

# Education

## New TVS Program Helps High School Students

Written For The Times  
By Jennifer Welch

Transylvania Vocational Services (TVS) has partnered with exceptional children's programs in Transylvania and Henderson county high schools, along with the North Carolina Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) to supplement job readiness training and employment-related skills in their curriculums.

The TVS program, Preparation for Employment Success, is designed to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 21. Services are designed to assist students in identifying and exploring potential career interests, as well as develop an understanding of work readiness skills necessary to be successful in the working world, or continue into higher education.

Enrollment is currently open to any students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or a 504 plan. Working with VR, the Pre-ETS team is excited to see more young adults be successful when they enter into the working world or continue into higher education.

"I am confident that the Pre-ETS program can provide assistance with that transition for the school system, VR, and more importantly, the students and families," said VR Transition Counselor Alan Praytor.

VR is a state agency that focuses on helping residents with disabilities



Jessica Casey (left) and Montana McPherson of the Preparation for Employment Success program stand outside TVS after working in a local high school. (Courtesy photo)

obtain and maintain employment.

"My favorite aspect of the Pre-ETS program is that it is designed to assist students in continuing to develop and practice the soft skills that are so essential to maintaining employment when challenges and difficulties arise," said Praytor. "Students can look forward to receiving a quality service that will provide them with skills and training that will not only assist them while they are in high school, but also many

years post-graduation."

"We are going into the classrooms and teaching job exploration, work place readiness, self-advocacy, soft skills and post-secondary information," said TVS Pre-ETS Program Specialist Montana McPherson. "It is exciting to see the students enthusiastic to plan their futures."

Preparation for Employment Success is supplementing, focus on employment and reinforcing many lessons also being taught in the

school system. The program places an emphasis on the development of employment focused social skills, self-advocacy skills, and understanding employer expectations. The program also provides students with information to explore their own job interests and identify career pathways.

"The goal is to get students thinking and offer them realistic information on what they need to do to pursue a job or interest," said TVS Pre-ETS Team Lead Jessica Casey.

What started in the Transylvania County public school system in the spring of 2019 grew last semester to include West Henderson High School and served a total of 48 students. This current fall semester, the program has expanded to include the remaining public high schools in Henderson County while

still serving the public schools in Transylvania County. The number of enrolled students has grown to 130.

"The teachers we are talking to are excited," said TVS Program Director Carla Hill. "They see this program as an additional support to teaching requirements for these students with disabilities."

The program is divided into different milestones, each offering an in-depth look into five sections, including job exploration counseling, workplace readiness training, work-based learning experiences, instruction in self-advocacy and counseling on higher education opportunities.

"The milestones the Pre-ETS program is working with compliments and reinforces the Occupational Preparation curriculum perfectly," said West Henderson

Occupational Course of Study (OCS) teacher Autumnne Lowe. "The instructors bring an element of professionalism into the classroom that requires students to rise to a more professional standard of conduct and practice the soft skills with adults with whom they are less familiar."

The milestones are created to be learned over the student's duration in high school. Students are able to focus on each specific milestone and work at their own individual pace based on their needs in either an individual setting or in a group.

The program has also designed milestone topics with condensed content for students who are close to graduating and will not be able to participate in the program for an extended period of time.

"My goals for the students are for them to learn about themselves and to learn about what might be of interest to them," said Brevard High School Exceptional Children (EC) teacher Donna Samotis. "I want them to know that they can hold paying positions and have the confidence to pursue jobs that may interest them."

Samotis previously worked at TVS as a job coach and assisted in kicking off the Pre-ETS program earlier this year.

"I believe the rewards of this program include exposing our students to job exploration, finding their interests, and helping to build their confidence and expectations of themselves," Samotis said.

As this semester comes to an end, the program is seeing progress.

Casey said, "The students have been welcoming and are doing a fantastic job participating fully in the program."

To learn more about TVS, visit [www.tvssinc.org](http://www.tvssinc.org). To learn more about the opportunities with VR visit [www.ncdhrs.gov/divisions/dvrs](http://www.ncdhrs.gov/divisions/dvrs).