

# TRANSITION PROGRAMMING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES



## Employing Innovative Approaches for Supporting Students with Disabilities for Success in Adulthood

### WHAT ARE SOME STRENGTHS AND CHALLENGES?

Many schools, agencies, and practitioners in rural communities face distinctive barriers to supporting students with disabilities in transitioning to work, such as . . . .

- Limited local job opportunities
- A lack of access to nearby disability service agencies
- A gap in resources
- Nonexistent or inaccessible transportation options
- Limited internet or cellular connectivity
- Unfilled staffing positions and overburdening responsibilities

Nonetheless, rural communities possess unique assets that can support schools, agencies, and practitioners in preparing students for employment, such as:

- Tightly knit personal relationships extending beyond schools
- Ongoing partnerships with local employers
- Local community groups that may not focus specifically on disability but that possess knowledge of the community's values and needs (e.g., faith communities, 4-H groups)
- Experiences developing strong informal supports that can address a historical lack of formal services

## WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

In recent research on transition services in rural schools, findings suggest that . . .

- Special educators play highly dispersed and extensive roles for preparing students with disabilities for work
- When it comes to preparing students with disabilities to transition to work, staff in rural districts tend to self-decide many roles, rather than responsibilities being delegated to them by an administrator
- Staff and administrators may have different views on the availability of staff for supporting students with and without disabilities in career development, the clarity of staff roles in this area, and the effectiveness of services being provided
- Some students with more significant disabilities participate in work-based learning opportunities but face low expectations from staff that they can participate meaningfully in career technical education or work after high school; conversely, some students with high-incidence disabilities do not receive enough support in high school to adequately prepare for employment (e.g., work-based learning; support in finding, applying for, and keeping a job)
- Administrators report limited knowledge, training, or support in facilitating transition services

## WHAT CAN STAFF AND ADMINISTRATORS DO?

Based on research and best practices in transition and career development . . .

- Special educators can tap into the capacities of their colleagues in special education (e.g., related service providers, paraprofessionals); general education (e.g., school counselors, career technical educators, general educators); and outside of the district (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation counselors, Pre-ETS providers, community members) to support career development for students with disabilities
  - For example, host a community conversation! <https://transitiontn.org/community-conversations/>
- Administrators can provide infrastructure that promotes the leveraging of district partnerships toward employment preparation for students with disabilities, such as:
  - Involving special education staff in district- and community partnerships related to employment
  - Allocating funding toward work-based learning and career development
  - Connecting staff in special and general education to training and resources for supporting students with disabilities in preparing for work
  - Identifying innovative ways to facilitate transportation to work-based learning and other community opportunities (e.g., paying paraprofessionals as bus drivers, using Driver's Education or athletic vehicles)

- Districts can adopt a team approach for integrating disability specific programs (e.g., special education work-based learning) and those generically available to all students (e.g., district-wide work study, career technical education programs)
- Administrators can provide professional development on career development for students with disabilities and cross-departmental training/meeting times to facilitate staff knowledge, skills, and collaborations for connecting students with disabilities to work
- Administrators can gather information from staff on their perceptions regarding staff models and role allocation and develop staff positions with clearly delineated roles
- Staff and administrators should hold high expectations for all students with disabilities to work while recognizing the specialized supports they may need to obtain and maintain employment

## WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

Resources for staff, administrators, agency providers, and students in rural areas include . . .

### **Illinois Center on Transition and Work: <https://ictw.illinois.edu>**

- Free videos, resources, fact sheets, and case studies on trending topics such as customized employment, pathways to employment, self-determination, transition assessment, WIOA, and work-based learning
- Has opportunities to apply for targeted technical assistance for school districts

### **TransitionTN: <https://transitiontn.org>**

- Free courses and resources for educators on pathways to employment or postsecondary education, student-directed IEP meetings, independent living, and writing compliant Individualized IEP Transition Plans
- Free courses and resources for Pre-ETS providers, including a Pre-ETS sequencing guide
- A free student portal with lessons, activities, and resources that can be used in groups with educators, agency providers, family members, or individually
- Live and archived regular webcasts and newsletters with practical recommendations and resources

### **Other Resources with a Rural Focus:**

- Supporting self-employment for students with disabilities in rural communities: <https://vrselfemploymentguide.org>
- Developing internships and apprenticeships for students with disabilities in rural communities: <https://www.explorevr.org/toolkits/apprenticeships-toolkit>
- Developing transportation options in rural communities: <https://www.umat.edu/rural-disability-research/resources/transp-voucher-prog/default.php>

- Creative ways for supporting individuals with disabilities in developing advocacy skills: <https://www.umt.edu/rural-disability-research/resources/advocacy-skill-building-toolkit/default.php>
- Family resources:
  - <https://odpc.ucsf.edu/advocacy/transition-successful-community-living/whats-next-a-self-advocates-guided-tour-through>
  - <https://www.autismspeaks.org/tool-kit/transition-tool-kit>

**Questions? Looking to partner in work that supports rural schools and communities?**

Feel free to contact me:

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