Erin: “I would say for Career and Technical Education teacher, or really any teacher, anything that helps a student assess their own interests, abilities, and career interests, as well as their limitations, and understanding what their individual strengths are is a good start. Self-advocacy is really important, I know many teachers really encourage that. That’s important in this program, and in lots of others, because as students transition out of school, they are going to be asked more and more to provide their own information, and most of them are making that transition into adulthood as well. So where the parent would’ve been credited as the main voice and representative for that person, when the student was a minor, they’re no longer in that role necessarily. And it’s important for us to be able to hear from the perspective of that individual what their situation is, what their interests are, what they really want for their life moving forward. Also, a realistic IEP goal is important for us. There’s a lot of years that the IEP goal is on there, and unfortunately when a student leaves school with something that is probably not attainable for them, we’re put in a position of having to redirect that, after years and years of them thinking that was the direction they are going in. So that can hurt the counselor-consumer relationship from the start, but it’s better for the student to have a solid understanding of their own situation. Also any hands-on work experiences that students can have before they leave school are really valuable. If nothing else, what they get from exposure to work is a sense of what it means to be an employee; what do I need to do to fit into this culture and to be successful in work?”

Kevin: “The good thing about Division for Blind Services is that we can serve kids who are of a younger age. In fact, we can serve kids all the way down to age 10 basically because we have a children’s program. So our transition services reach down to quite a bit of a younger age, than over at DRS. Because of the children’s program that we have, then also because of the agency’s philosophy that it’s never too young to start thinking about transition related issues and what’s going to happen after high school. So working with students, who may have an onset of visual impairment in junior high or at an earlier age, DBS is a fantastic resource. We would certainly encourage Career and Technology Education teachers at school to provide information for what we like to call “informed choice” about different careers, different fields, and different areas to spark interest. As Erin mentioned, we certainly can’t say this enough, “There’s no substitute for practical, hands-on work types of experiences or scenarios.” You really can’t place a value on that because it gives so much information, not only to the student as to whether or not it’s a possible reality of a career choice, but it helps so much with the process of knowing how to best work with that student and what’s going to be a realistic goal for him or her.”

Erin: “Those four years of high school go by quickly. Don’t wait until the last minute to start thinking about the supports your son or daughter or yourself may need after high school. It’s a good idea to contact DARS and ask those questions. We generally, at DRS, will start working with students around 16 or the last two years of high school, and we can work with them earlier if it’s appropriate. The counselor can help you determine the appropriate timing, but I always encourage people to call. Don’t wait for the school to refer you, be proactive in taking that step. I’ve got my contact information that I can share. I’m Erin Wilder and my phone number is (512)-424-4048 and feel free to call me. I can help people connect with the appropriate counselor really regardless of where they
are in the state. And it’s always good to be informed about the services that are out there, not just DARS, but all the other things that are out there as well.”

Kevin: “The only thing I would add is that, as far as advice to parent goes, is that it’s so important for them to stay engaged throughout the transition process all the way through because that support is critical. A lot of times, DRS can do a lot of things, the school can do a lot of things, but if the family support and the parent support are there, it sometimes almost seems like a moot effort. So having that parent support throughout the process is imperative. Also the other piece of advice I would give to parents is the importance of not setting the bar low, of setting the bar high. There’s a lot of things that the kiddos that we work with can achieve, can accomplish, and can do, and we certainly want to help them reach their upmost and fullest potential. So with respect to working with students with visual impairments or blindness, if CTE has a question with respect to working with these students or with respect to getting help from DBS, Erin gave her contact information, I would be happy to give mine as well. It’s Kevin Markel and my phone number is (817)-759-3514 and I can certainly help facilitate whatever the need might be with respect to a student with a visual impairment.”