

## DARS and LEAs: Collaborating to Enhance Outcomes

Collaboration between Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) counselors and Local Education Agency (LEA) educators is the cornerstone of successful transition. This relationship is key during the career development and transition planning process. In fact, both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act require schools and DARS professionals to provide transition services to help students become life-ready. Effective communication, coordination, and collaboration will lead to successful student outcomes.

### Interagency Agreement

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Develop an interagency agreement to ensure everyone understands their shared roles and responsibilities. This allows you to create policies and procedures that align for both organizations. Take time each year to review this agreement as a way to renew your commitment to the partnership.

### Student Referral Process

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Review your process for student referrals, and set goals to ensure that eligible students connect with DARS. Consider the following questions: Who should refer students? Who should be referred? When should a referral be made? Once answered, collect referral data and track the results. Assess and reassess this data throughout the year to revise your goals. This focuses everyone on increasing students' connections to DARS before they exit school.

### Service Delivery

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Plan to coordinate career activities and employment experiences for students and families. Successful experiences need aligned funding, staffing, resources, and planning. Think about where and when students will access transition activities: In school? In the community? During the summer? Discussing this in advance will reduce duplication of effort and promote purposeful coordination.

## Division Outreach Practices

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Outreach is an important way to inform students and families about DARS services. Many families may not understand why they would need support. They may also be unclear about the relationship between school and DARS services. Schools can warmly introduce students to the counselor who will assist them as an adult. Finally, create a process to ensure all students and families receive resources about DARS.

## Contact and Information Exchange

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Regular communication is important for collaboration. Choose a primary contact in your school division to assist your DARS counselor. This person can help with student records, progress updates, and planning transition services. Arrange time for school staff to meet their counselor and learn about DARS services.

## IEP Meeting Notification & Participation

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Make certain that your DARS counselor is invited to student IEP meetings when transition services are discussed. Provide advance notification and obtain a signed consent and release from the student and family before the meeting. Create a process for gathering input when the counselor is unable to attend the meeting.

## Work Environment

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One step you can take is to create a work environment for your DARS counselor that is warm and inviting. Also, consider providing a confidential space for meetings with students and families. Ensure your counselor has access to the school's internet, printer, and copier if needed. Finally, review important school procedures, and inform school personnel about counselor visits.

## Conclusion

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Partnership between DARS and LEAs has the power to produce successful outcomes for students. Take time to assess your division's strengths and needs as you consider collaborative practices.