

THE GOOD

THE BAD

& THE OH BOY!

Community Conversations

ICTW Symposium
April 23, 2026

WHO WE ARE

Allison and Meghan have worked a collective 30 years in the field of education. They have been in a variety of settings including middle school, transition, cross categorical, and life skills. Their passion lies in helping students become independent and successful on job sites. Their current roles include working with students, schools, teachers, parents, employers, and agencies to prepare students before leaving the school setting with the most experience and supports possible.



ALLISON BORLAND

Transition Specialist/PECT Coordinator
Special Education Association of
Peoria County

LBS1
Elementary Education
Masters in Curriculum & Instruction
Transition Specialist Certification



MEGHAN BRAKE

Youth Services/PECT Coordinator
Tazewell Mason Counties Special
Education Association

LBS1
Elementary Education
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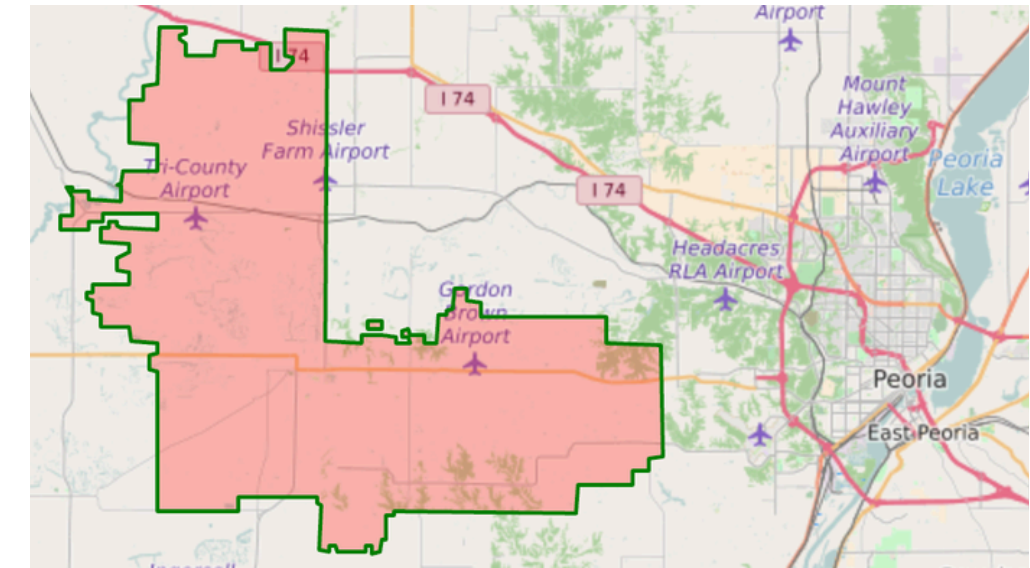
- What is a Community Conversation?
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What is a **COMMUNITY CONVERSATION?**

An event to engage members of the community in honest, open and productive conversations with the goal of identifying barriers to employment and producing outcomes for individuals with disabilities.



THE WHY



School District: Covers parts of 3 counties (Peoria, Fulton, Knox)

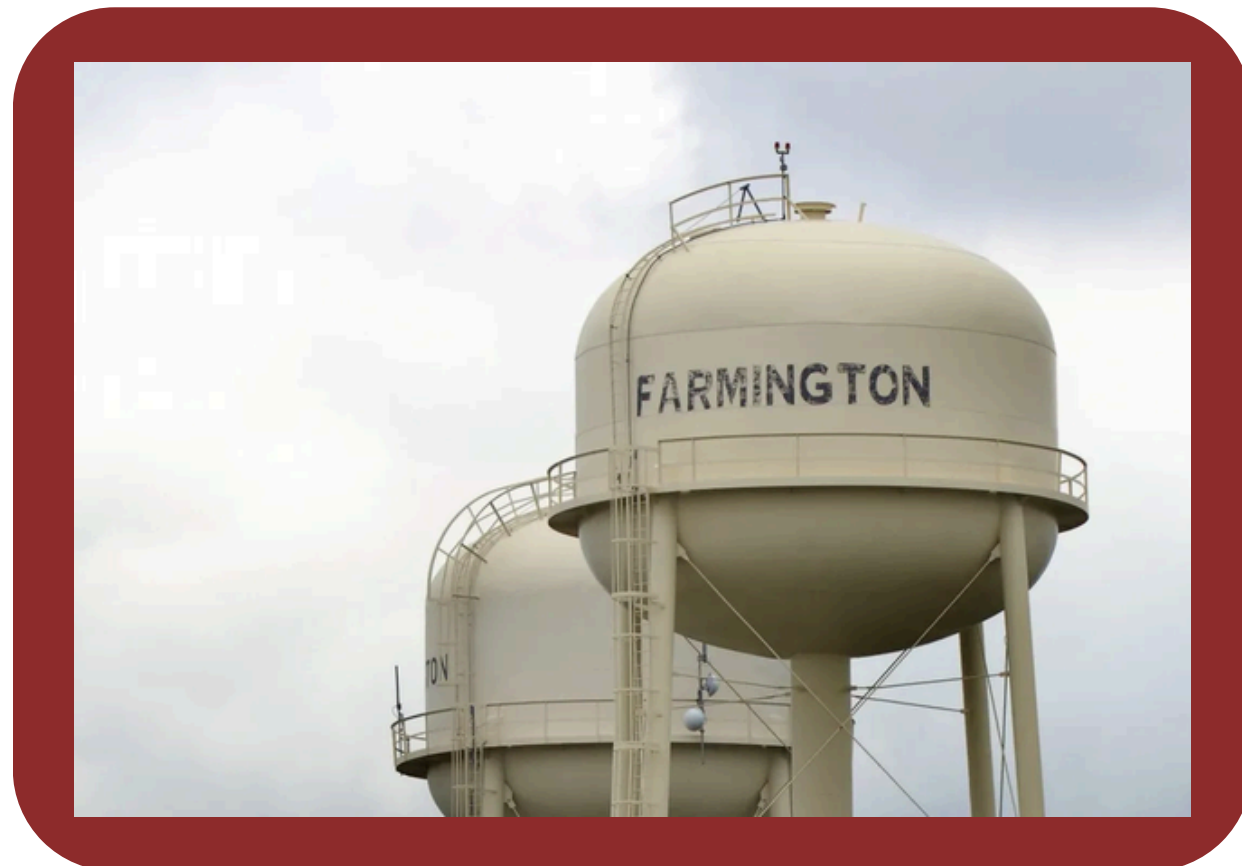
Enrollment: 1,265*

IEPs: 250* (62 high school)

PECT Referrals: 6

- 3 students working in the community

Farmington Businesses: 31



*Data collected from Illinois School Report Card


WHO TO INVITE

- Students
- Parents
- Teachers
- School Administrators
- School Board Members
- Local Businesses
- Local Government Officials
- College/University
Representatives
- Community Day Programing
- Division of Rehabilitation
Services
- Advocacy Agencies
- Local Community Emergency
Services





QUESTIONS

- In terms of connecting students with disabilities to employment, what is the community of Farmington doing well?
 - In terms of connecting students with disabilities to employment, what could the community of Farmington do better?
 - What would encourage local business to become more involved in offering job experiences in a way that is easier or more accessible?
- 

Timeline

July 24, 2025

FARMINGTON CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

WE'RE GATHERING

- Educators School
- Leaders Parents
- Youth Employers
- Adult Agencies
- Disability Agencies
- Community Partners



PLACE AND TIME

Farmington Community Center
322 E Fort St
Farmington, IL 61531
July 24, 2025 5:30-7:00pm

ABOUT COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

An event focused on strengthening career development and transition preparation for middle and high school students with disabilities.

GOALS

- Increase school- employer partnerships
- Identify obstacles students face in the areas of employment, education, and independent living
- Create positive solutions and outcomes for all stakeholders

RSVP TO

ABORLAND@SEAPCO.ORG
OR
MBRAKE@TMCSEA.ORG

April, 2025

- Started having informal conversations with community members we knew to gauge interest
- Chose initial venue (Farmington library)

May, 2025

- Flyer created
- Changed Venue (Farmington Rec Center)
- Attended school board meeting
- Attended city council meeting
- Attended neighboring city council meeting
- Sent out formal invite via email
- Approached businesses with flyer
- Chose initial table leads

June, 2025

- Met with Jane from ICTW
- Continued to meet with businesses to confirm participation
- Revisited table leads and adjusted based on attendance

July, 2025

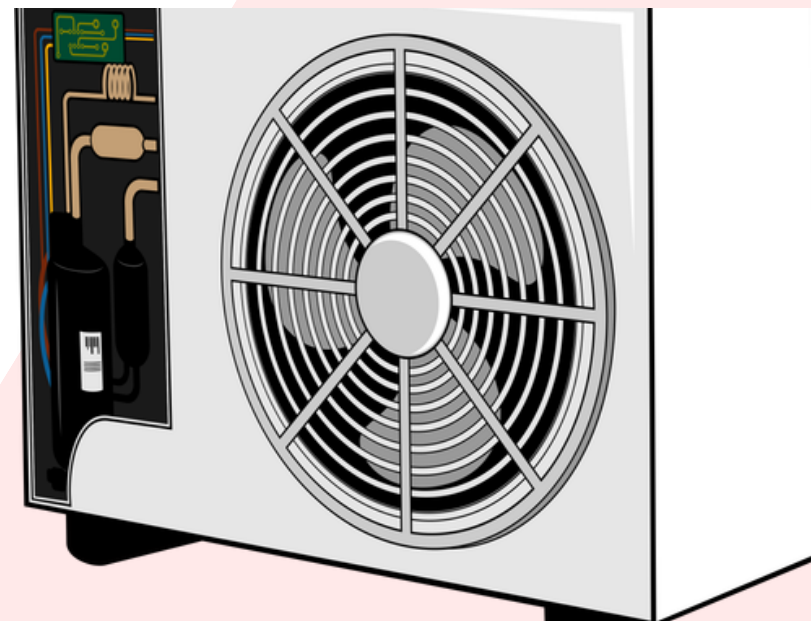
- Met with Farmington Rotary
- Walk-through of the Rec Center
- Finalized participant list
- Email sent to table leads explaining their role

July 24

- EVENT DAY!!!!

PHYSICAL SET UP

- Farmington Community Center gymnasium
- 6 tables/6-8 at each table
- Strategic planning in who was at each table
- Projector/Introductory PowerPoint
- Fans
- Flyers to inspire conversation
- Provided cookies and water
- Tables cloths/Table numbers
- Provided a timer for when to switch tables
- Sign in sheet
- Table Tents with questions



BARRIERS

- Community buy-in
- School personnel buy-in
- Attendance at event
- AIR CONDITIONING!
- Lack of businesses in attendance
- General lack of understanding about what we were trying to do
- Three counties to cover and knowing who to invite from each small community
- Traditional (in-the-box) thinking
- Understanding the value of work experience
- Understanding how employment agencies can help
- Transportation

WHAT WE LEARNED WHILE PUTTING TOGETHER THE CC

- Community is unsure of how to begin supporting students
- Have a backup venue
- Hard for participants to envision what happens at the event
- Be flexible
- Needs of the community
- Learned about school employees knowledge of employment placement
- Presenters can be a part of a table/table lead



WHAT WE LEARNED AFTER THE CC

- Knowledge of what the school is doing to provide services within the building
- Participants thought there were a lot of obstacles connecting students with employment
- Community has a limited understanding of the value of work experience; Need for more exposure
- Community doesn't understand how an individual with disabilities can add value to their place of employment
- Community is supportive, they just lack understanding



FOLLOW UP SURVEY

- Did you find anything about the Farmington Community you did not know?
- What could we do better?
- Did you feel as though you had enough time in your table groups to share information?
- Is there a specific group of people you felt were underrepresented at the community conversation?
- What you consider participating in a follow-up event?



WHAT NEXT?

- Create an informational night for families in the Jr/Sr. High School to learn about PECT, Guardianship, Agencies, CTE, PERFECT, College program, and rec/leisure opportunities.
- Put together folders for businesses to learn about supports PECT/DRS can provide (and explanations) and employer incentives



POST CC

- Farmington School Board Member, parent and Community Conversation participant heard what we were saying and trying to do!
 - She took a job as job coach at a local business specifically looking to support students in high school/transition programs we serve
 - Although Farmington school district has not specifically benefited from this, 6 other students have from within our Co-Op



REFERENCES

- Illinois Center for Transition and Work
 - <https://ictw.illinois.edu/>
- Transition Tennessee
 - <https://transitiontn.org/community-conversations/>
- Farmington Central School District
 - <https://www.dist265.com/>
- Illinois School Report Card
 - <https://www.illinoisreportcard.com/>