

BESB Pre-ETS Buzzzzzzzz



August 2025 Quarterly Edition

Happy Summer to BESB Students, Families, Educators, and Staff!

Welcome to our quarterly Pre-ETS newsletter. In this newsletter you will find information about past and upcoming events going on in Pre-ETS. You will find articles from students, comments from parents, resources for families, creative writing, and a few puzzles and games. This newsletter is intended to be a coordinated project to share ideas, thoughts, and news from everyone who is part of Pre-ETS.

What is Pre-ETS? - summarized for new Pre-ETS members

Pre-ETS stands for Pre-Employment Transition Services. This program provides 5 core services to students ages 16 through 22. These core services include:

- 1- Job Exploration
- 2- Work Based Learning Experiences
- 3- Counseling on Post-Secondary College Planning
- 4- Workplace Readiness Training including social and independent living skills
- 5- Instruction on Self Advocacy and Peer Mentoring.

These core services are provided to the students in a variety of ways which you will learn about in this newsletter. For more information, please contact Charlotte Copenhaver, Pre-ETS Educational Projects Coordinator at BESB.

What have our Pre-ETS students been doing this past quarter:

Our second annual BESB **College and Career Experience** program was held in late June at Central Connecticut State University- CCSU, in New Britain CT. 15 BESB high school students came to spend the week at CCSU to learn about Cyber

Security as a career, and to learn some skills in Cyber Security. In addition, they learned some college prep skills and independent living skills. They spent the night in the dorm rooms and ate in the dining hall with other college students. Dr. Chuck Gardner, specialist in Cyber Security, came to CT from Enterprise EKT www.enterprise-kc.com in KS to teach Cyber Security to our students. The evenings were run by Dave Denotaris and his staff at Skys the Limit and were filled with fun team building activities designed for students to learn to work together as a team and develop skills that will guide them in their futures.

College Prep workshop- During the spring term we were able to provide college bound students and their families with a full day college preparation workshop that students who are considering college, could attend in person. We held one workshop at CCSU in New Britain and the other at NCC State Community College in Norwalk. The workshop provided students and their families with small group information about the college experience for a student who is blind or visually impaired. We reviewed all things college- (policy, financial, accessibility) for students who are blind or visually impaired.

Work Experiences- This term has seen many of our Pre-ETS students actively involved in so many great work experiences. We have had students who have been working in the community in jobs such as retail stores, restaurants, and delis. We have had many students who have completed virtual work-based learning experience through LEAP, and others who have participated in the virtual career exploration workshops.

Skys the Limit-virtual workshops: Dave Denotaris from Skys the Limit provides our students with work readiness workshops for our BESB Pre-ETS students. For our Spring term virtual workshop through Skys the Limit, we completed a 5-session Self Advocacy workshop. Students who participated were able to play out various role-playing situations to practice how to self-advocate in their schools, with friends, or with others in their communities.

Mentor program- Our BESB mentors continue to be actively training and working programs with Leap to hone their skills as mentors. In our Pre-ETS program we maintain a group of mentors who are successful graduates of BESB Pre-ETS programs and are generally between the ages of 20-30ish, and are interested in being a mentor to our younger BESB students who are still in high school. If any

student is interested in having a mentor, please contact Charlotte Copenhaver, EPC, for more information about this.

Upcoming Pre-ETS activities and events to watch for

CT State Annual Back to School Meeting for students in CT with disabilities and their families will be held on **September 5, 2025**, at the Bristol Event Center (112 Century Drive, Bristol, CT 06010) between the hours of 7:30 AM and 1:00 PM. BESB will have a table at the event.

Our 2nd Annual BESB Community Resource Fair will be held at Neighborhood Studios of Fairfield County **September 11, 2025**, from 2:00pm to 5:00pm

Upcoming Mentor/Career awareness day: October is disability awareness month. Each year we do a mentor day where we hear from our mentors. This year we are working on doing the mentor day in person at CCSU. Keep your eyes out for more information for our mentor day in October or Contact Charlotte Copenhaver for more information.

Upcoming College Prep Workshop Each year we offer our students who are considering going to college with a Career Preparation workshop. Generally, we have offered it in the Spring term. This year we are looking at doing the workshop in January. This event will be held in person, one day in the northern region and another day in the southern region so that anyone that is interested has a chance to attend one of the workshops. More information on this event will be coming soon or contact Charlotte Copenhaver for more information.

2025/26 Virtual Skys the Limit workshops with Dave Denotaris are scheduled. We will be doing our first 5-week virtual workshop from 10/15/25-11/12/25 on Wednesdays from 4pm to 5:30pm. In this workshop we will be discussing various careers of interest to our students. The second 5-week virtual workshop will be 4/22/26-5/20/26 on Wednesdays from 4pm to 5:30pm. In this workshop we will be discussing and learning about how to use AI productively.

Our Annual Statewide Disability Resource fair will be held at NEAT Marketplace/Oak Hill on October 17, 2025, from 9am to 12pm. Resources will be available for individuals of all ages and all disability groups

LEAP Vermont has their dates for fall events for students, see below. These will be on their website by the end of August:

Fall Virtual:

- *My Voice, My Future (October 13 - December 12): Unpaid self-advocacy workshops focused on participant connection*
- *Dungeons & Dragons (October 13 - December 12): Unpaid D&D game play focused on technology skill building*
- *Communications Specialist WBL (October 13 - November 21): Paid work experience focused on with a communications and journalism focus.*

Fall Retreat: *Leading to Connections (October 31 - November 2, Burlington, VT) - Activities designed to promote leadership, decision-making, and self-advocacy, along with festive fall fun!*

Mentor Program: *(October 2025 - May 2026) High-school aged mentees meet virtually with near-peer mentors who are blind and visually impaired to learn from each other.*

Lock in for College: *(October 2025 - May 2026) Virtual AT Training and peer mentorship for college-bound high school seniors.*

Carroll Center for the Blind in Newton, MA

Carroll Center is currently offering three levels of computer training-

- **Computing Basics** for Beginners (2 weeks)
- **Workplace Computing: Foundations** for those who need to improve their skills for their job search (4-6 weeks)
- **Workplace Computing: Advanced** for those whose employment goals require more skills using technology (4-6 weeks)

Student Section

**BESB 2nd Annual College and Career Experience Summer STEM Program on
Cybersecurity**

By Aiden Gaucher

In the summer of 2024, I participated in a program focused on astronomy, and ever since it ended, I had been looking forward to the next opportunity to explore new interests. That opportunity came with the BESB 2nd Annual College and Career Experience Summer STEM Program on Cybersecurity, which was a five-day

residential program held at Central Connecticut State University and led by David DeNotaris.

Designed to promote independence and social development among blind and visually impaired students, the program offered a unique blend of academic and personal growth experiences. Like the other participants, I stayed in the Sam May Hall dormitory with a roommate. I especially enjoyed the many team-building activities, as well as the chance to socialize and build meaningful connections with others.

The core focus of the program was cybersecurity, taught by Dr. Gardner, a professor in the field. He introduced us to essential internet safety practices, such as creating strong passwords and identifying phishing scams. Under his guidance, we even built websites using code, a process I found both fascinating and rewarding. Throughout the week, we learned various coding commands and concepts, which sparked a genuine interest in the field for me. As the program went on, I began to seriously consider pursuing cybersecurity in college, possibly even working toward a degree in the subject.

The Ghost and Her Dream: A Perspective of a Lost Soul

Written by Sophia Lee

First steps in, I felt a chill,
A good kind, of course, combined with an equally bad one.
Ironical, it was, since the weather was all heat,
But I digress.
Perhaps it is hard to put it into simple words,
But I'll try the best I can.
I knew we would be doing a lot of experimenting,
Coding, creating, the like,
But I wasn't ready for the whirlwind,
The chaos that came in the form of a storm,
Sweeping me away into paradise.
Unpacking done, room set up,
Not much longer now, I'll just focus on my work.
Introductions made, rules put in place,
Not much there to say.
To sum it up, I can't tell you how,
I felt from when I first started to now.

Before I was a ghost,
Trying to make it through,
Focus at what I'm good at, floating through.
Ghosts scare people, that's what I've been told,
But I, myself, am perhaps the spirit who was afraid.
What was I so afraid of, you may ask?
The social interaction,
The fear of embarrassing myself,
Worrying about if I could even make it past one day away from home,
All of it, yes, all of it.
But this program, although not its purpose, helped me discover myself.
The instructor, with his words of wisdom and witty humor,
He reawakened a part of me I assumed had died,
The part where I used to enjoy experimenting.
I can only go so far through the darkness but
He helped me through every step, every bug, every uncertain moment.
And the friendships I made,
I found similar hearts like mine,
Reflections in a mirror that I could see.
With all the activities and learning curves,
Bonding became easier,
One day I gained the confidence,
Sang my heart out as if I was the only one in the room.
Now that was fun,
That talent show,
And the people in the program,
They helped each other.
There was just so much positivity,
Thanks to them, I found my confidence once more.
My advice to anyone wanting to attend future programs?
They're there to help you learn.
That, and also they're there for you to rediscover yourself.
Find parts of you that must've lain dormant for a while.
Maybe you'll find someone who gets you just right.
Test your limits, push your boundaries, break out of that comfort zone,
That's what these programs are there for.
Just try, that's all I can really say,
You won't have these opportunities forever.
Perhaps even the most saddest of spirits get a happy moment,
Just a moment,

But I won't forget it.
I'll look back,
And shed a river of tears no doubt,
But it's not of sadness.
After all, a little push never hurt anyone.
It helped me,
But,
Dear reader,
Would it help you?

Navigating a New Path Together

By Jess Faherty

My name is Jessica Faherty, I was a Resident Assistant at this year's Sky's the Limit Cybersecurity Program. I had the opportunity to support and empower the students by establishing relationships with each one of them. I assisted with daily routines and recreational activities throughout each day. Coming here I had no experience with blind or visually impaired people, but I felt extremely supported by my fellow staff and students as we navigated a new path together.

My time in this program ultimately inspired a deeper passion for advocacy and education, motivating me to pursue a career as a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI). I am eager to help students develop independence, confidence, and a love for learning. Working with the students so closely allowed me to see their potential beyond perceived limitations, which reinforced my belief in the importance of accessibility in education. I am so grateful for my experience at the Sky's the Limit program this summer and look forward to continuing this path in the future.

My Experience at this Years Summer Camp

By Jaiylin Anderson
8/14/25

Coming into this summer camp, to say that I was nervous would be a massive

understatement. I was quite frankly terrified. Last year I came into the camp as a participant, at that time I was nervous about meeting new people in a new environment. Thanks to the wonderful staff from Sky's The Limit and my fellow students, the process was smooth, I felt comfortable, comfortable enough to get out of my shell and step up to be helpful to my fellow students. Stemming from the success of last year, this year I came back as a staff member instead of a student. The experience was amazing, from getting to know and spending time with the great students, to working alongside my amazing fellow RA's. It overall summed up to be a fun new experience. I loved the events planned during the afternoons (my favorite being the talent show), I loved seeing the students learn something new about cybersecurity and meeting speakers who are professionally in that field, and I loved being there to help all students when needed. I couldn't ask for a better group of kids or staff, and if I had the opportunity to do this again every year, I would say yes, every time.

The Carroll Center experience

By Anita Paul

I have a great experience at CCBS. I learned many things to navigate in life. I have 6 classes throughout the week and every Thursday we go on a field trip in the city. We also have many clubs and activities. My class is Sensory Art; I have so much fun in that class. And my favorite trip is Taza Chocolate Factory. Overall, this was a great experience for me, and I love it.

Resources for families and students

Center of the Blind- The mission of the Center of the Blind is to serve the social, recreational, educational, referral, and advocacy needs of the blind and visually impaired population of southeastern Connecticut and assist them in attaining and maintaining an independent lifestyle. For more information please call (860)447-2048 or go to info@centeroftheblind.org

Hadley school for the Blind- Has loads of free resources for individuals who are interested in help and support for blind and visually impaired individuals. They have workshops, audio podcasts, and live chat discussion groups. They can help

you with daily living, adjusting to vision loss, recreational activities, technology, braille, and work. Go to [Hadley Vision Resources | 100 Years of Empowering Adults with Vision Loss \(hadleyhelps.org\)](https://www.hadleyhelps.org) to learn more about them.

CPAC- Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center- The mission of the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center is to educate, support, and empower Connecticut's diverse families of children and youth with any disability or chronic conditions, ages birth to 26, and the professionals who serve them. Please go to [Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center - CPAC \(cpacinc.org\)](https://cpacinc.org) to learn more about them.

SERC (State Education Resource Center) - SERC is a quasi-public agency established under statute to serve the CT State Board of Education in supporting educational equity and excellence. This is done by providing professional development and information dissemination in the latest research and best practices to educators, service providers, and families throughout the state, as well as job-embedded technical assistance and training within schools, programs, and districts. Please go to: [Home - State Education Resource Center \(ctserc.org\)](https://ctserc.org)

How to sign up for events and activities in Pre-ETS

Please keep your eye out for any activities or events that are being planned in our Pre-ETS program. Flyers and announcements will be emailed to you from [Ashley Morgan at BESB](#). Please be sure that we have an up-to-date email address for you in our system so that you will receive notifications. Please keep an eye on your email. Notifications are also sent to your Teacher for the Visually Impaired (TVI's) and your Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor so you can get information from them as well. As always, please do not hesitate to contact Charlotte Copenhaver or Jonathan Richmond for further information.

Charlotte.Copenhaver@ct.gov

Or call or text (860)692-4251

Charlotte Copenhaver- Educational Projects Coordinator

Coordinates paid work experiences in students' local communities and special group and individual projects and programs for BESB students throughout the state.

Charlotte.copenhaver@ct.gov or cell (860)692-4251

Jonathan Richmond- Counselor Coordinator

Works with the counselors who are assigned to working with our Pre-ETS students individually.

Jonathan.Richmond@ct.gov or cell (959) 282-0387

Next newsletter published in July 2025.