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Emerging Practices, Transition: Strategic Goals and Operating Policies (Issue Number 3 of 8)

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Emerging Practices, Transition

Strategic Goals and Operating Policies

Background on Partnerships in Employment Systems Change Projects

In October 2011, the Administration on Developmental Disabilities awarded grants to lead agencies in six states: California, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, and Wisconsin. Two additional states, Alaska and Tennessee, received grants in October 2012. These states proposed activities to spur improved employment and post-secondary outcomes for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). The Institute for Community Inclusion and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services are providing training and technical assistance (TA) to the eight state projects through the Partnerships in Employment (PIE) Training and TA Center.

Partnerships project work is framed by the High Performing States Transition Model which contains 8 key elements: collaboration, leadership, state goals and policy, funding and contracting, staff training, service innovation, performance management and quality assurance, and youth leadership development and family engagement. This document is one in a series of PIE Project Fact Sheets that have been developed to chronicle how PIE grantee states are making change under the elements of the High Performing States Transition model.

Statewide mandated transition partners' mission, goals, and operating policies emphasize employment and postsecondary education as the preferred outcomes for youth and young adults with IDD.

TENNESSEE

TennesseeWorks has developed a large stakeholder consortium that includes both state- and local-level associations and government agencies to influence policy change and practice. The project has provided an opportunity for consortium members to solidify common values, share knowledge, and develop a shared understanding of needed policy and practice changes.

The stakeholder consortium has expanded post-secondary scholarship opportunities for youth with IDD through the STEP UP legislation. Its members also provided feedback on Governor Bill Haslam's executive order establishing the Tennessee Employment First Initiative, which has the goal of expanding community work opportunities for people with disabilities.

Many TennesseeWorks partners were also appointed to the Employment First Task Force. This task force is comprised of state agencies, families, consumer advocates, and service providers, working together

to eliminate obstacles to employment for persons with disabilities and to better use funds to increase employment opportunities.

The TennesseeWorks partnership workgroups dually function as the Employment First Task Force's workgroups to ensure efficiency and minimize duplication among the state's employment initiatives. Additionally, the Tennessee Departments of Education, Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, Human Services/Division of Rehabilitation Services, Labor, and Children's Services are collaborating on enhancing and drawing upon the Tennessee Longitudinal Data System and other research to ensure state systems change efforts are data-driven.

The Occupational Diploma Taskforce developed a Skills, Knowledge, Experience Mastery Assessment (SKEMA) that has been piloted in a few school districts across the state. Beginning in 2015–2016, students with disabilities in all school districts may be awarded an Occupational Diploma at the end of their fourth year of high school if they (1) have not met the requirements for a high school diploma, (2) have satisfactorily completed an individualized education program, (3) have satisfactory records of attendance and conduct, and (4) have completed the SKEMA created by the department and two years of paid or unpaid work experience. By the time they exit the school system, participating students will have developed the skills and resumes needed to successfully enter the workforce as a young adult.

Post-secondary education opportunities are within the reach of many more young adults with IDD than in previous years. Programs in the central and western regions of the state have begun or are in process of implementation. Student access to financial assistance has increased through the STEP UP scholarship (as a result of the STEP UP legislation, which grants \$4,000 per year for each of two years to eligible students) and vocational rehabilitation funding that will provide eligible students \$2400 per semester towards tuition expenses.

Lastly, the expansion of Project SEARCH, a one-year high school transition program executed by businesses and using an immersion process to teach real work skills, has led to the development of sites in all three regions of the state in healthcare and other industries.

Lessons learned:

- » Collaboration at both the grassroots level and the highest levels of government creates legislative and policy change that can be sustained into the future.
- » Policy change needs to take place at both a state and operational level to ensure sustainable change. STEP UP scholarships used the state legislative process to create opportunities for young adults, while the SKEMA was developed as an operational policy.
- » It takes time and effort to expand these partnerships, but the richness and variety of the partners and collaborators makes the reach and impact of the work more significant than if performed by any one group or entity.
- » Working together not only promotes faster progress, but also enables state agencies to craft and communicate shared expectations for integrated work across systems.

WISCONSIN

Wisconsin's Let's Get to Work project has facilitated changes in state-level policy and practice to ensure that, across state agencies, employment is a preferred option for youth with IDD. Project activities have included:

- » Developing shared goals between the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Health Services, Department of Children and Families, and Department of Public Instruction.
- » Identifying three shared actions that impact statewide practice and policy, and the development of specific steps to help each agency achieve shared goals. The three actions are development of a sustainability plan, development of a toolkit/guide for schools to help them implement integrated employment strategies for their students, and development of a strategy for resource dissemination.
- » Making sure that policies are being implemented, that state and local government agencies and offices are supported in implementing the policies, and that stakeholders across the state are aware of these policy changes.
- » Requesting clarification from the federal Office of Special Education Programs on how employment assessments conducted in sheltered environments can be in compliance with the Least Restrictive Environment requirement. As a result, the state Department of Rehabilitation Services no longer permits assessments to be conducted in facility-based environments. The department has also

partnered with the Let's Get to Work project on the Youth on the Job Training Initiative, which pays up to 100% of wages for up to 500 hours for any youth in the state.

The Let's Get to Work project is an active member of an advocacy network whose members share a common mission of inclusion and employment. The stakeholder network has increased public awareness regarding employment and youth with IDD. This has helped get state government more focused on employment. For example, Governor Scott Walker has highlighted the importance of integrated employment in Wisconsin through his 2014 Year of the Better Bottom Line initiative.

Lessons learned:

- » True systems change requires consistent definitions and interpretation of policy across systems and across system activities such as service implementation, training, funding, and outcome measurement. Wisconsin has pursued changes across and within state agencies to ensure change. The change in policy to emphasize community-based work assessments required both clarification at the school implementation level and within vocational rehabilitation services.
- » Wisconsin used federal processes to support clarification of policy and intent at the state level.
- » Involve multiple stakeholders from the ground level all the way up to state agency leadership.
- » Study and understand state systems "as is." This is challenging, but makes it easier to identify solutions. Let's Get to Work understands definitions, funding, systems, and system interactions well.



This publication was produced by Partnerships in Employment, a project of ThinkWork! at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. ThinkWork! is a resource portal offering data, personal stories, and tools related to improving employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

We thank the Partnerships in Employment grantees for their contributions to and reviews of the emerging practices in their state.

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