partnerships in employment

Community of Practice on Demonstration Projects: Collaboration and Systems Change

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Beginning in FY 2012 and 2013, the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AIDD) funded eight Partnerships in Employment (PIE) systems change projects under the Projects of National Significance program. PIE is a national transition systems change project whose purpose is to identify, develop, and promote policies and practices to improve transition, post-secondary, and competitive employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Six of these projects (in California, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, and Wisconsin) started in fiscal year 2012, and two additional projects (in Alaska and Tennessee) were added for fiscal year 2013.

Each of these projects has been intricately involved with their state education, vocational rehabilitation, and developmental disabilities agencies, individuals with IDD, families, educators, and service providers to effect changes within and across state systems. Although the grantees beginning in FY 2012 were required to implement demonstration projects as a component of their systems change work, the 2013 grantees were not.

This document is the product of a community of practice on PIE's demonstration projects in which the six states required to use them-- California, Iowa, Mississippi, Missouri, New York, and Wisconsin--participated. In this document, key informants from each of these states describe:

» the purpose and nature of each state's demonstration projects,

» how each state's demonstration projects played a role in building support for and scaling up systems change within the state, and

» the lessons learned for other states engaging in efforts to change systems affecting the transition of youth and young adults with IDD to competitive integrated employment.

Participants in the community of practice that developed this publication noted and wish to emphasize the centrality of collaboration to the design and impact of their demonstration projects.

Why collaboration is important in systems change for transition

The Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI) and the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services (NASDDDS) were partners in operating the Technical Assistance Center for the Partnerships Project. Technical assistance was guided by the High Performing States Framework (Hall et al., 2007), which is drawn from over 20 years of research conducted by ICI on state systems change. The elements of this framework are Interagency Collaboration, Leadership, Values, Operating Policy and Goals, Financing, Training and Technical Assistance, Service Innovations, and Outcome Data.

Interagency collaboration is well established as a predictor of employment outcomes during transition (Haber et al., 2016). Despite mandates for collaboration in legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014), insufficient linkages between the education, rehabilitation, and adult I/DD systems are a factor in depressing the employment outcomes of youth with IDD (Certo et al., 2008; Martinez et al, 2010; NCD, 2008; Plotner & Marshall, 2015; Haber et al., 2016).

Research reveals a need for more effective collaboration between education and rehabilitation professionals (Stevenson & Fowler, 2016; Oertle & Seader, 2015). Hart, Zimbrich, and Whelley (2002) identify five major barriers to increased coordination:

1. Partnerships are not effective at both state and local levels.
2. Mechanisms for information-sharing and shared service delivery are uncoordinated.
3. Absence of resource mapping at the state and local level
4. Gaps in service delivery
5. Lack of partnership between professionals and students and their families

WIOA requires that each state's public VR agency strengthen transition and pre-employment transition services, and coordinate with the state education, Medicaid, and I/DD agencies. Combined with the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare guidance clarifying commitment to individual integrated em-

ployment as a priority outcome under the home and community-based services waiver program (CMS, 2011), and the assessment of community-based employment settings (Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, 2014), there is a strong federal foundation for transition systems change.

Summary of major themes and lessons that emerged

There were a series of themes across the six grantees that used pilot sites to test and incubate best practices in employment services and supports for transition-age youth.

Local pilots can provide evidence of the need for systemic changes at the state level.

The state consortia used information collected from their demonstration programs to inform and shape policy, funding, and practice at the state-level. In Iowa this was facilitated by having state-level decision makers on a leadership team who could support pilot work and use what was being learned from the pilots to help shape state systems. Mississippi used their pilots to support the statewide development of common definitions of employment. In New York, with support, empowerment, and an established structure to "sell up" feedback to the state level, local-level consortia organized around pilots and strengthened the state system by sharing what they learned about the systemic barriers to providing services in their region.

Local efforts must be crafted to meet the local community's needs.

Successful pilots balanced the goals of the overall project with the needs of the local community. Mississippi found that their school-based projects needed to consider varying factors that impact districts across the state. These factors include degree of urbanization, local economy, public transportation, size of district, availability of funding, parental involvement, presence of transition staff, and the willingness of local leaders to increase their focus on transition to employment activities. Missouri supported its pilot communities in identifying their own needs and developing individualized work plans for community success.

Local partnerships, including those with business, are best done in a collaborative, problem-solving way.

California found that the use of mentors or peer networks for educators, employers, agency staff, or family members is an important way to guide those who want to support individuals with IDD in pursuing competitive integrated employment. Pilots found great success when schools, providers, agencies, and others shared in transition work. In particular, Missouri found that communities were most successful in engaging employers and developing business partnerships when taking a community-wide perspective on how to engage collaboratively instead of doing so individually.

Local-level pilots can provide a venue to formalize leadership.

Identifying the optimal local partners is an important part of moving local-level pilots forward. New York found that when local leaders were identified and supported, they could bring about a significant increase in buy-in to the systems change process, as well as accountability to the overarching goals of the statewide project. Missouri found that strong leadership at the community level was important to the pilots' productivity. The importance of identifying a champion in the community who would help maintain a cross-agency collaboration and move forward the work of the pilots became apparent early on.

Local-level pilot participants need specific training and technical assistance to support them in maneuvering around local level obstacles and innovating.

Training and technical assistance are needed for educators and service agency staff to implement state and local employment-first policies. California's pilots identified specific skills that local staff would need to support more youth in obtaining employment outcomes. Likewise, Iowa's pilot sites needed technical assistance and individualized capacity building to provide opportunities for guided reflection and refinement of their efforts, and to share what they were learning. Wisconsin noted that, with training and coaching, local pilots were able to make significant progress with their students in a short period of time.

Building expectations for employment is an important part of building support for change at the local level.

Each state reported that they used their pilots to increase awareness among youth with IDD and their families that employment is an option for them, and they supported youth in expressing their desire to work. California found that sharing local-level success stories was an important strategy for promoting high expectations for all stakeholders.

Local-level systems change cannot be sustained if efforts are only focused on project development.

The states found that it is important to establish clear boundaries regarding funding and sustainability of pilot programs from the very beginning of the project. New York's PIE project coordinators provided extensive and necessary technical assistance around capacity building to the pilot program partners. They found that by focusing on sustainability efforts from the start, they were able to avoid the tension and mistrust that sometimes results when communities perceive that valuable programs are being unfairly terminated. The Wisconsin project offered pilots start-up funds, but restricted their use to systemic practices that could be developed into policy "asks" or recommendations. Further, Wisconsin's pilots each reported that the on-site coaching they received was significantly more valuable to them than start-up funds, although the opportunity to receive funds had increased the local-level buy-in to systems change.

The themes above present a brief summary of lessons learned by the six state consortia that used demonstration projects to change systems affecting the transition of youth and young adults with IDD to competitive integrated employment: California, Iowa, Missouri, Mississippi, New York, and Wisconsin. We encourage you to read the individual state summaries that are included in this monograph. In their own words, key informants from each state describe the purposes and design of their pilots, how their pilots played a role in systems change within the state, and lessons they learned that other states can apply.

Individual State Summaries

A. California

Introduction

In 2011, the California Employment Consortium for Youth and Young Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (CECY) was formed to stimulate policy change and build capacity in California state systems and local communities to increase the number of youth and young adults with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in competitive integrated employment (CIE). Competitive integrated employment is defined as "full or part-time work at minimum wage or higher, with wages and benefits similar to those without disabilities performing the same work, and fully integrated with coworkers without disabilities" (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, 2014). CECY is a collaboration of state agencies, centers, organizations, families, and self-advocates with responsibilities for the education, rehabilitation, employment, and support of youth with disabilities. One of the ways CECY enacted its mission was through its Local Employment Collaborative Teams (LECTs).

At the same time CECY was working towards the passage of a state Employment First policy, it was also looking at how to support efforts that were driving change at the local level. This has traditionally been done through pilot or demonstration projects. While CECY initially considered funding traditional demonstration projects, a conscious decision was subsequently made not to use funds to develop new models, but to use them instead to uncover existing effective practices. We knew there were many barriers to competitive integrated employment for youth and young adults with IDD, but we were also aware of areas within California where agencies working together demonstrated success in assisting youth and young adults with IDD in gaining a job of their choosing at or above minimum wage.

Purpose and Design

The purpose of the grant CECY offered was to fund local teams to document their experiences helping youth and young adults with intellectual

and developmental disabilities achieve integrated, competitive employment and take their existing outcomes to the next level of success. A competitive, multi-round process was used to select seven out of 17 applications to provide support to document unique aspects of their programs. These seven programs were referred to as Local Employment Collaborative Teams (LECTs).

CECY members played an important role in shaping the Request for Proposals (RFP) to identify and support existing effective practices advancing CIE in local communities. The RFP served as a call to action for identifying pockets of success at the local/regional level. The LECTS were viewed as local systems change vehicles to increase CIE for youth with IDD. It was also an assumption and expectation that it was through the work of collaboration that such change was possible.

To be eligible to apply for support, the applicant had to have an existing California based collaborative effort that successfully moved youth and young adults ages 16–30 with IDD into integrated competitive employment.

The RFP provided examples of standards for effective evidence-based practices in secondary transition, learning experiences that result in improved outcomes for youth employment, and quality indicators in postsecondary education as identified by the National Secondary Transitions Technical Assistance Center and Think College. Effective practices could include, but were not limited to, building resumes and portfolios and getting work experiences while still in school, engaging family involvement and support, leveraging natural connections to identify jobs, raising awareness around benefits planning, and having a postsecondary education experience.

Each selected LECT addressed challenges to competitive integrated employment in a unique way that made full use of their community's resources. Support was provided for two years, from October 2012 to September 2014. LECTs were awarded $20,000 in the first year, and $10,000 in the second year. The first year was focused on documenting their practices and collecting employment data. In the second year, there

was a focus on scaling up of practices, through replication or promotion/product development about their practice.

The seven LECTs encompassed rural, urban, and suburban areas reflecting the demographic and geographic diversity of California. Four of the LECTs were situated within high schools (Glenn County Office of Education, Sweetwater Unified School District, Irvine Unified School District, and Whittier Union High School District), and one within a college (Taft College). Two of the LECTs were led by community-based agencies that had a specific aim around employment and offered employment services (East Bay Innovations and TransCen).

Each selected LECT was required to document their practices, provide specific employment data, develop a plan to expand on their outcomes, and disseminate their best practices.

As part of the documentation, each LECT reported employment data on a biannual basis during the two years of support (October 2012 to September 2014). While the California employment rate for individuals with IDD has remained fairly stable at 12–13%, the majority of the LECTs at the start of the documentation process reported a much higher employment rate for individuals in their programs. Six of the LECTs reported that a quarter (25% or more) of their participants were working in integrated employment. By the last reporting period, all LECTs reported employment rates above the California rate of 12.4%.

The overwhelming majority of the LECTs reported an average hourly rate at or above minimum wage. LECTs with the highest average hourly rates ($10.00 and above) tended to be in areas that had a higher minimum wage than the state minimum wage. By collecting employment data such as hourly wages, a systemic barrier related to funding was revealed. One of the LECTs situated in a school district reported subminimum wages for its participants where the source of wages was Workability I funds. This is in contrast to the other LECTs, where the source of wages was predominantly the employer.

By September 2014, the average hourly rate for

those participants was above minimum wage ($8.46) and the majority of working Sweetwater LECT participants (75.0%) were paid at or above minimum wage. This represents a major shift, especially as it occurred prior to implementation of Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, which prohibits schools from contracting with sub-minimum wage providers. LECTs engaged 75 employers (as reported for April–September 2014) representing a variety of workplace settings, including retail, entertainment, grocery, restaurants, government, health care, childcare, and banking sectors.

Challenges that Emerged

The barriers to CIE addressed by the LECTs mirrored some of the challenges at the state level, including inadequate funding for job development, lack of coordination across state agencies, gaps in service, high unemployment in general, fears of losing benefits, and need for innovative ways of acquiring and demonstrating skill acquisition. The LECTs addressed these barriers through diversifying and braiding funding, expanding beyond their collective to develop additional community partnerships, engaging families and employers, providing training on advocacy, expectations for work, and benefits planning, and continuing service innovation and development. Specific examples follow.

Funding

» Diversified funding. East Bay Innovations sought additional funding through the Workforce Investment Board's On-the-Job-Training and Individual Training Accounts and the Social Security Administration's Ticket to Work program, as well as through private donations, foundation grants, and corporate giving.

» Braided resources and funding from both the developmental disabilities system and vocational rehabilitation to build comprehensive, wrap-around support that enabled people with more significant disabilities to work and live in the community. This was achieved through negotiating an hourly rate (instead of a daily rate) for day services, allowing for a braided funding model; using Regional Center[1] funds

for community services and Department of Rehabilitation funds for employment supports in the course of the same day, eliminating the need to choose between community engagement (day services) and integrated, direct hire employment; and increasing the number of hours worked while reducing day service support as confidence is gained and work skills are built.

Partnerships

» Partnered with a local university department of informatics, the local Department of Rehabilitation and the Regional Center to develop the Technology in the Workplace (TIW) Program providing technological supports that helped students gain and retain work experience. TIW identified existing computer applications as well as developed new ones such as "Preparing for an Interview" and "Hygiene Helper," available on both Apple and Android devices.

» Paired rehabilitation counseling master's students with district transition students to administer vocational assessments.

Engaging Families

» Increased direct family involvement and enthusiasm in the transition to employment by coaching families to network and assist the graduate in securing a job.

Engaging Employers

» Developed marketing material directed at employers through a testimonial video highlighting positive employer experiences to help recruit and maintain a growing list of business and community supporters.

» Established a business advisory committee, which enabled businesses employing individuals with disabilities to share success stories as well as encourage other businesses to support student training opportunities.

Training Students, Teachers, and Parents

» Special education teachers received training and conducted job development one day a month.

[1] California's 21 "regional centers" are non-profit private corporations that contract with the state's Department of Developmental Services to provide or coordinate services and supports for individuals with developmental disabilities.

Substitute teachers were hired through the grant so special education teachers could participate in trainings.

» Held frequent Social Security work incentive trainings to educate families and students, and to explore expectations around employment.

» Designed a series of family and student events showcasing self-determined role models with disabilities successfully working in the community.

» Trained students in self-advocacy in partnership with the local Independent Living Center.

Building and Demonstrating Jobs Skills

» Adapted certificate training curriculums in food handling, basic tool safety, customer service, OSHA back safety, CPR/first aid, custodial service, and workplace safety by including pictures, videos, and kinesthetic activities.

» Used technology to create video resumes highlighting the abilities of individual students for the purposes of marketing to potential employers and for use during interviews and used QR (Quick Response) codes on student business cards to direct potential employers to a video resume or other information by scanning the code with a cell phone application.

» Instituted the Career Education Academy: a three-week summer intersession where students participate in a series of industry tours, volunteer activities, and connect with vocational services. These activities culminate in a "Dress for Success" student fashion show.

» Invited transition students to attended monthly Regional Center Job Club meetings.

» Used person-centered planning to support the unique skills and interests of each student by crafting realistic roadmaps to workplace and personal achievements.

Each LECT also assisted with the planning and implementation of local Community Conversations. Seven community conversations, held in the counties where LECTs were located, uncovered the most promising avenues for expanding employment opportunities in diverse local communities in California. The conversations were an important way to further engage with families, disability service providers, young adults with disabilities, and employers. Employers, in particular, spoke about their positive experiences in hiring people with disabilities.

Lessons Learned

It takes a combination of factors to connect individuals with IDD to appropriate job opportunities. There are several lessons to be learned from the LECTs in how to address the barriers and successfully achieve CIE:

» There must be a philosophical shift and commitment to integrated community-based employment by leadership and staff. This requires a shift in funding and resources, including staff time.

» Training and technical assistance are needed to support educators and service agency staff in implementing state and local employment first policies. Training and resources are also needed to help make family members and individuals with IDD aware of the various services and supports available for moving toward CIE.

» Job preparedness and job matching are necessary ingredients for securing employment of choice, higher wages and retention. Staff must be hired and/or trained for this expertise.

» A team approach is needed, particularly for those transitioning from high school. Partnerships among educators, regional centers, and rehabilitation staff are key to connecting youth with IDD to appropriate services and supports for moving towards CIE. Community partners such as employers or other local assets (such as graduate students in rehabilitation counseling) can greatly assist in matching skills and job opportunities.

» Business partnerships addressing a variety of industry sectors must be established to ensure access to work-training and employment opportunities in integrated settings.

» Use of mentors or peer networks, whether for educators, employers, agency staff, or family members, is an important support for staff moving individuals with IDD to competitive integrated employment.

» Youth with IDD need skill development and work experience opportunities.

» Youth with IDD need to be aware that employment is an option for them. They need to want to work, and be able to express their desire to work.

» Success stories are needed to promote high expectations from all stakeholders.

B. Iowa

Purpose and Design

The Iowa Coalition for Integrated Employment (ICIE) has used pilot projects to inform and support systems change efforts throughout the course of the project. The two primary areas of focus for pilot projects include the Model Employment Transition Sites (METS) that concentrate efforts on transition services and an array of pilots focused on community rehabilitation service providers (CRPs). Below is a brief description of the purpose of each of the pilot areas.

1) Model Employment Transition Sites (METS): These pilots were an exploratory initiative which sought to assess the needs of and define the infrastructure necessary to build and implement a system of transition services and supports across Iowa. The goal of the pilots was to develop a replicable framework that school teams throughout the state could use to build transition programs that prepared students with disabilities for paid employment. The first year of the METS there were four school districts that participated. The second year, an additional district was added for a total of five METS sites.

The METS system-building framework is organized around four essential elements:

1. *Early planning and experience to focus student career preferences.*

2. *Early and ongoing collaboration.*

3. *Paid work experience.*

4. *Support and follow-up to maintain employment.*

These four essential elements represent the services, supports, and procedures that are needed for effective employment preparation programs and are derived from research-based practices. Working with and learning from each site's experiences informed the development of a framework. Moreover, each community addressed the essential elements by implementing strategies that reflected their local culture and resources. METS sites used a team of subject matter experts that met with local site leadership teams on a quarterly basis to assist with processes and tools to support individual site plan implementation.

2) Community Rehabilitation Service Provider (CRPs) Pilots: The CRP pilots have evolved as the project progressed. Early in the project, six CRP pilots worked with subject matter experts to learn and implement customized employment strategies with job seekers who were considered as having the most significant disabilities impacting integrated, competitive employment. The second, third, and fourth year of the pilots were very specific to individual provider proposals involving assistance with transformation from facility-based services to integrated employment services, partnering with schools, and building strong integrated employment service teams.

The intention of the design of the pilots was to use the resources afforded from the project to implement different approaches, assess, and capture lessons learned that would help refine both transition and CRP focused models that could be shared across the state as well as inform state-level systems.

METS: Potential pilot schools were selected based on various performance indicators from both Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services (IVRS) and Department of Education (DE) data. Sites represented large, medium, and small districts from across the state. A self-assessment process was developed based upon the literature review and the four essential system elements of the Iowa Model Employment Transition Sites.

The self-assessment started with a case study review of individuals with disabilities who have exited the district high school. Each case study included IVRS and DE data. The case study review was intended to identify possible patterns across individuals and generate hypotheses about current

system strengths and areas in need of support. The next step in the self-assessment was to review the system data from IVRS and DE to further explore the generated hypotheses and identify other patterns. These findings were then sorted into the relevant essential system element for discussion and selection of priority focus areas. The self-assessment ended with the development of an action plan.

IVRS and DE staff initiated the self-assessment with each of the METS sites. Each site identified a team to complete the self-assessment. Project staff decided to use the effectiveness cycling method for METS implementation. Using this method, the self-assessment was piloted with two MET sites, refined, and then implemented with the other three MET sites. As anticipated, this process was effective in identifying areas in need of refinement.

CRPs: The first year of the CRP pilots, ICIE collaborated with Iowa's Employment First Leadership State Mentor Program (EFLSMP) to leverage resources between the two projects to fund six model service provider projects (two small, two medium, and two large sites representing all quadrants of the state) instead of the three identified in the original project proposal. Subject matter experts assisted with providing individualized technical assistance to each of the pilot sites. Each site focused on using customized employment strategies with individuals with significant disabilities who were pursuing integrated, competitive employment.

Representatives from ICIE, IVRS, and the Iowa Association of Community Providers met with each of the pilot locations and discussed expectations, parameters, resources, and timelines. Pilots provided monthly feedback and cost analysis information that was used by Iowa Medicaid Enterprise (IME) and IVRS for employment services rate restructuring and modeling.

Pilot sites all have representatives serving on the Coalition, and they participated in discussions and decision-making regarding future CRP pilot priorities to support CRPs with aligning mission, services, and resources to support integrated, competitive employment services across the state.

Contribution to Systems Change

The METS and CRP pilots played a critical role in advancing system change efforts in Iowa. The pilot projects provided essential information regarding challenges, what worked well, and what support was needed to implement efforts successfully.

Probably the most notable impact from the METS and CRP pilots was the significant change in the level of collaboration among both local and state-level stakeholders.

METS: Each METS established local leadership teams of cross-stakeholders in their community to work together on project implementation. For example, all the teams included an array of school personnel (some that are not typically engaged in conversations around students with disabilities and preparation for employment), including Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services staff, community rehabilitation service providers, case managers, employers, parents and advocates, etc. It was not typical for school districts to have such a diverse group of local partners working together on a shared initiative. This increase in collaborative partners has contributed to a greater understanding of the importance of the different players in supporting youth with moving into competitive employment. It has stimulated learning about how partners can collaborate to develop a more effective system for serving youth.

CRPs: Although the CRP pilots did not have local leadership teams, each of the pilots worked closely with local partners (Iowa Vocational Rehabilitation Services, case management services, school districts, parents/families, employers, etc.). Sites submitted monthly progress reports that included an overview of partner collaboration and any challenges to collaboration. CRPs realized early on the importance of engaging multiple stakeholders, and experienced much higher success rates when multiple partners were active in the process.

All of the METS and CRP pilots also worked closely with a state leadership team. This allowed ongoing regular communication regarding what pilot participants were learning, what supports were needed, and what state-level components either supported or impeded local collaboration. This

collaboration has provided valuable information for state agencies, and has led to changes in policy, funding, and practice at the state level.

In addition, learning from the pilots has shaped and refined the focus and approach of the overall project, and has contributed to building a much larger network of stakeholders across the state that are engaging in the work and conversations for improving Iowa's system around integrated employment. Throughout the project, pilot projects have also participated in statewide Coalition meetings to share information about their efforts, what they are learning from the work, and to engage in discussions with Coalition members.

Lessons Learned

The pilot projects played a significant role in helping inform and shape the overall work of the project. They brought a much wider group of stakeholders together across the state, who are communicating and sharing what is being learned.

Outcomes from the work have not only influenced how the individual agencies and districts deliver service, but have changed how Iowa's state agencies are doing business. For example, the CRP pilot data guided Iowa's Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Iowa Medicaid Systems in identifying new services and an improved employment service rate structure. Policies have been modified at the state level based on what was shared from local communities. In addition, job descriptions within agencies and districts have been refined to support integrated employment services.

Both challenges and successes of the pilot projects contributed to tackling the complex dynamics of moving Iowa's system forward. Challenges experienced by METS and CRP pilots are listed below.

» There was significant variance among the pilot project sites and the overall quality of investment of time and effort in implementing their individualized plans.
» There was a significant amount of resource invested to build capacity of pilot sites and difficulty in replicating that statewide. All pilot sites needed technical assistance and individualized capacity building, which

contributed significantly to the positive outcomes that were realized. Without individualized support and capacity building, it is believed outcomes would have been different. Iowa does not currently have a structure in place to deliver this type of support to transition programs and community rehabilitation service providers. The importance of capacity building across systems has been identified as a critical component, and is currently an area of focus in the final stages of the project.

» There is an array of variables and it takes time to come up with models that are ready for scaling up across the state.
» There is an inconsistency across the state with regional decision-making and the quality of collaboration among partners (e.g., IVRS staff approving/not approving services, variation in services provided by area education agencies, etc.).
» Across stakeholder groups, there are still challenges related to low or no expectation that individuals with significant disabilities can work in integrated, competitive employment.

What worked well for METS and CRP pilots:

» New relationships and partnerships were developed that will be sustained beyond the life of the pilot, and they represent a much widened group of stakeholders working together.
» State agencies strengthened communication with one another, and there has been a building of more positive relationships and stronger collaboration between local and state level partnerships.
» Schools and CRPs found success in implementing strategies that influenced how they deliver services to Iowa youth with disabilities that lead to integrated employment.
» There has been a significant change in expectation that individuals with significant disabilities can successfully work in the community.
» Participants are capturing frameworks for models that could be used by other schools and agencies across the state.
» All pilots had success with placement of individuals with disabilities in integrated, competitive employment.

» Information collected from pilots informed and shaped policy, funding, and practice at the state level.

Here are some final suggestions related to use of pilot projects to inform and shape system change efforts:

» Be clear on purpose, what you want to accomplish with the pilots, and how they will tie back into the systems change work.

» Maintain regular and ongoing communication with the pilots to shape systems change efforts, and treat the relationship with the pilots as an ongoing partnership.

» Realize that capacity building is an important component and that often resources and experts will be needed to help take local work beyond what is already known.

» Pay attention to local elements that either enhance or inhibit success.

» Include regular evaluation efforts for individual pilots to help them with reflection and refinement of the work and to capture what they are learning.

» Include state-level decision makers on a leadership team who can support pilot work and use what is being learned to help shape state systems.

C. Mississippi

Purpose and Design

The Mississippi Partnerships for Employment Innovation Grants funded three pilot projects from 2012 – 2016. These pilot projects focused on demonstrating how schools can improve transition services, provided students with employment experiences while in school, and assisted in finding competitive employment in the community when students leave school.

Gathering Grounds, through the Rankin County School District, was a community-based business (coffee/art shop) teaching students transitional work skills in an inclusive, safe environment. Students operated the coffee shop featuring original student artwork. The goal was to provide the extensive job skills training needed in the areas of employability and social skills to reach each

student's goal of competitive, paid employment. In addition to the hands-on activities in the coffee shop, students were able to participate in numerous community events and create various handouts and other promotional materials.

Building Opportunities for Learning and Transition Success (BOLTS), through the Oxford School District, was composed of hands-on employment skills combined with various systems change activities. The goal of BOLTS was to increase competitive employment outcomes and transition services for youth and young adults with IDD who attended the Oxford School District. Activities included: development of on-campus work training opportunities, development of job/career videos or podcasts through digital media, development of a Preparing for Life Transition Planning Guide, development of transition training opportunities, the expansion of the current array of transition services and hands-on training opportunities for future teachers.

"Customized Employment," the third project, was initially designed to target workshops to begin the process of customized employment by linking job seekers to community employers. It sought to improve the reimbursement system used by the Home and Community-Based Waiver and work with the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services to reimburse workshops that provide training in customized employment.

The main objective of this project was to establish a pilot provider network between vocational rehabilitation and five agencies serving people with significant disabilities. The process of customized employment, as promoted by Marc Gold & Associates, was used for this project. It offered a hands-on approach to teaching an agency how to facilitate employment outcomes for a population that has been traditionally served in work activity centers and sheltered workshops.

The initial request for proposal (RFP) for the pilot projects focused on helping youth and young adults with IDD get and keep employment consistent with their interests, abilities, and needs. To promote an assortment of grant proposals, the RFP was deliberately written to allow projects to

focus on employment from various perspectives. A primary goal was presented: to increase competitive employment outcomes for Mississippi youth and young adults (ages 16–30) with developmental disabilities, including individuals with intellectual disabilities, by enhancing collaboration across existing state systems.

To meet this goal, two objectives were presented:

Objective One: Identify and implement strategies and best practices that improve outcomes for youth and young adults with IDD. For example, provide training and technical assistance for restructuring an established sheltered work environment that will move employees with IDD into competitive community employment.

Objective Two: Enhance collaborations to facilitate the transition process from secondary and post-secondary schools or other pre-vocational training settings to competitive employment in integrated settings.

Contribution to Systems Change

In addition, the RFP listed the criteria that all proposals needed to encompass in one sentence: "Initiatives must promote systems change activities to improve outcomes for youth and young adults with IDD to be employed in competitive, integrated, inclusive settings aimed at maximizing personal and economic independence as they transition from education (secondary or postsecondary) or pre-vocational services to employment."

In order to meet these criteria, each of the three projects developed its own structure. The Gathering Grounds and BOLTS pilot projects each promoted inclusive practices in all activities. Both offered paid and unpaid work experiences, development of all individualized education plans to fully include employment as a primary transition activity, and sustainability for all activities once grant funding has ended. Each project focused on sustainability activities to continue services and developed materials to promote replication of services in other districts and areas of the state.

The "Customized Employment" project focused exclusively on a financial systems change initiative. At the time, the use of a provider network had

never been tried in Mississippi. Southeast TACE took interest in this concept, and funded Marc Gold & Associates to provide the training to the pilot sites and 20 vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors jointly.

Around the same time as staff changes within VR took place, the Mississippi Department of Mental Health (DMH), the agency responsible for the IDD waiver through Medicaid, launched a new menu item known as job discovery. This service was based on the customized employment concepts being used by this project.

Concerns were expressed about using VR dollars if Medicaid funds were available for job discovery. As a solution, the idea of serving people on the waiting list for the IDD waiver was offered. Many of these people were not receiving any services, and might be interested to learn there was a mechanism to help them find employment. A review of the waiting list showed approximately 700 adults who were potentially eligible to be served through VR dollars.

VR and DMH have been working on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for some time. Since no agreement existed, VR agreed to have the agencies continue to serve any job seekers who already had a case open, but not to add new clients. The MOU was signed in June 2015.

Lessons Learned

Lessons learned from these pilot projects included the following:

» It is best that all state agencies agree on and use one definition of employment.

» Success should be documented with quantitative and qualitative data.

» Data collected across demonstration projects that is to be collected should be consistent.

» Employment providers, the business community, youth and young adults with disabilities, families, disability agencies and organizations, school transition staff, and the community at large need training on available resources and services.

» Business partners need to be part of all project activities to improve planning, implementation, and sustainability.

» School-based projects need to reflect variations, including the degree of urbanicity, the local economy, public transportation, district size, funding levels and sources, parental involvement, transition staff, and the willingness of special education directors to increase focus on transition to employment activities.

» To achieve sustainability all projects need to plan for continuation of the project when they are initiated.

» Youth and young adults with disabilities do want to work.

» Parents need to be part of the entire transition to employment process, and need to know how work may impact benefits such as Society Security and Medicaid.

» Youth and young adults with IDD who have transitioned into employment need case management services for as long as possible to assist with future issues.

» Youth and young adults with disabilities need to be part of all planning, implementation, and sustainability activities.

D. Missouri

Purpose and Design

The overall goal of Show-Me-Careers is to increase the number of youth and young adults ages 16–30 with IDD who are participating in paid, inclusive community employment in Missouri.

A leadership consortium of statewide agencies was formed to lead the project. Consortium members believed that stronger collaborations among the systems that support youth and their families, at both the state and community levels, would lead to better employment outcomes. For that reason, the project sought to pilot and/or scale-up cross-systems approaches to transition within local communities throughout the state.

The leadership consortium developed six Guiding Principles grounded in current research and best practices regarding transition to integrated employment. The Guiding Principles provide a framework through which to identify, expand, and share effective school to work practices. They also allowed the consortium to review and identify funding, policy, and other changes that are needed to support the expansion of these practices statewide. Guiding Principles include:

» **Career Planning and Early Work Experience:** All students should have paid work experiences and participate in high-quality, person-centered career planning.

» **Employer Engagement and Business Partnerships:** School-to-career initiatives should engage employers as active partners and should focus on the needs of both businesses and youth.

» **Family Involvement:** Families should be encouraged and equipped to have high expectations for their child's future and to participate actively in all parts of transition planning.

» **Integration of Systems:** School-based and post-school service systems should coordinate efforts to make sure students can move seamlessly from school to career.

» **Post-Secondary Education and Training:** Students with developmental disabilities should get the support they need to aim for, apply to, enter, and succeed in post-secondary education/training.

» **Youth Development:** Students should have the opportunity to build self- determination skills and community connections.

The leadership consortium decided that collaborative teams in eight pilot communities would be selected through a competitive application process. The Project Director conducted nine pre-application meetings across the state to train applicants in the Guiding Principles and provide information about the grants.

In addition, the consortium developed a Planning Guide for applicant teams to conduct a community assessment in relation to the Guiding Principles,

Leadership Consortium
- MO Developmental Disabilities Council
- MO Division of Workforce Development
- MO Office of Adult Learning and Rehabilitation Services
- MO Office of Special Education
- Governor's Council on Disability
- People First of Missouri
- University of Missouri – Kansas City Institute for Human Development, UCEDD

and to identify how they planned to address some or all of the principles through their community partnerships. Pilot communities were required to develop a core team of cross-agency partners to plan, implement, and evaluate activities aimed to support the following outcomes:

Intended Short-Term Outcomes

1. An increase in the number of businesses providing early work experiences and/or inclusive employment to youth with IDD.

2. An increase in the number of youth and young adults with IDD who explore work and career preferences and opportunities through participation in a variety of early community work experiences.

3. Increased collaboration and coordination of resources at the community level that supports access to early work and inclusive employment opportunities for youth with IDD.

Intended Long-Term Outcome

An increase in the number of youth with IDD who transition seamlessly upon high school graduation to inclusive employment and/or post-secondary education and training.

To achieve these outcomes, selected pilot communities were asked to use the project's Guiding Principles as a framework to direct their efforts over the three and a half years of the project. Through the planning process, communities were able to focus more attention on those principles most relevant to their community needs and goals and less attention on the principles already addressed in their communities.

In addition to the Guiding Principles, some communities chose to focus on other barriers to inclusive employment (for example, transportation, fear of losing benefits, and lack of access to assistive technology). However, it was important that efforts be linked to improving the short- and long-term outcomes identified above.

Throughout the project, pilot communities received funding, technical assistance, and coaching from the leadership consortium related to the Guiding Principles. Such activities included monthly webinar series, annual site visits, and the annual Show-Me-Careers Leadership Institute held for all pilot communities. Teams were also supported to attend trainings on transition offered throughout the state. In addition, two consultants worked individually with pilot communities to provide assistance and guidance in developing and executing annual work plans.
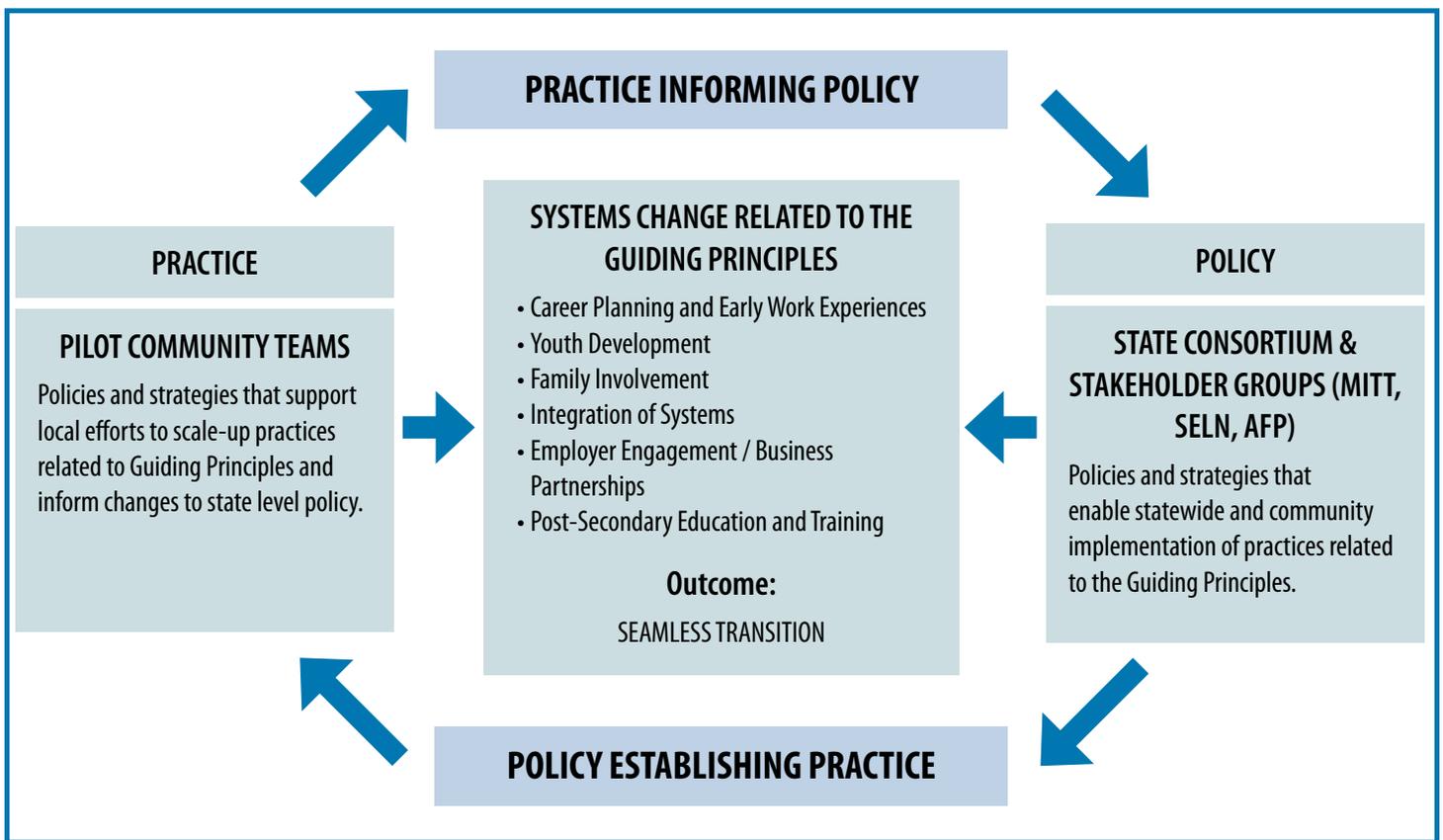
Influences on design and implementation

The overall approach of the Show-Me-Careers project to address both state- and community-level systems change was informed by the framework pictured below. The policies and strategies related to the Guiding Principles, when implemented by the pilot communities, would inform and support state-level policy change related to transition. Likewise, state-level policies and strategies related to the Guiding Principles enables the implementation of effective community-level practice. Efforts at both the community and the state level would lead to the overall outcome of seamless transition to employment for youth with IDD.

When designing the implementation of the pilot communities, the leadership consortium considered the following elements regarding transition at the community level:

1. **The project's core outcomes reflect opportunities for growth.** The leadership consortium identified lack of competitive inclusive employment, limited access to career planning and early work experience, and lack of collaboration and coordination between agencies at the community level as areas of weakness in the state of Missouri, and adopted those areas as priority targets for the pilot demonstrations.

2. **There is a need to increase collaboration at the local level.** The leadership consortium believed that cross-systems collaboration between agencies such as the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), and Division of Developmental Disabilities (DD) was already occurring on the state level, but began to break down at the community level. The intent of the pilot demonstrations was to facilitate and increase collaboration between systems and organizations working in transition in local communities (e.g., school districts, VR, DD, Centers for Independent Living, etc.)

Figure 1. Show Me Careers Conceptual Framework

PRACTICE INFORMING POLICY

PRACTICE

PILOT COMMUNITY TEAMS

Policies and strategies that support local efforts to scale-up practices related to Guiding Principles and inform changes to state level policy.

SYSTEMS CHANGE RELATED TO THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES
- Career Planning and Early Work Experiences
- Youth Development
- Family Involvement
- Integration of Systems
- Employer Engagement / Business Partnerships
- Post-Secondary Education and Training

Outcome:
SEAMLESS TRANSITION

POLICY

STATE CONSORTIUM & STAKEHOLDER GROUPS (MITT, SELN, AFP)

Policies and strategies that enable statewide and community implementation of practices related to the Guiding Principles.

POLICY ESTABLISHING PRACTICE

3. **Each community is at a different starting point.** The leadership consortium acknowledged that some communities had existing cross-agency partnerships addressing transition (Regional Transition Networks, Community Transition Teams), while others had no formalized transition group and would need to spend the beginning portion of the project learning about other stakeholders in their community and creating partnerships. For this reason, the consortium decided not to use the same intervention in every community, but to allow communities to design their own team and identify their own work plan based on their perceptions of community needs.

Contribution to Systems Change

Systems change has occurred at both the state and community levels due to the efforts of the pilot communities and the work of the leadership consortium. Below are some examples of systems or policy changes that occurred as they relate to the project's Guiding Principles.

Integration of Systems. The leadership consortium facilitated involvement of Workforce Development staff and centers in the pilot communities, including cross-training, addressing barriers that prevent youth with IDD from using Workforce facilities or resources, and improved information sharing processes. One pilot community has implemented an opportunity that allows students to register for and complete a national career readiness certificate in the local high school. In another community, the local workforce system and disability partners cohosted business outreach events. Project efforts also increased collaboration with local County Developmental Disability Boards. One County Board of Services is now helping to fund transportation to community work experience sites for students.

Career Planning and Early Work Experience. Missouri VR, a leadership consortium agency, funded a new statewide program to expand services and offer work-related supports to public school students in Missouri who are not yet eligible for similar services through VR. The Pre-Employment Transition Services (PETS) program was made possible through new Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) legislation. PETS will focus on providing hands-on supports

by working directly with students, families and schools. The services will include job shadowing, mock interviews, and counseling to help create a smooth transition into the workforce. Because pilot communities had established working relationships between agencies and with local businesses through Show-Me-Careers, they were well positioned to implement new WIOA programs. For instance, through WIOA funding, VR developed a new summer work experience program with participating Community Rehabilitation Programs. The program offered a paid summer work experience for VR-eligible students with disabilities who have not yet graduated from high school. Multiple pilot communities participated in this new program.

Family Involvement. Show-Me-Careers pilot communities began receiving technical assistance from Missouri's Family-to-Family Resource Center (F2F) and the National Supporting Families Community of Practice to build the capacity of schools and service agencies to engage families in the transition process. Technical assistance activities included training support coordinators, disseminating transition-related handouts and resources to local schools, and planing community-wide transition events. As a result, transition tools and resources geared towards families have been integrated into schools and the work of professionals such as pre-employment transition specialists and support coordinators in various parts of the state. The leadership consortium assisted F2F as transition content experts in the development of a Daily Life & Employment packet to support families to begin planning for employment at an early age. Trainings on uses of the packet with families were provided at the broader systems level to the new state pre-employment transition services coordinators, as well as VR transition counselors.

Employer Engagement and Business Partnerships. There has been a growing focus on employer-driven job placements among many state and local business initiatives. Show-Me-Careers is a collaborator on the KC@Work project, led by the Greater Kansas City Business Leadership Network (GKC-BLN), which expanded efforts to support businesses with their disability inclusion efforts. KC@Work's current initiatives include Staples and Amazon fulfillment centers, Cerner Corporation, and the University of Kansas Medical Center. At the local level, collaborations have developed teams and systems for ongoing business engagement strategies after the funding ends. One community is developing a local business-led consortium. The Missouri Developmental Disability Council, a statewide organization and project consortium member, has included in their new five-year plan, funding for three pilot Business Leadership Networks in local communities. In addition, the Council developed a business resource website for businesses, providers, and agencies.

Youth Development. Throughout the project, pilot communities created and expanded trainings and curricula to enhance self-determination, employment skills, and soft skills among youth with disabilities. In one community, an Independent Living Center partnered with schools to provide classes on self-determination, goal-setting, employment, and post-secondary education. Another community worked with area schools to implement job clubs during school hours to develop job skills throughout the school year and connect participants to summer and permanent work opportunities. Some communities also offer summer leadership academies and additional opportunities for youth to build self-determination and social capital that enhance the individuals' ability to make decisions impacting employment.

Post-Secondary Training and Education. Although access to post-secondary education was identified by the leadership consortium as a component of successful system transitioning youth to employment, it was not a primary focus in the work plans of the pilot communities. However, communities received information and training related to this Guiding Principle through the project's webinar series and training institutes.

Lessons Learned

The leadership consortium and project staff believe the project's design, to use local partnerships with a shared strategic direction, advanced effective transition practices in Missouri. The following list

captures some of the lessons learned:

» The project evaluation was affected by the design of the pilot communities. One challenge was evaluating the outcome of the project. Because each community did not implement the same intervention, it was hard to compare outcomes across communities. However, the leadership consortium did not want to prescribe the intervention. Instead, every community identified its own needs and developed individualized work plans.

» The strength of the collaboration was key to the success of the pilots. In any aspect of transition, there should be multiple partners and agencies coordinating services. Pilots found great success when schools, providers, agencies, and others shared in transition work. In particular, communities were most successful in the principle of Employer Engagement and Business Partnerships when taking a broad community-wide perspective.

» Change at the systems level helped facilitate the work plans of the pilots. As previously mentioned, changes in WIOA led to the new VR-funded summer work experience. This change allowed communities to receive additional funding to design and implement new early work experiences.

» Strong leadership at the community level was important to the pilots' productivity. Early on, the importance emerged of identifying a "champion" in the community who would help maintain a cross-agency collaboration and move forward the work of the pilots. One community was unable to continue its work as a pilot because the group lacked a champion to continually move the work ahead.

E. New York

Introduction

Launched in October 2011, the New York State Partnerships in Employment Systems Change (NYS PIE) project aims to enhance collaboration among the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD); New York State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council (DDPC); New York State Education Department, Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation (ACCES-VR); and the New York State Education Department, Office of Special Education (OSE). The project is coordinated by the Strong Center for Developmental Disabilities (SCDD), a University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) at the University of Rochester Medical Center.

The structure of NYS PIE rests on the creation of statewide and regional consortia of state agencies, individuals with IDD, families, providers, universities, public and private employers, educators, school districts/Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), and other partners who have pledged to work collaboratively to engage in systems change efforts that contribute to the following: (a) developing policies that support competitive employment in integrated settings as the first and desired outcome for youth and young adults with developmental disabilities, (b) removing systemic barriers to competitive employment in integrated settings, (c) implementing strategies and best practices that improve employment outcomes for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and (d) enhancing collaboration to facilitate the transition process from secondary school or other prevocational training settings to integrated employment settings.

The goal of this systems change effort is to improve employment preparation for high school students; increase the number of students transitioning from high school to competitive, integrated employment while decreasing participation in day habilitation programs and sheltered workshops; increase the number of young adults employed in competitive employment settings; and enhance cross-agency communication and collaboration. The effort also aims to establish an Employment First Policy in NYS, resulting in improved quality of life and independence for people with disabilities, including IDD.

Purpose and Design

The NYS PIE approach to model demonstration programs was based on several key tenets: (a) when high school students are prepared for and

then experience work for themselves, they gain the confidence to pursue employment after graduation; (b) it is important that students are very much a part of their community, and providing employment skills allows students to continue participating in their community through employment; and (c) students who are unable to continue in employment after graduation because of the systems issues related to changing to adult services often regress, and become more costly to serve.

Taking into consideration the complexities of a being a large state with significant regional variation in practice and service delivery, the NYS PIE project was built upon the recognition that change occurs best when addressing needs at the local/regional level and then scaling up those practices statewide (Figure 1). As such, NYS PIE demonstration programs were purposefully developed in each region of the state to ensure

that both feasibility and sustainability of these programs was achievable regardless of the geographical location of implementation.

Cross-systems engagement, in both planning and implementation, was a requirement for each model demonstration program. For every program developed, a corresponding regional transition work group was established, if one was not already present in the region. These groups were comprised of school district representatives (including administrators, special education teachers, and transition specialists), community rehabilitation providers and supported employment agencies, and local/regional OPWDD employment specialists and ACCES-VR counselors. Other local constituencies, including self-advocacy groups, parent groups, regional workforce development representatives, and area businesses, were also involved in the local/regional consortia.

Figure 2. The NYS PIE organizational and regional structure.
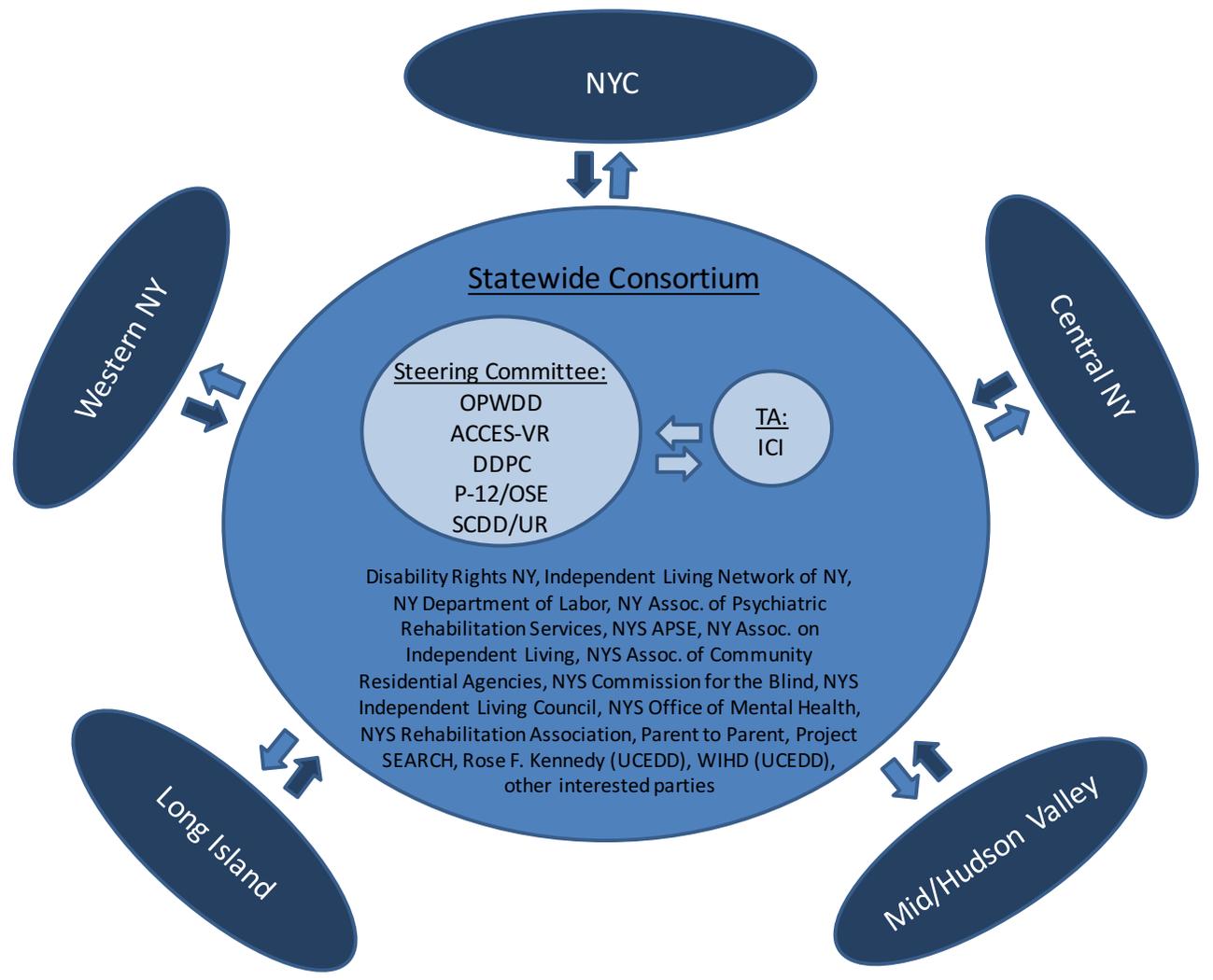
The NYS PIE Steering Committee identified two promising practice transition-to-work models, already in existence in NYS, as programs to replicate through this effort. These included OPWDD's Employment Training Program (ETP) and Project SEARCH. These models were chosen based on their proven track record for successful outcomes within pockets of NYS, as well as having established funding mechanisms already negotiated and in place within the state.

High School Employment Training Program (HS ETP)

Prior to NYS PIE, OPWDD had long been offering the ETP program for adults with IDD across the state. However, OPWDD had not historically provided employment readiness supports for students prior to exit from high school.

In recognition that early preparation is the key to long-term success, OPWDD partnered with the NYS Education Department to pilot a high school adaptation of the ETP program as a deliverable of NYS PIE. The goal of these pilots was to begin introducing job readiness skills to students in the 9th grade, tailoring each year's curriculum to be age appropriate with increasingly complex concepts and participatory practice exercises; and offering community work experiences related to specific employment goals established during the final years of high school.

Components of the program include both discovery and job readiness training. A customized approach is used to carve an internship that matches a person's interests and skills with the needs of a partnering business. During the internship, OPWDD pays the ETP participant a minimum wage salary (using non-Medicaid funds). Job development and job coaching supports are provided by the high school. Every ETP participant has a job description that is used to assess their progress in meeting the employer's expectations. At the end of the internship, it is hoped that the ETP participant will be hired by the business.

Four high school ETP programs were established through NYS PIE in Albany, New York City, Eastchester, and Broome County.

Project SEARCH (PS)

Project SEARCH is a one-year transition-to-work model that delivers intensive job-readiness training through in-class instruction and unpaid internships in a fully integrated setting during the final year of high school. Students complete up to three internship rotations, with a focus on learning transferable and marketing job skills. They are challenged to use natural supports and to develop important "soft skills" that, when lacking, are often a deterrent to achieving and maintaining competitive employment.

The PS model partners business, education, and adult-agency supports, including vocational rehabilitation (VR) and the state DD agency. The model is flexible to meet the needs of a diverse market and population, and operates on a sustainable braided-funding model. While a few successful PS programs existed in NYS prior to PIE, the start-up costs associated with training and licensure posed a significant barrier to expansion across the state. NYS PIE grant dollars were used to engage PS at Cincinnati Children's Hospital in providing training and technical assistance across the state to expand PS during the five years of the PIE project.

Additionally, NYS PIE supported a model integrity audit for each newly developed program. While the initial intent was to focus PS expansion on high school transition, the opportunity presented itself early on to explore the feasibility and impact of an adult PS model in NY. One workshop-to-work program was developed to assess the appropriateness of the PS model in helping adults transition from sheltered into competitive employment.

Nine PS programs were established during the five years of the NYS PIE project in Buffalo, Rochester (adult workshop-to-work pilot), Geneva (adult program), Syracuse (adult program), Binghamton, Herkimer, Brooklyn, Bronx, and Medford/Long Island. This brings the total number of programs across the state to 16, with at least one program operating in each region of the state (Figure 2).

Figure 3. Project SEARCH sites operating in NYS as of 2016.
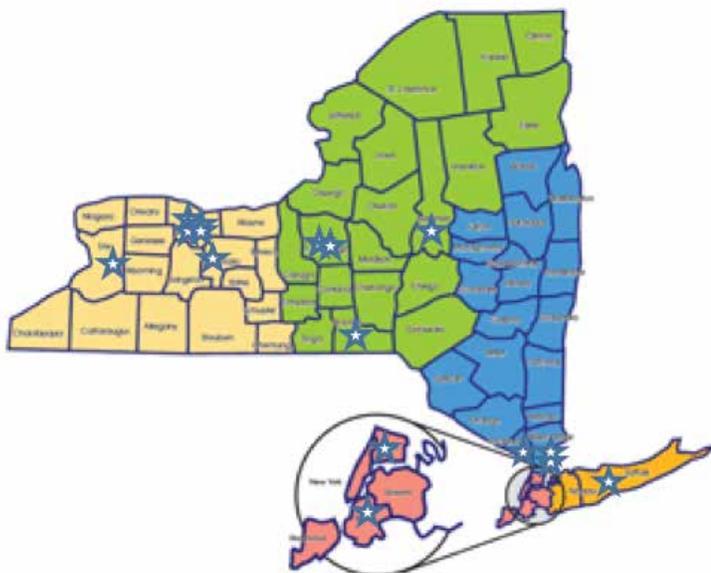
Contribution to Systems Change

The creation of the high school ETP program was instrumental in breaking down the legacy practices and commonly held beliefs that OPWDD will not provide pre-employment services to youth prior to exit from high school. In the early months of the NYS PIE project, it was noted that high school students were often not connected to OPWDD, and that regional offices struggled to identify and reach these students and their families towards the end of the last year of high school eligibility. School personnel across the state reported significant confusion regarding navigation of the eligibility process, as well as a lack of clarity around the benefits of connecting youth and families to OPWDD for services and supports.

Furthermore, OPWDD noted a lack in employment preparation, especially for those students with the most significant disabilities, even in cases where a connection with OPWDD was successfully made. As such, even in those instances where exiting students were successfully identified and placed in pre-vocational training programs as part of their transition plan, they were often unsuccessful moving into supported employment services and, as a result, were largely placed in sheltered employment or day habilitation programs.

Through the purposeful partnership with schools

as a result of expansion of the high school ETP program, OPWDD has been able to connect with students and families much earlier in the transition process. Students receive more supports in navigating the OPWDD eligibility process, and service planning embraces an Employment First philosophy by placing an emphasis on connections to appropriate employment supports upon exit from school. A pre-employment curriculum, developed in partnership between OPWDD and OSE, specifically focuses on ensuring that key concepts and strategies are appropriately adapted to meet the needs of students with the most significant disabilities.

Project SEARCH expansion similarly led to significantly enhanced cross-systems coordination in the transition planning process, both at the local/regional and state levels. At the start of the PIE project, two identified barriers to PS expansion were an incorrect interpretation in state regulations that high school students could not receive VR supports while still enrolled in school, and an insufficient number of employment agencies across the state approved by ACCES-VR to provide employment supports to high school students. Expansion of PS across the state aimed to address both of these barriers.

The PS model requires that all participating students are found eligible and have an open case with VR prior to enrollment in the program. Significant efforts were made to promote Youth Employment Services, an approved line-item within the ACCES-VR contract allowing for job coaching supports for high school students, and to encourage more agencies to apply to provide this service.

Despite relatively flat budgets for VR services across the state during the 5 years of NYS PIE, the overall capacity to serve high school students was significantly increased as a result of these efforts. Because the PS model also requires exploration of eligibility for OPWDD services, expansion of PS led to innovative collaborations between VR and DD services across the state, with positive results for cross-systems transition planning and promotion of Employment First outcomes.

Regional cross-systems consortia were developed in areas of the state where high school ETP and PS programs were established. These consortia consist of local/regional representatives from education (teachers, transition specialists, special education administrators), adult agencies (job coaches, job developers, service coordinators), and state agencies (OPWDD, ACCES-VR, Office of Mental Health). However, a wide variety of other people engage in these groups, including American Job Centers, self-advocates and family groups, and business representatives.

These groups generally meet monthly, with a focus on group brainstorming and problem solving around addressing barriers to successful transition to employment. Of note is the bi-directional mechanism for information sharing that has evolved in terms of state policy development and implementation. Regional state agency representatives have consistent and direct access to "front line" staff across the state, which has allowed for consistent messaging as new policies and regulations have been developed.

Additionally, the direct feedback of the regions is captured via this regional framework, allowing Central Office policy makers access to a wealth of input that takes into consideration variations in needs across the state. This has led to greater consistency in both practice and access to service delivery across the state.

Lessons Learned

Several lessons have emerged over the past five years of the NYS PIE project from the pilot programs:

Support bi-directionality of systems change.

While policies and regulations are developed at the state Central Office level, local/regional engagement is necessary for informing development as well as ensuring successful implementation. Local/regional engagement allows for greater buy-in and ownership of outcomes, and expands on the breadth of proposed solutions to addressing commonly identified barriers. However, local/regional consortia need to be fully supported, empowered, and provided a structure in which to "sell up" feedback to the Central Office level.

Understand the pros and cons of using an RFP process.

The process of issuing an RFP to identify partnerships and locations for potential pilot programs is time-consuming, and can significantly slow down the start-up process. In order to meet reporting requirements and demonstrate adequate progress to funders of multi-year projects like PIE, project coordinators are often forced to rush the RFP process. In NYS, this resulted in a limited pool of applicants to choose from, as many highly qualified and strategically placed entities cited inadequate time to prepare. However, in those parts of the state in which a formal RFP process was used, there was a significant increase in buy-in to the process, as well as accountability to the overarching goals of the NYS PIE project. Finding a process that balances finding the right partners while moving the project forward in a timely manner requires careful planning.

Establish the evaluation process and data collection measures upfront.

Pilot programs serve the purpose of creating a learning laboratory to test out new ideas that stretch systems in new ways. However, this opportunity is lost if not adequately evaluated and measured with consistency and transparency. It is vital for all parties to agree upfront to the goals of the pilots and the measures that will be used to demonstrate success. The evaluation plan should clearly outline reporting timelines and responsibilities, as well as the consequences if data is not adequately collected and reported. In the most extreme cases, project coordinators should be prepared to pull back funding for pilots that are not fully compliant. Additionally, it is important that all parties feel comfortable with the evaluation approach, and have full confidence in the ways in which information gathered will be used and disseminated. When the goals of the evaluation remain firmly grounded in pre-established systems change goals, there is less fear that data might be used to expose individual project partners in a potentially negative light.

Plan for project sustainability or wrap-up from Day 1.

It is important to establish clear boundaries regarding funding and sustainability of pilot programs from the very beginning of the project. Funds made available to support pilot program start-up costs are not, by definition, sustainable. The primary responsibility for achieving fiscal sustainability rests with the pilot partners. However, the NYS PIE project coordinators provided extensive and necessary technical assistance around capacity building to the pilot program partners. It is also worth noting that some pilot programs, by design, serve a very limited purpose and may not need to be sustained long-term. When this is the case, it is important to plan for the wrap-up of these programs from the start of the project. This avoids the tension and mistrust that sometimes results at the local level when communities perceive that valuable programs are being unfairly terminated.

F. Wisconsin

Purpose and Design

The Wisconsin Let's Get to Work pilot projects included nine school sites with a total of twelve high schools participating. These schools started up in two phases. Phase one began in February 2012 with five pilot sites, one of which included a consortium of three small, rural high schools. Phase two began in Sept 2012 with four additional pilot sites, one of which included two urban high schools. A Request for Proposals was used for both rounds of funding. Almost 30 applications were received for phase one and about a dozen applications were received for phase two.

Each pilot site was required to work with a minimum of five students between the ages of 15 and 17 with significant IDD. School staff involved in the pilots were encouraged to seek out students who would likely be eligible for the long-term care system as an adult and/or the 1% of students who qualify for alternative assessment. The schools were asked to implement eight evidence-based practices and participate in a comprehensive evaluation. They were also required to attend the quarterly Consortium meetings and participate in a monthly learning collaborative via conference call.

School pilot sites received three years of funding, which was gradually decreased each year to encourage schools to embed these practices. The funding helped pay for things like professional development opportunities around integrated employment and for substitute teachers so they could work on infusing new practices into their daily routines and work on the development of new skills like meeting with employers. No funds could be used for direct service (e.g., hiring summer job coaches) or equipment purchases (e.g., tablets, smartphones) because of their unsustainability after grant funding has ended. The sites also received hands-on, on-site coaching from a content expert to help them implement the evidence-based practices they were required to use with the pilot students.

After an extensive literature review, we identified specific evidence-based practices that were most likely to lead to improved transition outcomes. The project provided resources and supports so the schools could implement these practices and test the efficacy of systemic and policy changes that may lead to increased opportunities for youth with disabilities to achieve competitive, integrated employment in their community. The intervention strategies focused heavily on expanding the experiences, opportunities, and relationships that all youth with I/DD need to develop while still in school to prepare them for adulthood and the world of work.

The following activities were part of the intervention model:

» Initiate **person-centered planning** with selected youth and their families starting at age 15, to identify strengths, interests, career goals, and direction for course of study and extra-curricular/volunteer involvement while in high school.

» Complete a **school-wide opportunity mapping** activity that includes students with and without disabilities, special and general education teachers, guidance counselors, and any others with interest in identifying the opportunities that already naturally exist through the school and community for all youth, as well as the paid and

natural supports youth with disabilities might need to participate. Schools were provided with an established mapping tool and training/coaching.

» Develop a **Community Action Team** to support youth employment, as well as elevate awareness and expectations about integrated, community employment for youth with I/DD. A first activity of this team was hosting a required **Community Conversation** using the World Café/Community Conversations model (theworldcafe.com).

» Support selected students to take a full range of **general education core/academic classes and participate in extra-curricular activities and community volunteer/youth leadership activities** as they relate to the students' interests and career goals.

» Identify and connect youth to **paid and volunteer work experiences with appropriate supports**, including natural and fading supports that align with student interests and strengths, and are exclusively community-based.

» Connect students and their families to **information on post-secondary and career options, work incentive benefits counseling, and community activities**, starting no later than age 15.

» Inform youth and their parents about the **services offered by the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Department of Health Services** to encourage timely application so the student and family could decide if these agencies should be invited to the Individualized Education Program meeting.

Contribution to Systems Change

We hoped to learn from the pilot sites what was happening on the ground so that we could better understand the implications for policy development. The first round of schools tripled our students' rates of employment. This was significant enough to catch the attention of our state agency partners, other schools, policymakers, etc., giving us a unique opportunity to propose local and state policy changes. Some of our proposals included:

» Pay for Performance to reward schools with high Indicator 14 employment/postsecondary outcomes

» Funding for school-based job developers to better equip schools to reach out to businesses

» Earlier connection to vocational rehabilitation, especially for those students with more significant disabilities

» Better pre-service training for teachers on effective transition practices and outreach to employers

» Additional codes in the children's long-term care system to allow peer mentoring and community inclusion experiences to build children's volunteer experiences and community connections

The coaching was significant for the school sites in learning how to embed the practices we were asking them to enact. School sites reported the coaching was far more useful than the actual funding they received.

» Since LGTW began, the statewide Transition Improvement Grant (TIG) at the Department of Public Instruction has moved to a coaching model and is working with schools with the poorest transition outcomes using the LGTW Quick Guide, which was designed by the coaches and uses the framework of evidence-based practices the pilot schools adopted.

» The TIG also allocated grant funding to start seven Community Based Integrated Employment (CBIE) schools. These schools had some of the poorest transition outcomes in the state, and they received funding to do most of the LGTW model, including receiving training from our coaches in addition to the TIG Regional Coordinators.

» DVR is working on a training to help new providers get started. One of the important aspects of the training identified by others was the need for a coaching/mentoring model to work with new providers because of how well it worked in LGTW.

One of the project's main objectives was to raise the awareness and expectations of parents, teachers, students, employers, school administrators, and the community in general. We address this primarily through Community Conversations — one of the best ways we have found not only to raise awareness of an issue with a variety of stakeholders, but also to

provide an inclusive way for all segments of the community to offer solutions and support. It proved so successful in our project that these conversations were also included as a required intervention in the WI Promise grant, the CBIE schools are required to host one, and a state representative is helping project staff replicate them statewide by working with Wisconsin Chamber of Commerce Executives.

About 25% of the participants in the LGTW Conversations were employers, and after the conversation most participants agreed that they believed youth with significant disabilities could work in the community. An unexpected outcome of the LGTW conversations was that often when an employer attended a conversation he or she would extend actual job offers.

School staff reported that early DVR engagement with youth greatly assited in getting youth jobs in the community. Early in the project, DVR was reluctant to work with youth as young as 15 or 16 because it was assumed the students would be in the system longer, accruing higher service costs. However, with the excellent employment outcomes LGTW was able to show, the work of the WI Promise project, and the changes with WIOA, DVR is now working with youth much earlier, particularly youth with significant disabilities.

DVR also significantly improved its tracking system. Early in the project, DVR was able to flag LGTW students who were receiving DVR services, allowing us to obtain data on services used while students were in the project and beyond.

Most of the practices initiated through PIE have been sustained by the school sites, even though none of the sites has received funding since last September. This indicates that it is possible for schools to embed best and evidence-based practices into current school practices, and that when all the partners are doing what they are supposed to do, students have successful transition outcomes, including employment.

Lessons Learned

Schools did not need as much funding to get started as we anticipated. We started the first round of pilot sites at $20,000. The first round of schools had difficulty spending all that funding, so we started the second round of schools at $15,000 and gradually reduced it to $6,000. In retrospect, the school participants reported that the on-site coaching was significantly more valuable, but that the funds were the carrot to get them started.

Providing the schools with coaching made it evident that **teachers need more training, especially around employment**, and that they would welcome that training. It was also evident that with a little training and coaching, teachers were able to make significant progress with their students in a short period of time.

Pilot work that documents outcomes and provides real-world examples is powerful in moving policy positions forward. Policymakers take pride in success stories in their own districts, and can use those stories to move forward legislation. Likewise, results from pilots pushed departments that might be reluctant to embrace or develop new policies to move forward with them based on demonstrated success.

Pilot work should be developed in ways that it can be sustained after grant work goes away. None of our pilots could spend funds on direct services. Instead, they had to implement systemic practices that could be developed into policy "asks" or recommendations. Most of our policy recommendations required little or no additional funds: they were innovative ways to use existing resources in more outcome-based ways.

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