendix A

Recruitment Email

Dear School Name/CRP-

Hello, my name is Tabitha Pacheco. I am graduate student at Utah State University in the Special Education and Rehabilitation program. I am planning to conduct research on focus groups with high school special education teachers and community rehabilitation providers. The purpose of this research is to gather data on the current understanding of high school special education teachers and CRPs regarding transition services available to students with disabilities provided by the other party. IRB Protocol #9843. I would like to include 3 (special education transition teachers/CRP staff) from your (district/CRP).

I am looking for participants in this research project who meet the following criteria. The participants must be part of the district and CRP that have current pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) contracts in place. PRE-ETS contracts presuppose that districts and providers have agreed to work with students with disabilities in secondary schools providing transition services. Teachers will be from the five school districts who currently have contracts in place with CRPs. These districts are Alpine, Tooele, Ogden, Weber, and Salt Lake. CRP staff will be from programs that have current contracts in place with these school districts. Teachers from these districts must teach secondary special education. The CRP staff must work for Ability First, Easter Seals-Goodwill Northern Rocky Mountain, Logistic Specialties INC (LSI), or Columbus Community Center "Columbus Connects."

The participant in this research will involve attending one 90-120 min focus group on an online video platform called Zoom. The participant will be expected to have access to a computer with internet access and video and audio capabilities.

Please email me by March 1, 2019 with the name(s) and contact information for any (special education transition teachers/CRP staff) that meet the above criterion. I appreciate your support.

If you have questions about the recruitment process please contact the Principal Investigator at (435) 797-3251 or bob.morgan@usu.edu.

You can reach me at (801) 830-6443 or tabitha.pacheco@aggiemail.usu.edu

Thank you for your help.

Appendix B

Initial Participant Survey

Teacher Demographics

- 1- Do you have a current UT teaching license?
- 2- How many year's experience do have teaching transition age students (14-21)?
- 3- Is your endorsement in severe, mild/moderate, or other disability?
- 4- What best describes your role?
 - a. Classroom teacher providing full day instruction to students
 - b. Classroom teacher providing instruction to students for part of the day or a specific subject
 - c. District level professional
 - d. Transition Specialist
- 5- What age of students do you primarily work with?
 - a. Middle school/Jr High (14-15)
 - b. High School (15-18)
 - c. Post-High School (19-21)
 - d. n/a
 - e. other (describe)
- 6- How would you rate your familiarity with Pre-ETS
 - a. I don't know what Pre-ETS is
 - b. Somewhat familiar
 - c. Familiar

- d. I work with the Pre-ETS provider on a regular basis or know what services are available for my students

7- In your position are you allowed to directly communicate with outside agencies to initiate services and invite them to attend an IEP meeting?
(assuming all confidentiality release forms are in place)

8- In your position are you allowed to directly communicate with outside agencies to discuss student progress on IEP goals (assuming all confidentiality release forms are in place)

CRP Demographics

- 1- How many year's experience do have working with transition age students (14-21)?
- 2- What type of services do you primarily provide to students?
 - a. Individual or 1-1 services
 - b. Customized employment
 - c. Other day programs
 - d. Supported employment
 - e. Other (describe)
- 3- What best describes your role?
 - a. Direct service provider
 - b. Administration
 - c. Other (describe)
- 4- What age students do you primary work with? Please select all that apply.
 - a. Middle school/Jr High (14-15)

- b. High School (15-18)
- c. Post-High School (19-21)
- d. n/a
- e. other (describe)

5- How would you rate your familiarity with Pre-ETS

- a. I don't know what Pre-ETS is
- b. Somewhat familiar
- c. Familiar
- d. I work with the Pre-ETS students on a regular basis or know what services are available for students.

6- In your position are you allowed to directly communicate with your students' special education teacher to discuss progress on IEP goals (assuming all confidentiality release forms are in place)

Appendix C

Focus Group Transcription Sorted by Question

Question One: Teachers- What is your experience working directly with community rehabilitation providers (CRP) who are providing services to your students and CRP staff what is your experience working directly with your student's special education teachers?

Teacher 1: Our voc rehab counselor contracts with different CRP providers and quite often and regularly we have people from these CRP come and help with job development and coaching, but most often job discovery, just recently we had someone come last week. They will come and talk to me about the student and what strengths and weaknesses are for that particular individual and what areas they should be looking for jobs. And then when they do get a job, I probably have more contact because I communicate with them about that job and what sort of accommodations they may need.

Teacher 2: So I've had fairly limited experiences, I mean I have been in voc rehab meetings where CRP 1 is there, I have experience with J.S organization a little bit, but I haven't had a whole lot of contact necessarily with the process, its more in passing, maybe a brief interview with me about the student. I've also noticed that you know that its understandably that community rehabilitation providers want to do their own assessment of the student to get to know them, but there's a lot of stuff that I've already done that might save some time if we work together better.

CRP 1: I would totally agree with that (CRP 2 comment). And the other thing is I have spent a lot of time in IEP meetings over the last couple of years. We get invited more

frequently now than ever before to the students IEP meeting and we are sharing information on current levels together in those meetings, we are discussing goals together in those meetings and so we are able to collaborate better with the students and parent in setting a plan for what the student is doing. And also, one of our goals as a CRP is when we have a student who is in one of our programs, one of our programs we do weekly feedback, and so I try to make sure my staff include the special educator in that weekly feedback so they are in the loop. That doesn't go as well, often as I want it to but it is one of the systems that we are trying to get into place more consistently, that sharing of information that we are getting one regular basis with the special educator and then we are doing discovery with the student then I am in the school talking to them about that they are doing, going and seeing what they are doing on job sites, post high particularly.

Follow up question by moderator: You had mentioned that recently you've been attending more IEP meetings, what do you think has been the change of why either you weren't attending them or why you are going to more now?

I think as we moved into the pre employment transition service and we are working more with the families and more in depth, as some of our other programs were more short-term and we were working with the students just in the community and we weren't spending as much time we are able to educate the families that we can be invited to those meetings, and also because we are talking to the school districts more frequently, I am getting invitations from the special ed teachers to come as well. But also, Voc Rehab, if voc rehab is involved with that student and I am serving that student, I get a lot of heads up about IEP meetings. So, I think it's just improved communication over the last couple of years and just that our services have changed to be a little more in depth. I think people

recognize the value of having us there because we know the student better than we used to.

CRP 2: Because the special education teachers in term of percentage of time spent with the student they usually have the greatest number on that and so for me they are usually my favorite resource because they get to the student when they are not with their parents or in their own space, they are usually in school or a work environment, so as far as getting the information I need for doing my job, they are usually number one on my list.

Teacher 3: I was just at a transition training meeting, my experience has been good- well good for the most part. Last year was when I started working for CRPs in our school to work project. My CRP was phenomenal, but I know there have been some in the past who didn't really get things going. The good thing right now is that my interaction is that we are part of this new project that focuses on employment for all students. It is really looking at customized employment, which is awesome. The ones this year there has been less interaction. Last year was phenomenal, but this year the students that I have been working with, and the person I have been working with is also new, she used to be a probation officer and I know that CRPs have a lot of turnover- this is all new to her as well. but for the most part she is positive and hopeful.

CRP 3: Our experience at Columbus Connect. We got the grant two years ago and it has been renewed for another two years, and the response from teachers, schools, admin has been really positive and supportive, and we really appreciate it and we appreciate our partnership with them, like you said this is a whole new thing. For Columbus we have been around for over 50 years but working with population of 14-21-year old's is new for us and going into the schools and outside the schools and so it has been very good. We

are working with a lot of schools right now and getting a lot of requests to come to IEP meetings right now and come and explain our programs and see if that a fit, it may or not be. We like doing that we go to transition fairs, we go to those and those are starting to crop up everywhere right now. We go to staff meetings, we are invited to go to staff meetings and present our programs at staff meeting. It has been very been positive, I can't think of one thing...although as a former teacher I just have to say I know what your responsibilities are and how much you have to do, Teacher 3 and everybody, you know you're supposed to be doing pre-employment transition services, Pre-ETS, but you don't have time, at least that how it was for me, so it's nice to have some help with that, to help you accomplish your goals for the students.

Follow up question by moderator: You mentioned you have been going to more IEP meeting. Who generally invites you to those?

Teachers. Yes, with our new grant we have been asked to go in the rural populations with 6 counties, I have a staff that just started in December, and man she is going great. There really is a need for transition services everywhere.

Teacher 4: We worked with LSI at our school last school year we had about 10 students in their program our focus with LSI at the time was primarily with getting students job shadow experiences or into the community kind of felt like with our group of students they had a lot of practice with job applications and resumes and had done a lot of those pieces in other courses before they came to us at the high school so we really tried to get LSI to work us on community engagement.

Follow up with moderator: who initiated the relationship or trainings with LSI?

LSI reached out to us, came to our school and offered what services they could provide, then met with our students and discussed their program and what kind of things they could provide and then gave permission slip to those students who were interested so they could engage in the program.

I think that what she is talking about is really different. Because at our schools we had LSI pull students one on one and meet with them and develop a plan for them to get in the community and they did that during an academic support class we had for those students so that they wouldn't miss their core content classes. So, they were really flexible to come during that time and then they would pull students out during that time and work with them, they were able to get students into job shadow placements and out into the community. And then what Teacher 5 has been doing- she is with our post-high at the ATC. She's been offering workshops that LSI has provided as I understand it. So those workshops have been daylong things that involve resume writing and career exploration, but it's a little different model then what we used at Two Rivers.

Teacher 5: We have one more session with LSI, we've been working with LSI and I echo what Pam said, it has been, like they come to the schools and kids show up for workshops and they've done like resume writing and all those job things, I kind of echo what Teacher 4 said.

CRP 4: Just to take one step back or look at it from a 50,000-foot view since I am not a career advocate, CRP 5 is our lead career advocate, when we started providing Pre-ETS, gosh now we are in our 3rd year. Really what we tried to do was customize it for the LEAs as well. So we started at the school districts and then their sort of Special Ed, and CTE and WBL supervisors gave us the ability to go customize for the teachers as well so

it's definitely a different, I wouldn't say tiered approach, but customized for each different institution that CRP 5 just alluded to, but then customized for the individual student as well, and then we don't say here a class everybody come to us, because we know that's a barrier, so the our intervention is designed is to remove barriers to those skills development, for teachers as well hopefully.

CRP 5: We did reach out to Ogden and said this is what we would like to do, but I think what was attractive to Ogden High is that we were coming to the school with them during their life skills class or prep period or something along those lines. And I think delivering services during that time period made it easy, and we try to figure out transportation to different place because that can be one of the largest barriers most of those students are facing. So, I think that may have been one of the attractive things about what our program offers.

And at Ogden high we do very much the sort of one on one intense mentoring and our main focus is to get that job shadow so we can get them out in the community. With Sam it is a little bit different because we kind of took a focus group, we still do interactive they are still allowed to, in fact the more participation and back and forth the better. We've really seen more of the group idea is that they build on 1 an another but they are opening up more social and definitely that self-advocacy piece where they are learning to engage and make eye contact and make conversations which there were a couple of them who wouldn't do that in the beginning. So I feel like those are the important pieces to highlight in the group side, because the focus on more of the other four services, the self-advocacy, the career exploration, those pieces, not just the job shadowing. However, we did still talk about those.

I think the thing about LSE is that we have the flexibility to create a model and still delivery transition services in a way that works for the demographic we are working with. So if that's 2 rivers, if that's a high school we work wither work independently 1-1 providing those mentoring services or in a group, but it's still us coming to them to provide the service with a professional being the career advocate and being able to have those open discussions has been a benefit for both of those programs.

Question Two: What would you like to know about (the other)? Go ahead and ask them.

Teacher 1: So I have a questions that's kind of related to that (Teacher 2 first question), and I'm not even 100% sure about this, but I've heard that the assessment process that Voc Rehab, and I don't even know that it's the CRP that does it, I think its Voc Rehab that goes through this assessment process, that it costs around like \$500 is what I've heard and that's one thing that another teacher at my school has been frustrated with, similar to what Teacher 2 was saying, because we've done so many transition assessments that we have in their IEP file that it would be awesome if we could save that \$500 for something that the student needed more. I'm not exactly sure what, but it would be cool if we could collaborate more. But is that accurate? Does it cost \$500 for that test? That would be my question.

(In response to CRP 3) I think it would be more successful if we could because obviously the teachers in most situations have been working with the student for a number of years and knows that student well and the particular things they might need help with and I think it would be a much more useful experience if that was allowed and that was able to be included in that process.

(In response to CRP 3) One thing that I think for the purposes of the conversation that we are having right now that I think would be really valuable is we do quarterly evaluations of, you mentioned early soft skills and we have a whole list of different soft skills that we work on at the job sites and we have our job coach evaluate and determine a summative sort of how well they are doing on a scale and we loads and loads of data that's collected on those students on a daily basis at multiple job sites and I think that information could be extremely valuable to show how they are performing in a variety of different scenarios and settings.

Teacher 2: So, through the CRPs is there a way that we can kind of unite our efforts better? I know you need to get the students yourself but the reports I get from you I'm like yep I already know that, I've already been doing that with the student for 2-4 years. I could have answered the questions and saved some time, Is there a way for us to better work together?

(In response to Teacher 1) I'd like to add on to that. There was recent work strategies assessment done on of my students by Easter Seals, they identified some key areas in my student, that at least to me, those are areas that they are seeing in an unfamiliar location, that would happen in any unfamiliar location because that's what I've seen. But once they get familiar those deficits go away, but you weren't able to see that in your limited work strategy assessment whereas I could just say, they're ready these barriers go away if we just stick the student in a spot where they can just work in and start to get familiar. So that was just a recent thing that happened that I've been thinking about too.

CRP 1: (in response to Teacher 2 questions)- Yes, one of the things that's challenging is that for that sort of collaboration is that voc rehab requires us to do, like they authorize an

assessment for us so we can get to know the student ourselves, but I do think we can make an interview with the teacher probably part of that, but what I'm wondering is if that would be better, that conversation with the teacher, would be better off after we've done the assessment, so we can say this is what we found and then you can tell us we have been doing this for 4 years and this is not and we are still not past this point or this is where we started and this is where we are now. So, I think that's information that would be really helpful for us if we added that in as part of our assessment process and we could add into our report, because we don't have that, and students aren't going to give us that information about what they are doing in school in a very thorough way.

Follow up by moderator: I just want to clarify that teacher interview is not a standard part of the intake process?

Correct. It's part of what we are doing in Pre-ETS its part of what we do in the discovery process later, but it's not part of the reports Jake is talking about that come from our PEER Connections Program which is the short-term program that is we only see the students out in the community for a few weeks, so that's one of the things that we have never thought to do, I've never thought to do since we are looking so specifically at soft skills for employment and we have a very specific focus and I never thought to include a teacher interview of part of that. But I think that would be really great information for us.

(In response to Teacher 1 questions) Yes, so it's called a Work Strategy Assessment and that's one of the things they contract the CRPs to do. So, VR doesn't do that, they send the authorization to us and that's exactly what Teacher 2 is talking about when he talked about the reports he is getting from the assessments, is that authorization for a work strategy assessment. So one of the things I would be curious to know that you guys can't

answer is when VR authorizes a work strategy assessment they require for that to be 8-10 hours of time and what I don't know and would like to find out now, is can we use some of that time to collaborate with the teacher? So that we can do the assessment we need to do specific to our program, but so we can bring in your information cuz right now we are spending most of that time with the student specifically.

(In response to Teacher 2) And I think that's excellent because one of the things we are assessing is in unfamiliar situations how are they performing. But your right we don't have the longer-term vision of what happens once they get settled. Both of that will be important to know as we start doing job seeking. What accommodations will they need once they get settled, and what can we expect as far as independent in that setting when they do get familiar and that's the information, we don't have that you don't have, and I think that's an excellent point.

I'd like to know what type of transition assessment you are doing with students, because usually when I ask teachers what I get is, "Oh we are doing Utah Futures or O*Net" and the answers I'm getting when I ask those questions seem pretty basic or superficial, and I know you have more information than that so can you give me some examples of what your assessments really look like?

Teacher 3: I don't necessarily have too many questions, because I am familiar with Columbus Connects, so just a history, before, the SCORE academy, we used to work with Columbus, Salt Lake District did, but then we sort of went away with that, and that is where SCORE academy came in. We created this and so, however where Columbus connects provides more of these employment opportunities is more a of a new thing, some of our students do participate in Columbus Connects, but from my understanding

there if. Columbus connects is a VR program, but if they fully connect with VR then they can no longer be in Columbus connects? I guess that's where my confusion is. We have some students who are in Columbus Connects, but then we connect them with VR for employment, and then they are no longer eligible for Columbus Connects. I think there is still confusion about, and not just with Columbus Connects, but with CRPs, VR, DSPD about who is funding it, who's supporting this area, and who's role and responsibility is it really, because you know we as teachers do what we can, but then also we start doing things that we realize this is actually the CRP role, so I guess, CRP 3- the question would be described in a nutshell what your role and connection with VR and the schools. Where is your link?

(In response to CRP 3) Yeah it does. So, when they come to our program, we have a spreadsheet that outlines who is their DSPD coordinator, who is their voc rehab coordinator, who is their CRP if they are already connected, because some come connected, some don't, so we try to fill in so where are the gaps. So, then we give the paperwork to parents and say, so here is what you need to do to connect let us know, invite them to IEPs. So we did have students who were identified as Columbus Connects, and we were like what does that mean they don't have VR services, then we talk to parents and they were like unaware, so we ask are you receiving services, and they are like no, so I was like how are these identified as being Columbus Connect, yet not participating in services? Again, how don't know how that happened, so it was just trying to sort through all this information.

We had a few students, we got our list from everyone, so DG sent us a list of people and who their caseworkers are from VR, and then there was a list of people for Columbus

Connects, however the parents had not filed out the application for voc rehab, so that's why I was confused. Why were they identified as Columbus Connects, yet parents had not gone through voc rehab yet? I don't know how that happened, or somehow before our program started they were identified, again this is only our 3rd year as a program, so we have students who could have been in transition before us, so I wonder if he was identified with Columbus before us and that connection was never fully made, because we switched over to our program.

CRP 3: Good question, not easy to say in a nutshell because it is every evolving because it is new and there was some confusion in the first two years, I would say of who is eligible and who is not eligible and that and now, that's a really good question. I like to tell parents who have questions about stuff like this- Pre-employment services are a great way to start what comes next. And our relationship with voc rehab is that basically, they contracted out to us, like the other CRPS to provide these services for students ages 14-21 with disabilities, that being said, we have a process that whenever we get a referral of a name of a student, we vet that through voc rehab. We just provide the name and they get back to us to let know if they can be in our program, Columbus Connects, or maybe they are already with another CRP and they need to be with that CRP or maybe they are in plan with Voc Rehab. If that is the case, that is not a problem, because all voc rehab does is just write Columbus Connects or Easter Seals or whatever CRP they want to use, they just write that in the students plan and then get the signature from the student and guardians, and then we just start doing our program, so they can still be, so here the confusing part. So, they are either not connected with voc rehab, but they are potentially eligible for voc rehab, so they get approved to be in our program. So, they are not in voc

rehab, or they are in voc rehab and in our plan with voc rehab and voc rehab write us in their plan to prepare them, to get them preparation for that. what they cannot be is on the wait list for voc rehab, it is kind of confusing. But now there is not a huge wait list. So, they cannot be in voc rehab or in voc rehab, but not in that waiting period, does that kind of...

(In response to Teacher 3) Right. I'm kind of confused too, I've worked with a couple of students from West High, we don't have any right now. We haven't gone into the classrooms, but we have done individual services, so I don't know, that's interesting. Even if you say now that you have any students from West High, because right now we don't have any from West High in Columbus Connects.

Teacher 4: I just wanted to mention too, that I think one of the huge barriers for students particularly the high school and junior high age students is to get to community resources. I teach at an alternative high school. A lot of our students don't have a lot of resources. A lot don't have drivers licenses, they don't have money for buses, they don't live near bus lines, the don't have families who will take them. So to refer them to community agency is often not super effective, because first of all they can't get there and then trying to schedule appointments after school hours it just gets really complicated, so having an agency that is willing to come to the school removes a huge barrier right at the get, because then students can access them during the school day and students who wouldn't typically access an agency are more willing to do that because they see it in this sort of safe place. and that these people are just part of the team and the don't have to drive across town and go to voc rehab or Weber County mental health, because those types of appointments often don't get followed up on. So, I think if you're

looking at barriers, one of the barriers LSI has removed is the ability to come into the setting where the students are.

Teacher 5: In my opinion with the relationship with LSI coming into the post high to work with those workshops, I've now had more contact with other LSI people, not necessarily CRP 5 about other students that need help from their end where post high could help service them, so it's not only just up and out into other services that we can provide to help their students that we necessarily didn't have at the beginning so we can try to coordinate more services.

CRP 4: In response to moderator follow up: Yes, Yes, and Yes, all the above. And I think that comes to the customization piece right so it's the relationship between the teacher, because the teacher has the relationship with the students, so it can be put on the transition plan, it can be at a 504 meetings, it can look like whatever works for that particular student and that teacher.

(In response to Teacher 5) And I think to that point I'm going to take it off tangent, I think part of the beauty of it to that point the reason why this works is because we also pull the employer in, so it's really this partnership model. It's not sort of this cookie cutter this is the curriculum, and this is how we do it and everybody follows suit. It's really a partnership.

And I actually think that also "coolifies" it because it's not this sort of labeled program that's not I have to go to this thing that I don't want anybody to know about, right? It's done in a way that kids are excited about it, because they are the ones leading it, right? Because they are the ones deciding what they want to do and how intensive services they

want, so its supported by the team approach but it's really guided or directed by the students themselves.

CRP 5: We do, do so much communication with these teachers, and these teachers are the above and beyond ones, I mean they know their student by name, they know what their individual needs are, they are having communication with us on the back side so I think that between Teacher 5 and Teacher 4 we get definitely lots of input and it's on a constant regularly updating basis, so I don't feel like we don't ever have to check in they are already there giving us what we need and following up with support.

Moderator follow up: How do you guys communicate? In person, email, phone, shared document?

Questions Three: What stressors or barriers do you have to deal with in your profession that you would like teachers/CRPs to know about so that they better understand you and your role?

Teacher 1: So, going right along with what Teacher 2 is saying that's definitely an obstacle I have noticed as well. It is very challenging to find partners in the community that are willing to let us work at their location. But I have found that that's usually the case when we are trying to find a long-term placement, But I have found more success when trying to do things like job shadowing for 1 or 2 or 3 experiences or a couple of, I think we called them in our class, situational assessments where we would put them in a situation at a place of their interest, usually but not always, employers would be a little more willing to handle those situations, or like a job tour. So I've been trying to do a little bit more of those things, but also I have found that in so doing that makes my

administration more nervous and there is all that red tape and it's hard to get through the barriers of administrators that think of all the reasons why it wouldn't work, instead of all the reasons why it could work. Those have been my obstacles.

Follow up question by moderator: In your school who is responsible for finding community partners for job placement? As teachers can you just go out and ask business or is there one person at the district office? Or do you have to get permission from your principal before you even make an approach?

So for us, and I'd be interested to hear Teacher 2's answer on this too, for us most of the time it is the teachers building relationships with employers and we try to be really grateful and like make little gifts and constantly be checking on them to make sure our relationship is sound, but if I try going through our administrator, again, sometimes it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission kind of thing. I'd be interested to know what Teacher 2's answer is. But yeah, usually it's the teacher in our type of setting.

(In response to Teacher 2) It's definitely that networking principle and I've seen some of that too at our school, some of our staff that have been at our school have helped us maintain or build that network.

Teacher 2: (In response to CRP 1) It is such a difficult time to find a community partner and we find a new one we try to do everything we can to support that. This year midway through the year we got a connection with Marriott, so we got a Marriott contact where there are a lot of people who have interest in that. It is a huge barrier and huge stressor. I'd love to be able to see what the student is interested in and get as community partner to let us come in and let us learn skills in that type of environment. I think the hardest thing

is that those community partners, even though we have tried to explain it to them as simply as possible, still don't grasp the whole concept of it. It's not us coming in and doing their work, it's them letting us use their environment to teach skills and any work that does get done is just a bonus for them. And they're like expecting us to come in and do the work, just trying to get those community partners on board. I think with all of us trying to get that going is a benefit, but I still don't think that's perfect. I do have one of my crews, that we call customized employment, but it's not really customized employment as we know it. Where instead of actually practicing the skills in the environment they are actually going on informational tours going to places that they are interested in, interviewing actual employees, getting a feel for the environment, but we can't actually get them in there working on skills, but that's the closest we can actually get them in there working on their interests.

(In response to Teacher 1) It is either teachers, we also have some staff that are pretty dedicated. I mentioned the Marriott placement. One of my staff's daughter started working at the Marriott and my staff was like okay let me talk to your manager now, "Hey here's an opportunity" So my principal is a little more understanding, my principal is just over my transition school he doesn't have the responsibility of any other types of special ed teachers so he is full for anything we are presenting within reasons, obviously he assesses any dangerous situations, but I think we as teachers are pretty good at weeding out any of the dangerous situations, but most of it is, sometimes we even have a parent contact that we start developing that relationship as a school through our teachers and aides that we call job coaches.

CRP 1: One thing that I have noticed lately, I've had to do a lot more discovery than I have previously, and as I go out and observe students in the job sites in schools one of the things I find challenging is that job sites seems to be negotiated with the school and seem to be basically kind of the same site, and so when I am trying to discuss the students interest in the site, I have one student that goes to a site every week and he is completely disengaged every time he is there because he is not interested and it has no bearing on his interests at all and then at another site he does a little bit better which does give us information, but my curiosity is, and its a barrier for both of us, is to find work experience where we can assess a student on their interests and skills, and not based on who we can get a job site setup with, and I would love to hear the teachers perspective on that.

I think as a CRP we face similar obstacles, it's one of the things in our PEER Connections program, we have specific sites that we go to and they volunteer for a period of time and we are assessing and we get some good information and assessments, but it's not specifically related to their interest and we don't get as much information as we could if we had more freedom as far as sites go and certainly the red tape is something that I as a CRP is frustrating because we do have more freedom to do some of those things, but we are often bound by what we can get authorized through voc rehab or what the school is comfortable with. As a CRP we aren't particularly bound by a lot of red tape because we are private nonprofit, we have a lot of freedom to do what we feel needs to be done but we also have to manage funding. So, if we don't have an authorization to fund it, even though we might have time and skill then we can't offer that service. So that is definitely a barrier that all of us face.

Follow up question by moderator: Do you ever make recommendations to the schools of community partners that teachers could go to do some of this job shadowing or on-site job training?

I have never had the opportunity to do that, and it probably wouldn't have occurred to me that as I'm making connections for my own students and doing informational interviews and going out in the community. No, it would not have occurred to me before you asked that question. Melanie, what do you think?

CRP 2: I have an answer for this one, it seems like a lot of frustration runs in how much overlap there is, especially in paperwork and some of these things that we have to pay for and so that's a stressor and a barrier I think in how much get caught up in the legislation of disability resources. So, there are some things that are just required to do that has been put there to protect the student.

(In response to moderator follow up) I was just thinking that usually when we find someone who is a good fit and is really flexible and works well with those kinds of students as an employer, that news spreads quickly. So, they either get burned out or we've used them too many times, or there are too many service providers that are using that particular employer. that's just what my experience has been.

Teacher 3: I mean I feel like CRPs know what teachers go through. They know the stresses that we go through. I never feel like a CRP doesn't understand. I think a lot of it, back to what we talked about, it comes down to whose role and responsibility is this. CRP 3 mentioned teachers invite her to IEPs, again whose role is that? Is it the teachers or the parents? I always tell my parents if you have a CRP invite them, if you go to DSPD

invite them, if you have a VR counselor invite them. you invite your neighbor is you want to. Anyone is a part of this individuals life and their decisions invite them to the IEP, and so to answer that question about what stressors or barriers do I have to deal with in my profession as a teacher, I feel like we kind of face the same barriers which are, working with individuals with disabilities, especially those who are maybe more severe to moderate, who people think I've never seen someone with this type of disability in employment, so they have no conceptual understand go this is going to work. So, we have this barrier of not only are we trying to support and individual to gain the skills and obtain employment, but we also have the job of educating the community, educating employers about how is this possible. Helping them to gain a vision of it.

Follow up by moderator: Teacher 3 mentioned a barrier of finding job sites has that been a barrier? Are there people who are not willing for students to come in?

Yeah, so I think test and no. For example, being with the school system still, we are providing job training opportunities, so typically they are the same businesses, where it gets tricky is when you want to customize employment. When you want to branch out beyond bagger at the grocery store, cleaning tables, you're a greeter, you're going to rip off ticket stubs. So it is when we go into these creative areas, so my student wants to work at a bakery and help with the baking, but they have down syndrome and not really quick about things, so that is where it gets tricky finding those supports and heling the employer to see what is possible, because let's be honest. We all know of employers who all need extra help here, but no one wants to work for 1-2 hours a week. But guess what we have this task force that really some can only work 1-2 hours a week and they want that opportunity. So really, it's just helping the employer see the possibilities and find out

are their needs and who can we meet those needs, and really, it's not us, it's the individuals we are working with. How can we take their strengths and align them with a good employer, because the reality is all of us with any of our jobs, people gave us the chance even though we didn't have the skills for the job, but we were given the opportunity to learn and to grow into these positions, right?

CRP 3: Ditto. I don't know what else to add or what I can add to that.

Follow up by moderator: Do you ever offer trainings for teachers on finding customized employment or do you just work with students in your program?

We do not train the trainer so to speak, or we don't train teachers, but part of our program, which is a beauty of Columbus Connects, I mean all of the CRPS that are doing Pre-ETS we all are doing a great job and have a great relationship with each other, but all of our programs we do things differently, we have different focused. One thing about Columbus Connects which is really fun is we try to find the student a short term - since this is pre-work experience-work placement, a paid internship not in a group setting where they are going out with other students, but actually just them in a company in their career interests. So, we are exploring their interests before and then going to companies within their career interests. Talking to people in that career or taking them on college tours within their interest field, and then we try to find them a short-paid internship within that career interest, and customized, like you said Teacher 3, is where it gets fun. I used to work in customized employment and I absolutely know what it's like to walk into a company and have them go "ohhh we already have enough of those people working here" Really, you know. So, I have to say with the Columbus Connects program we are doing the community has been phenomenal in opening up for these paid internships. So, it's

been really fun for us as staff, because like you mentioned it's just trying to get people in as a bagger or this or that. We are really looking at their interest and going into companies like that or related-- we can't always find something in gaming, but we find something else and relate it to that. The community has been really great. We currently have a student in an engineering firm, at a software development, at an IT place, at a bakery, and one at a bird sanctuary. It's really interesting and that's what keeps our jobs fresh and fun, because we are trying to find jobs that are in their interests. So that's a little about what we do and the reception we have gotten from companies. And we work people of all abilities so yeah in your setting Teacher 3 it is a little bit tougher, but we still have worked with students with more moderate to severe disabilities to savant level. That's what makes our job exciting and fun to work with students of all abilities but still in areas they are interested in.

Teacher 4: I agree that kids are more willing to do it in the school setting and with support than independently. And another barrier I see, and it's more of a system barrier it's not really related to CRPs or LSI specifically, one barrier in a school setting, to any kind of change to schedule, is always credit earning and graduation. So, our students are very focused on earning credit and graduating and their grades can be affected when you want to try and take them out of school to do the kind of things that we want to do which are transition activities. Like we had a couple students that like job shadowed a veterinarian well that means missing classes for an entire day so you're always having to weigh and balance out the risk kind of the cost risk benefit for them missing a day of classes you know some teachers are more willing to work with those kind of things than others, so that really a system barrier in education is if a student missing a class than a lot

of times they don't want to participate in the transition activity because they don't want to not get credit and not graduate. It's a difficult thing getting students into the community and that's something we have to work through somehow.

So, I just have a quick question probably CRP 4 or 5 could answer this, but in Weber school district where Teacher 5 and I both are, I think maybe the district directed you to our two schools, I'm not sure if they approved contracts for other schools. But I know last year they had to work with Two Rivers and Teacher 5, and I know they were kind of piloting it in the district and I don't know if there is a memorandum of understanding but I think that is in process so I think some of those things are district negotiated, just some information for you.

Teacher 5: But more than them having access, I don't think that's a barrier on your part CRP 5. I think that's a barrier on the confidence and the motivation and the willingness of the student to put themselves out there independently without the support of someone like Teacher 4 or I. That's what I was trying to say. Like if kids can't come when I'm working, I think some are less likely to pursue and do it on their own because they have that relationship. I don't know maybe Teacher 4 you can explain it better than I am.

I think another barrier not necessarily with LSI but with community resources in general is knowing how to access them. So, my background this is the first time I have not been in the traditional school setting. I've spent 15 years in junior high and then mentoring new teachers the last 3 years. I know I've had many parents say to me to their 9th graders, "I don't know what to do" and you give them these names, but I haven't really known how to hook them up either. So, its education provided to the teachers, so we know how to hook the parents up with the resources in the mainstream schools before the kids are

graduating before. 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th grade I think that is a huge, huge barrier and we are working on that, because parents don't know how to do that.

CRP 4: But I think just one thing to add to that, I think that's why it's a customized role, right? Because it is to remove barriers. So, if that it is indeed a barrier, which it is, I agree and concur, I have so much respect for teachers because they have so much on their plates, beyond students' learning, right or at least learning academics, literacy, mathematics, right and numeracy. So, I guess my thought is we try to be a resource to the teachers too, so that teachers don't have to know how to access resources. Or if we access resources for one student, we can share that with teachers so that the next time they can then be sharing that if they see a trend or that as a specific need. Its not one of the tracked outcomes if you will of the program but it's certainly the intervention design was intentionally that way so that there could so it would yield these other sorts of benefits other than just providing Pre-ETS.

Follow up by moderator: I know Teacher 4 and 5 work in transition settings, but do you ever reach out to the other more mainstream high schools?

Yeah, again its customized for the school district and what they would like to see. For example, our contract was extended to be statewide, so I went down to the St. George area and they are responsible for the schools that educate the Warren Jeff's young people. So, you know one of their main focuses was this might be a really great way, so they are not a traditional student with disabilities, but they need significant help and they are eligible for Pre-ETS. so that's what we do. CRP 5 has been phenomenal at reaching out to CRP 5 help me out here, some of teen centers that offer education, rehab centers, trying to provide resource Pre-ETS to the youth in these non-traditional settings. So, it's anyone

and everyone. And again, because it is customized, we ask the schools and the districts where do you want us to focus our efforts. It's not just only limited there. Of course, once the word gets out, CRP 5 walks in and everyone knows here and like it's my turn.

(In response to Teacher 4) so I don't know if that's a question, but yes and a lot of times just to be clear on this, it's not just well where do we have the low hanging fruit, sometimes it is, hey we have 75 seniors and we want you to meet with any of them who want to get on a transition plan. A lot of times its, wow this is a new program and we are going to go with the teacher we know is the best teacher. You know that has those follow up skills. So, it just completely depends on the district and what we do is we will go in and say look here are a couple of options for you and here is how it has worked best and it gets their juices flowing, but its typically directed by. We want to be an additional resource, we don't want to be a new thing, we just want to be the glue that binds, so to speak.

CRP 5: We do try and fit it during the school day, there have been occasions and we haven't really have an opportunity to utilize this as much with Teacher 5 as we have with Teacher 4, in the past, but there are time we will go and meet with them at a coffee shop or a library at a later time if that works for them. But I can see where Teacher 5 is coming from, because we definitely encourage them to have a job no matter where that comes from but helping them engage into their school programs to better themselves. So I can absolutely see where that would come into play for them, it hard to negotiate that time, and where we are active in so many place it hard, more so because one day we are in Ogden, one day we are in Layton, one day we are here, if they had more access to us I think that would probably solve those problems.

I absolutely would agree with Teacher 5 on that. I have so many teachers who say "hey this a mom, this a phone number, can you reach out to them. Because I've given them your information and they aren't getting in touch with you." So, I do see, and I think part of that generational piece, because obviously if the student can't reach out independently their seeing that on the parental level because that parent isn't reaching out to us. So, I'm definitely, I'm on Teacher 5 side 100%. I get more of those conversations everyday of hey, I will tell the best one I've ever gotten. I did have one parent say to another parent in a completely different school, "hey my kids signed up with LSI this is what they are doing, and it's been phenomenal." And that parent reached out to me which I thought was completely out of the norm. So, I absolutely see what Teacher 5 is saying. If they don't see their parents doing it, the student's not going to do it either.

The other side to that is we currently have 5 high schools that you know they house 7th-12th graders so there is definitely access there to what they need not necessarily in Ogden district there is pretty straight forward but throughout the different counties when we are in there we obviously like to serve their most in need which is going to be their seniors. Most of Davis county we are only working with their juniors and we are kind of seeing how that is preparing them for their senior year and picking the necessary classes to do that credit like Teacher 4 was talking about to make sure they got enough so they are headed in the right direction. But then we do have the 9th and 10th graders who are coming on board and it's more the self-advocacy and career exploration. What do you want to do? How are you going to get there? And then you know What does that consist of and what does that plan look like for you? so they are definitely there of all ages.

Question Four: How would closer collaboration benefit a student's transition services?

Teacher 1: One thing that I think would be really cool, I'm frustrated because we have this whole thing in Alpine School District about not promoting anything that is for profit so it's really hard to know and a lot of people will come in from such and such company and I'll have no idea what that company is, I would love it if we could get rid of this ridiculous- so I could know what the pros and cons of each of them are, but it seems like this very hush hush we can't really about that here because it's for profit. So, a lot of times when people come, I don't really know who they are or and I feel like that could be a barrier that doesn't need to be there.

Teacher 2: I'd like to say something about that. So, I think that there are certain things that we as a school can do that might free up some of the CRPs time so that they can focus on things that the school can't do. Like they can work with a student after school hours, whereas we can't. whereas if there is somethings that maybe they are working with a community partner that doesn't only have time from of between the 9 to 2:00 depending on the timeframe that people come in, maybe we can do some of the work that can be done during the school day, whereas they can focus more of their time on what they're getting paid for on things that we just can't focus on as a school. I think we have to have a conversation about what those things are.

I have a quick question. How--usually I wait on voc rehab to tell me if they have a CRP who wants to be involved in the IEP. I put that on Voc Rehab because I don't know who the CRP is for the student or if the student even has a CRP or are at that point. What would your recommendations for me as a teacher be to be able to find that out--so I can

kind of skip the middleman of voc rehab and actually be able to invite them. Because I find most times when I leave it up to voc rehab, only voc rehab sometimes shows up.

CRP 1: (In response to Teacher 1) I've certainly had experience with that. Where we will go in and talk with a school and the school administrator will say, "We can't share information about your program because then it seems like we're promoting yours over somebody else's and we can't say that yours is better than somebody else's." So even sharing information about CRPs with students from the schools seems to be a barrier and so, we kind of cut out administration and went straight to teachers for a while and saying this is what we have, this is what we are offering. It helps that we are one of the Pre-ETS providers under the Voc Rehab contract so that's something we can say, "look this is Pre-ETS and there are 13 providers and are one of them. We would love to get information to your students about all of the providers and let people choose." Even that is better than no information at all. But I definitely thinking having more direct conversations like this would be beneficial. Because like Teacher 2 was saying, there are things that the school learns that we also learn, and we could just share that information and go seek out some other information or some other aspect of the student. The other thing that I think is challenging with not having good collaboration, is that CRPs do have more flexibility, so if we have authorization through voc rehab to do discovery or they are in the Pre-ETS program we have a lot of flexibility to take that student out and go talk to employers and those type of things and we should be as CRPS coming back to the teachers and saying I know this is what you are doing inside your job setting at school, this is what we learned outside of that setting by going and talking to employers with that student. So, I do think

that direct collaboration rather than this sort of sideways collaboration where we send notes or we send an update, that's not really the same thing as having a conversation.

(In response to Teacher 2) One of the things I have been doing with parents is having that exact conversation, so when they say "I have an IEP coming up," or most frequently what happens is I have a parent say, "Oh we just had an IEP," and then they'll start talking about it and say "I totally should have invited you." And then they will invite me to the next one. But I'm trying to have that conversation sooner with the parents, but I think you could have a similar conversation with the parent and student and let them know if you are working with someone other than at the school, and your voc rehab counselor, they can come to the meeting. You can have anybody that you feel would be productive in that meeting come with. So, I think that if we're both educating the parent and student on who they invite to the meeting it's a good self-advocacy skill for the student, but it will also help you get to know what they are doing if you are asking the student or parent what services they are getting. The other thing is as CRPS we could do a better job of letting the teacher know, "hey we are working with this student." Because when we do an intake, we are asking what school they go to, and who their teacher is and then sometimes it just stops there. So as CRPS we could do a better job of reaching out and just saying. "As an FYI I'm working with this student if you need anything, let me know." So, I think both sides of that could be better.

Follow up by the moderator: CRP 1 just to clarify, with the new Pre-ETS contract funding, does the teacher have to go through Voc Rehab to get a student working with a CRP or could a teacher refer a family directly to you, or could a teacher reach out directly to Easter Seals Goodwill, or do they have to have Voc Rehab be the middleman?

So, for Pre-ETS the student has to be potentially eligible for voc-rehab. So, if they are not yet in voc-rehab the teacher has to reach out to us directly. Well even if they are in Voc-rehab they could reach out to us directly, but we still have to go through voc-rehab if they are enrolled. So, yes, the teacher could refer the family or reach out to us. I have a couple of teachers that have just this last semester I went and met with them and we talked about release of information and how that works, and they have been talking-to the family about us and then sending them directly to me with a release of information. That has been helpful. I certainly think the direct referral is much better, even if they are a voc rehab client because we have, I believe we have more time than you. You guys are really busy and not to say that I'm not busy because I really am, but I think that we have more time dedicated to meetings with voc rehab and getting things setup like that. So even if they are a voc rehab client I think the direct referral is the way to go, because we can help navigate all of that as far as intake goes.

Teacher 3: I can speak to that, so it benefits it because there is not this drop off when they leave the school system and so what we they to do with our program and we are very clear with our parents, when they are in the high schools they have their 7 hour school do plus time on the bus before and after. So, some of them get on the bus before 7 am and then they don't get home until almost 4, so it's a really long day. But the reality is, once they become adults, they aren't going to have this long program of supports. Our program is from 9-2, so it's only 5 hours. And part of the reason we did that is so that we really can be transition. that we can help prepare parents and families for look this is the reality. day programs are going to be shorter than you expect and how do you fill that time. And again, to show them why employment is so important, what do you do if you can't work

full time, so we look at day programs, but what if you can't work with day programs, so we look at employment, but what do we with their free time? So, what has been really nice about this collaboration is that we can prepare our students for what is to come, not only in the structure and design of our program, but then with that it fosters this gradual fade out. So, we tell parents, if a student gets employment, that trumps what we are doing. I have this student that only comes 3 days a week because he is working and that's what we want, we want that gradual fade out. Sure, there will be students who will need more support, like our students in wheelchairs, toileting, diapering, you know, longitudinal they are going to be in more of a care setting, simply because that's what they need. They simply need to exist to survive. It's just a basic part of their life and who they are and so they will need more supports, but then there are those that we want o gradual fade out into those adult services, is that those natural supports are there.

CRP 3: Collaboration is always good. We work with a few schools and teachers and I think it is really beneficial. We all know what the 5 Pre-ETS services are that we need to be providing. So we work with some teachers where they are doing a great job at providing some of those Pre-ETS services, but maybe they don't have time to do all of them, so we collaborate and we let them do their thing with the ones you do have time for and do really well and we can help with the others that you don't have time for, such as taking individuals out into the community into companies to explore or taking them on college tours which you really don't have time to do, but if teacher does really well with work place readiness, like resumes and applications and how to interview and stuff like that, then do that and you can take that off our plate and we can take job exploration off of your plate. We just, our program is really adaptable to working and accommodating

the teacher and collaborate on their needs and how we can work together to do that.

We are very flexible and work it all different ways, also I don't think it hurt for students to hear things over and over, It doesn't to learn how to resume in your class and then get it again from us, Like us, we forget things and we learn things if they are told in a different perspective so it doesn't hurt to get things over and over. If that makes sense.

Teacher 4: Teacher 5 we need to collaborate because I have a website part way done too, and it has all the community resources on it. We need to merge ours, so Teacher 5 we need to go to lunch.

Teacher 5: So, for post high, I know that I forged a relationship with not only LSI, but I'm working pretty closely with DWS- with workforce services, so is that one I can talk about. So that one has been for years I have sent kids there and we haven't gotten a lot of response. But now that I found a connection there, I inundated them with people so I can try to get kids help with some of the things do along with LSI and now we are trying to get information with voc rehab so we can forge a relationship with that. I don't know if that answers your questions, but I feel like LSI was the only one that reached out to me, where I feel like I have a very needy population and I had to really fight and beg and call and pester to get relationships with some of these other agencies and I can be pretty pesky. So, I don't think that they come to us, expect LSI but the others we really had to go to them. Does that answer your questions? Maybe not.

Well and I'm in the process of creating a transition website for the district. I don't even know if J even knows that, but I'm going to have all of the phone numbers and

applications and its almost ready to go and I'm hoping to share that with all the high school teachers and with Teacher 4. We are meeting with Voc Rehab on Monday. So, I think we are trying.

CRP 4: So if I'm going to take my 50,000-foot level view to answer your question and not to toot LSI's horn or Teacher 4's horn or anyone else's horn for that matter, but I think the reason this is customized so that the students benefit from coordinating with the CTE administrator, coordinating with work-based learning, you now getting their credit hours towards graduation so they're not having to choose between do I do this transition piece and set myself up for the rest of my life, or that takes me out of these classes, or I have to decide sort of between graduating quicker and doing this. We don't want them to make those choices, because we think that this learning is integrated. So, the idea is, look if you do this, then we will work with your special ed teachers and the CTE and whomever else to make sure that that work, or effort or experience translates back into your even on your diploma for example as credit hours. So that's one way that I see a direct benefit. And I see the schools benefiting so again the work-based learning coordinators, a lot of time work based learning and special education don't talk because they are in, they are separate silos and what I see work-based learning goes "Wow special ed is doing some pretty cool things." And they look at some of the transition curriculum and go "oh my gosh that would be, that's really good." So, I see all the general students because special ed does such a fantastic job and has such a great infrastructure, so I see the general, the teacher peers learning off of each other. And one additional sort of thing is things like work-based learning learns from us that the students are covered on workman's comp, right. So, employers they won't necessarily have someone come for an internship because

they are worried if someone is covered under workman's comp because legislators just passed that, not in this last session but in the session before, so they may not know that yet. So, I think all students benefit because of the network and collaboration, even like you just saw here on the website, so, but I think all students benefit from that. Sorry I talk a lot. One more piece to that is in a lot of the school districts because the work based learning coordinators are also maxed out they'll say well I can serve 50 students so they start putting these, I wouldn't say arbitrary, but our best students are going to go out and they have to have a 3.9 or a 3.5 and they have to be you know x, y, and z, when the idea around, well look if we can help you support another 50 but maybe the 3.0 students or maybe 2.75 which is actually not a bad GPA right? so I guess my point is, I think it's really opened some other eyes. So, I think where students are involved it allows them to access some of the work-based learning services as well, where before they couldn't because it was so siloed.

CRP 5: I guess I'm just giggling because I adore Teacher 5 and 4 because they really are those teachers that go way above and beyond and so when she says I'm that pesky person, even though she's not. She just wants those services to be provided for her students because she cares. And I think that a lot of the things that I hear on the flipside, is "if you come in here and I introduce you to my kids are you going to continue to show up?" And I think that's the number one question I get, and I tell people over and over again I promise you will see my face for the next 6 weeks and every one of those students that we touch, and we work with and that we move forward on. They will get the services that I'm putting on the table for you. And so, I feel like I've seen the frustration for Teacher 5. I've seen her go after that and she's very passionate about it. So, I think anytime we try to

partner and say, "Oh I know this person I'm happy to introduce you or I'm happy to refer or let me help you make a phone call on that side." If that's what we can do. Because at the end of the day, we are all just trying to make it the most successful for the student.

Question Five: I will now give you 10 minutes to work together to generate the top three things you would recommend as a group to strengthen the relationship between CRPs and special education teachers. In 10 minutes, be ready to present your three recommendations to the rest of the group.

Teacher 1: So, we have already kind of mentioned this, but I really like the idea of direct communication with the CRP. I was thinking of a specific example. I have a student who is really interested in horses, and ranches, and farming and that kind of theme and he has had a variety of different experiences at job placements like that, and I drove past a place that is a small little company that does pony parties out in Lehi, and I thought this really fits the profile for customized employment. It is a small privately-owned business, and I was thinking this student has voc rehab and I don't know the CRP that has been contracted, but I would love to have their phone number to share that information. Why don't we try this company? It's a small little business but maybe we can find a job for a couple of hours a week. So, I think maybe just sharing phone numbers could be a big thing. It doesn't have to be our personal cell phone numbers, but just knowing how to contact each other and knowing who we are, and them knowing me and me knowing who they are.

(In response to CRP 1 and Teacher 2) I could also do the same at our setting as well. I think it's a fantastic idea, love it.

(In response to CRP 1) I agree. I think that there might be some pushback from some people because they have so many other meetings that they have to do, but I definitely think it would be valuable and I think it's one the best things we can do is collaborate. Because no one person can do transition by themselves. It's going to take a village. It's going to take a whole team of people. So, the more people we can add to that team I think we will have more success.

Yeah, I only see it being an issue with teachers, I don't think it would be with parents.

I know a lot of teachers that I work with have very limited understanding of what CRPS are. So, a lot will have to go back to just basic understanding of what the process is so that we all have an understanding of why we are doing it.

(In response to Teacher 2) I agree, I would prefer doing it in person because I just like talking to people and I feel like there is a lot missed with these little questionnaire things, but at the same time I can see how it might appeal to some. I know we have to do that for social security all the time. We get those all the time for our students so that they can continue to receive Social Security benefits. But yeah when I see a stack of papers it gives me anxiety.

Teacher 2: (In response to CRP 1) CRP 1, would you recommend that be different CRPs, different times? Or maybe have all the CRPs of all our different students come in and have that conversation together?

(In response to CRP 1) CRP 1 if you want to contact me, I'm the one who organizes our Monday weekly collaboration meetings at our ATEC, contact me and I'll arrange something.

(In response to CRP 2) I would love to see that happen where maybe before you start the discovery process with a student or maybe the first step of the discovery process is to come talk with us with the student here. Maybe a meeting with the teacher parent and student all there could be the begging of your discovery process? I also have heard from some students why am I doing this again? I've already done this before. So that might be the best step. And then where we are limited, maybe that opens up the kind of discovery tasks you guys can do to make it more meaningful to the student.

(In response to CRP 1) I am all for it. I know some that might be a little resistant to that because they are like my time is already being used for so much, I can't dedicate it to another meeting. But I think if we can explain the purpose, they can get behind it a lot better.

(In response to Teacher 1) I think some of the teachers might be giving pushback if they can't see the value in it upfront, they might pushback. We really need to, there's some teachers we really need to sell it to so there wouldn't be that pushback.

I think we'd have to clearly define what the process looks like. Whereas maybe we get together as a whole group of the teachers and the CRPs to talk about what are the questions what the information is, we are really trying to get from this, to try to eliminate any of the fluff and just keep the meeting as short as possible. Because, we'll have to do it during school time, and we have so many things pulling us every which way. We would have students waiting for us outside the bathroom sometimes. That happened to me a couple times this week, so far.

(In response to CRP 1) Me personally, I say no. That's more paperwork and maybe I'm just really hating paperwork right now because Alpine just got its UPIPS audit, so when I see more paperwork it just sort of turns me off. Some teacher might prefer it that way so if we had like two methods of either an interview or a form to fill out, that might help with some of the nay-sayers who may not have time for a meeting but have time to fill out a form.

CRP 1: I think having regularly meetings is hard to set up because we are all super busy and our schedules are crazy, but even if it was a quarterly time where we as a CRP come in and sit down with the teachers at ATEC. I think that would be really beneficial because invariably I have a least a couple of students from ATEC, from each ATEC actually, so if I could come into a staff meeting and say these are the ATEC student we are working with, and just have like a team meeting, I think that would be awesome, because one of the things we get, rather than a 1-1 meeting is that we get all of the other teachers input and not just the one he is working with and then you get all of that sort of brainstorm mentality of look this is what I am doing, this is where I am stuck, or this is where we are stuck as a school. I feel like a quarterly, having the CRPs in on your meetings as school personnel on some sort of regular basis would be really helpful, because it makes it formal and when its formal it tends to happen more.

(In response to Teacher 2) We would probably run into confidentiality issues if multiple CRPs were in place because if one CRP is working with a student and they are talking about that student then I don't have any right to know that information. I don't know your thought on that, but that's my first thought is if we are sharing, if multiple CRPs are sharing then we might have some confidentiality conflicts, but as I think about it in the

school to work project, we have multiple CRPs, multiple VR counselors and the school staff there and we are discussing the students and what's happening with them, so I think that it's totally doable. And that's a great example, that conversation is really great because we have all of the different players at the table. And so, I think maybe not all the CRPs, that's probably a bug meeting, but you could probably do a few at a time a couple times a year and that would be better than what we've got going on right now.

(In response to CRP 2 and Teacher 2) So I think that goes back to what we were talking about early about adding a teacher interview into our process as a CRP. I think that would be an excellent takeaway from this, to have the CRPs reach out directly to the educators and Teacher 2 I love the idea of doing it with the student and the educator so it's a conversation that we're all having. Instead of the student having to do it with you and then with me. Because certainly I have heard the same thing that I've already told somebody else this, like 700 times. I think that would be an excellent way to take off some of that crossover to sit down as a team. Whether that's during assessment for our PEER connections, I'd love to see that happen even in a regular work strategy assessment, and then also in the, but specifically in discovery I think that would extremely helpful to setup.

(In response to CRP 2) Yeah, I love that idea. Teachers what do you think?

(In response to Teacher 1) do you think you would get pushback from families and students, or just staff?

So really explaining it really well to teachers, that would be critical for us as CRP, because if we are going to add that into our process and we say this is going to be part of

our assessment and we can't schedule it for 3-4 weeks out, that will significantly impact our processes that's something if we did decide to implement that, we would need to talk about it as organizations first and make sure everyone is on board before we frustrate everyone by just implementing it.

(In response to Teacher 2) So I have a question some of what we do as far as our assessment goes, is we use forms that are just questionnaires and we have the student fill it out and we have the parent fill it out if we had the teacher fill out the same thing it's just evaluating skills. So, we look at job skills, job seeking skills, hygiene skills, time management skills and those kinds of things. Would you as teachers be willing to do that in lieu of a meeting if the meeting took too much time?

CRP 2: Is there a way we can eliminate some of that initial crossover between what the teachers are seeing in the classroom and what we end up doing during discovery, while still fulfilling our requirements?

(In response to CRP 1) well and it's such a unique viewpoint that the teachers have, I feel like it would be easy to justify a good chunk of that first part, like if we needed to dedicate an hour or two to that.

Teacher 3: Well what I would say is that part of that having conversation is that you have to have an effective method to organize all the information you share, so for example in my case I co-teach and we have 24 students in our program, so even though we have a caseload of 12 each we work with all 24s students and that gets kind of intense especially when we work with all 12 job coaches as well. So we have all these people to manage and it is hard for us to remember who is so and so DSPD coordinator or VR

coordinator, so I have a excel form that tracks here is when their IEP is, here is when their re-evolution is, here is when they exit the school system and then here are what other services providers do they have, so their OT, PT, speech a health care plan because that stuff needs to be transferred to their adult care as well. And then who is their VR coordinator, their DSPD coordinator and then who is their CRP person and that helps me so when I am preparing for an IEP or doing a progress report I know who are the people that need to stay up to date on this information. And then also I know right now we are part of the school to work project working on customized employment. So, part of that is we all have this form that we sort of contribute to which I think is helpful and I think more schools need to implement that, because often time we have our form and these other organizations have their forms and then there is one of this like transfer. So, it would really be nice to, Yes, you communicate, but what is being done with that communication. So, it would be nice to have something that can then be transferred. because let's be honest, are you really going to give someone their IEP file, there is so much crap in there that you don't know who to sort through, not crap I shouldn't say that. It's just a lot of information to handle and so I love the form that we've been using for part of this grant, because it just sort of breaks it down on here is what their school day looks like, here are what their needs and interest are, here are the key support people in their life and all these things so that it really can be a collaborative effort, a smooth transition so that we are all contributing together during these transition years so that when they leave everyone is on the same page, because they have the same page.

Well you know what I really think about that I think CRP 3 touched on with communication, one thing that really strengthens any relationship is a willingness to have

compassion and empathy for the other people on the team. I think that is a really essential skill that we often overlook it. And we overlook it even with our students, right, we give them all these other skills, you can do the task, you can do this, but do we teach them how to understand another individual, how to show compassion to another individual and if we as their support people in their lives can demonstrate and exact that skill and support one another we then can model that for them and how much better will be able to support them in obtaining their transition goals. It will help with employers, with relationships with parents, with the students Think that's a real important skill that we often overlook because it seems so fluff. Like how do you measure compassion or empathy, you know?

(In response to CRP 3) Well and to go along with what CRP 3 was saying I've just seen the benefits of being able to support your team members, like I co-teach so we get to practice this skill a lot of working on our communication and supporting one another. And you know as a teacher one of the greatest things that we can give to our students or any individual is to validate them and say oh that is really hard, I understand, I see what you're going through, that goes so far in really helping them. more than saying we just have to focus on this task and get it done. So sometimes I think we miss out on that essential part. It's part of our nature as human beings to connect with each other.

CRP 3: Just conversations like we are having.

Follow up by Moderator: So, to follow up how do you start those conversations? Do you have scheduled times that you go to schools? How are you making those happen?

Well in the beginning I also after I've been a teacher I've been in marketing, that was beneficial because I know how to go into a business and approach, so in the beginning it was just hitting the pavement, going in introducing ourselves, reaching out to schools and special education teachers, all that and just telling them about us. And now it's more word of mouth actually. Because the ball has gotten rolling, so it is setting up the meetings, the teachers don't have time to reach out to us and say how about you come in, so I think it is up to the CRP to market it to get out there. Teachers are very open, I mean you're not going to turn down someone who wants to tell you about a program, it may be tricky to arrange a time-- am I right Teacher 3? It's marketing and education and collaborating, but it's up to the CRP to get their name out there.

(In response to Teacher 3) I was thinking along those same lines Teacher 3. I think you put it into words really well. I was thinking like you said if we can, if students can see us as a team, we are a team, we are working as a team, then they can learn that and they can mirror that maybe, but if they can see that we are having a good time, that we are having fun, that sort of professionalism in a professional manner and that we are a team and they are part of that team too, the student if we make them aware that you are part of this team too. And then like you said, with compassion and empathy I really like that. In our professions we have to work with our brain and our heart. Its brain and heart, it's that compassion that empathy but also having a business mind go with it. But I think you're absolutely right, if we can be a team and students can learn from what they see with us, I think you're right.

Teacher 4: And I'll say peer to peer in terms of students because when you guys were at our school and I had a couple of students start fairly early in the program and I was

talking about the program I would ask other students to vouch for the program. And when other students vouch for it and are like "oh yeah their helping me do this and it's okay, it's okay." Then others were willing to sign up. So, I think being in the school and having students able to vouch for the providers is a good thing so I do think recommendations for teachers and peers can help students get engaged. I don't know if it is in my top three things, but I think it's a valid point.

So, if we are talking about strengthening relationships between CRPs and the special education teachers, I think that is what the question is specific to, I think probably the most important piece is communication. I know we had a couple of misfires when working with LSI, a couple of things that didn't go as planned and probably had I had a little more information we could have avoided. I think communication is important. We are all busy and sometimes things sort of slip through, and you don't know what the other person is doing or what their intent is or they don't know what my intent is or what plan is with somebody, so I think that open communication is first and foremost in terms of relationships between LSI and teachers or between any CRP and special education teachers.

Follow up by moderator: So, with your communication, do you have any specific recommendations on how to communicate? Is it weekly contact, quarterly meetings, in person? What is the best way to structure?

Teacher 5: Well I'll throw one out there. Its exposure to the programs. I think we need to expose people to what's out there and then have people like, I think it might be Teacher 4 and I, who get to go out a and help the high schools and things understand how to facilitate these relationships. So, exposure for me is one, if people agree.

(In response to CRP 4) I agree with that too, and I think another one too would be to make sure teachers understand the importance of the IEP, because I so mentoring and being a teacher and now being at post high, because I mentor elementary, so I feel like I've seen the whole IEP process and I and this isn't a secret, I've told this to other teachers so I'm not gossiping. I feel like I we don't use the IEP to the advantage of the students. Everyone has become so busy, we have so much to do we follow an outline and we check off boxes and I think that's probably what they're trying to change with this whole transition, they're trying to get, we have things already in place, CTE pathways, we can start planning, pulling community resources so I think the use of the IEP for each student to get where they want to be is very important.

I agree (with Teacher 4).

CRP 4: I agree, And I think peer to peer exposure is a really good one, right? Teachers telling other teachers about the program is extremely helpful.

Yeah, I guess I see that as one goal right, visibility of the program, whether it's through teacher to teacher or student to student, I think visibility of the program and what's available is obviously important. But I think an additional one I might throw out if the group agrees is just clarity of roles. I think when there is really clear this is what we do this is what it looks like, and even just a visual a really simple visual even though its customized, if you saw here is the foundation and you get to you know, here's the Christmas tree and you get to decorate it I think understanding that we're the Christmas tree, so to speak, I get that's a bad metaphor, I'm not good at, well I am good at metaphors on the fly but not that one, but I guess my point is, it is a team approach but you're only as good as your communication and role clarity.

I just think that from the beginning because part of that communication, at least from a CRP standpoint, you go into a school and maybe a principal says, "yeah come on in" and then the teachers go, "who are you?" right? So, I think just making sure that you have that foundational piece of roles and responsibilities and very clear even tangible sort of this is what the program is and then understanding the hierarchy within the school. So where we have been most successfully is when schools say, "here's this person, this is this persons roles and responsibilities they will follow up." and then making sure everyone in that conversation, whether it's just a name or people actually sitting around the table know clearly what is they are supposed to be doing and do that and follow up. It's communication for sure but I think it's beyond that too. It's followed up. So interagency and within agencies.

CRP 5: I would agree with Teacher 4 with that because I know that I've been working with a student and they will say to me, "hey I was talking to my friend and my friend really wants to do this program too because they need this and this and this." So obviously its working for them and they feel confident enough to say they're working with someone, as soon as they share that information, just like Teacher 4 said, knowing that there is someone out there who offers that peer to peer, it spreads like wildfire.

(In response to Teacher 5) I've been invited to a couple of different IEPs over than at couple of months and the ones that seem to be the most effective are the ones that they, the call self-driven IEPs and they actually invite the student to bring someone to basically vouch on their behalf, things that they are, they disclose their disability to others here, these are the goals they have been working on and here is how I accomplished them, and then that peer is given an opportunity to say these are the things I see happening and the

really amazing part about that is it is forcing the students to say what their goals are outloud and I have been in tons of IEPs and the parent lead the entire IEP, Yes I want this for my child, this is what I am looking for and this is what I want to happen, and the child just sits there and nods their head. So, when they make that switch and make them the primary speaker and they have to bring someone to vouch this is what happening, it actually sort of opens up the conversation and it forces them to be pushed into the frontline and it has been sort of interesting to watch. So, we work on the self-advocacy piece of that to encourage a self-driven IEP is what they are calling it.

(In response to CRP 4) One of the other things we've been doing, more so with Teacher 5, well we worked with Teacher 4 a little while ago, but more so we've been working with Teacher 5 more recently, but one of the things we've really been trying to do, is every time at the end of meeting with one of her students we just pop our heads in and just kind of give a brief overview of this is what we did, this is the feedback that we are getting, these are the conversations that we are having, you know it's just a quick 10-15 minute conversation, but it lets them know exactly what things were guided through and kind of what went on and I feel like just giving her that brief 15 minute updates allows her a really good insight into what's happening.