

Ms. Williams is the Assistant Director of Special Education in a large suburban high school district. In this role she oversees several special education programs including the school to work transition program. Despite the program’s success in helping students obtain jobs in the community after graduation, various stakeholders (parents, teachers, administrators) expressed a need to explore additional work-based learning experiences (WBLEs) that align with students’ interests and preferences. Ms. Williams decided to work with the transition program teachers to explore ways in which the teachers could be more intentional about the WBLEs they developed and the ways in which they matched WBLEs with student interests.

As a starting point, Ms. Williams and the teachers attended a workshop on *community mapping* where they learned a structured process for gathering information about the resources available in their community and how to match those resources with students’ needs and interests. The process sounded simple to use and the teachers felt it had potential to help them identify businesses that they might not have previously considered for WBLEs. Using a free tool called *Google My Maps* (mymaps.google.com) the teachers typed in their school address to identify businesses near the school. They then searched for information on each of the businesses to learn more about the products or services offered. This process resulted in a “map” or list of businesses where new WBLE sites could be developed that offered job types not currently available through the transition program.

After completing the map, the teachers reviewed their students’ transition assessment data to determine which businesses identified through the community

mapping process matched each student’s interests. The teachers quickly realized that the assessments provided limited information about their students’ interests. Instead of pinpointing specific job types (e.g., veterinary technician, sales associate, food preparation worker) or career interest areas (e.g., medical, fitness, retail, clerical) the assessments yielded inconclusive information. This problem was particularly evident for students with extensive support needs (e.g., intellectual disability, multiple disabilities) who often experienced difficulties communicating their interests. The teachers realized that before they could match students’ interests with the businesses identified through community mapping, they needed to gather better transition assessment data.

The teachers and Ms. Williams shifted their focus to reviewing recommended practices for transition assessment. They learned the importance of using multiple assessments, gathering information from people with diverse perspectives (e.g., student, family, teacher), and observing students across several work experiences. Understanding these tenets of transition assessment, they then reviewed existing assessments and evaluated their utility, paying particular attention to the potential fit for students with extensive support needs. By reviewing recommended assessment practices and transition assessments, Ms. Williams and the teachers recognized the need to adopt a multi-faceted process for transition assessment that would be ongoing throughout each year of the student’s program. They also realized that this process may need to be more intensive for students with extensive support needs in order to accurately identify their employment interests and preferences. Table 1 describes the types of assessments they adopted and the rationale for each type.

Table 1*Assessments Adopted and Rationale*

Assessment	Description	Rationale
Parent/Caregiver Questionnaire	Parents/caregivers answer questions about the student's strengths, needs, interests, and future goals related to employment. Given annually.	The family understands the student best and can provide accurate information to confirm or question other assessment findings.
Student Reflections During Extended School Year (ESY)	Students receiving ESY through the transition program visit businesses in the community each week to learn about the types of jobs available and what employees do on a day-to-day basis. After each visit, students reflect on the experience and their interest in the jobs observed. Conducted after each visit.	Student preferences gathered in the summer can be used to match students with WBLEs prior to the beginning of the academic year.
Situational Assessments	Students are observed during work-based learning experiences to determine strengths and weaknesses within the natural environment. Conducted throughout the school year.	Allows for ongoing documentation of skills and interests across WBLEs. Provides data based on actual performance rather than perceptions.

Community mapping is an effective process for identifying resources in the community that match students' needs and interests. By engaging in this process, Ms. Williams and the transition teachers identified numerous businesses that had potential to expand the types of WBLEs they offered students. Although engagement in community mapping was initially driven by a need to be more purposeful in selecting WBLEs that match students' interests, the process itself actually helped teachers realize that they had insufficient information about their students' preferences. Now that there is a clear plan for conducting on-going transition assessment using multiple measures, teachers will have access to more accurate information about their student's preferences, which in turn, will allow the development of WBLEs that better align with students' interests.

This case study was developed by the Illinois Center for Transition and Work at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign through a contract with the Illinois State Board of Education. Information presented may not reflect the position or policy of the Illinois State Board of Education.

Additional Resources

Community Resource Mapping Webinar
youtu.be/vYFEk2TqKsc

Community Mapping Research Brief
icwtw.illinois.edu/resources/research-briefs/other-topics/brief-community-resource-mapping

Introduction to Transition Assessment Research Brief
icwtw.illinois.edu/resources/research-briefs/transition-assessment/brief-transition-assessment

