

# Inclusive Employment and Career for Boston Youth With Disabilities

## Pathways to the Talent Pipeline

OCTOBER 2015

**A REPORT BY**

The Workforce Development Task Force  
of the Boston Special Education  
Transition (B-SET) Project

[www.b-setforcareer.org](http://www.b-setforcareer.org)



**“ Our country showed bold bipartisan leadership in 1990 when it passed the ADA and America is a better place because of its implementation. It is now time again to show the same kind of leadership and open wide the doors to better jobs and careers as well as create an accessible pathway out of deep poverty and into the mainstream of the American middle class for the more than 20 million working age American adults with disabilities. ”**

Unfinished Business: Making Employment of People with Disabilities a National Priority

United States Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions  
Tom Harkin, Chairman, July 2012



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## ABOUT B-SET

The Boston Special Education Transition (B-SET) Project is an initiative of Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC). B-SET's goal is to *increase employment, career, and independent living opportunities for Boston's youth with disabilities*. The objectives of the project are three-fold:

1. Increase community awareness and knowledge – among youth, parents and community organizations – of transition rights and strategies for students under the special education law and of ways to empower parents and youth to participate in the transition process.
2. Improve transition planning and services for Boston students with disabilities age 14-22 so they will stay in school and exit special education prepared for further education, employment, and independent living.
3. Provide opportunities for Boston students with disabilities to more fully integrate into the mainstream of career and workforce development opportunities.

## ABOUT THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

The work of this Task Force resides in the third B-SET objective, for to the extent that the first two objectives of B-SET achieve results – greater community awareness and improved school-based transition services – there will need to be more community-based placements available for those transition age youth still in school and for those who are exiting, either by graduating or by turning 22.

While there have been and are models of integrating small numbers of youth with disabilities into mainstream workforce development, employment, and post-secondary education, there had been no systemic response among multiple sectors to collaborate and identify the resources required for the thousands of Boston youth with disabilities. **This Task Force was convened by MAC and The Boston Foundation for that purpose.** Currently nearly 70 organizations are represented on the Task Force.

The goal of the Task Force is to *increase inclusive workforce and post-secondary education placements*

*and opportunities for Boston youth with disabilities, for all types and severities, while enrolled in school and after exiting.*

The Task Force has four objectives:

1. Develop a resource guide identifying strengths and gaps in resources to provide to Boston youth and young adults with disabilities inclusive employment, college, supported work, and independent living opportunities.
2. Identify best and promising practices and programs from local and national models.
3. Develop an implementation plan to meet the project's goals by more effectively utilizing existing resources and seeking new external resources.
4. Create collaborations and partnerships among members to more effectively use existing and seek new resources.

## ABOUT MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN (MAC)

MAC was founded in 1969 by Hubie Jones to address the social problem of children excluded from school and educational opportunity. Its investigative report in 1970 led to the first bilingual law (1971) and the first special education law (1972) in the nation, dramatically expanding access to school for thousands of children across the state.

MAC's mission is to be an independent and effective voice for children who face significant barriers to equal educational and life opportunities, particularly those who have disabilities, are low income and/or are racially, culturally or linguistically diverse. MAC works to overcome these barriers by changing conditions for many children, while also helping one at a time.

Today, MAC is a leader in statewide special education advocacy (with a focus on transition), the autism community, school discipline reform and education reform in the Boston schools. MAC is an integral part of the statewide network of civil legal aid organizations and has pioneered an innovative approach to education reform statewide and nationally through its policy analysis and advocacy to help traumatized children learn.



## Task Force Organizational Members

Action for Boston Community Development  
Asperger/Autism Network (AANE)  
Autism Speaks  
Bay Cove Academy  
Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology  
Best Buddies  
BEST Corp. Hospitality Training Center  
Boston Asian: Youth Essential Service  
Boston Center for Independent Living, Inc.  
Boston Metropolitan District Building Trades Council  
Boston Private Industry Council  
Boston Public Schools- Re-Engagement Center  
Boston Public Schools- Special Education  
Boston Public Schools Special Education  
Parent Advisory Council  
Boston Youth Services Network (BYSN)  
Boys and Girls Club of Dorchester  
Boys and Girls Club of Greater Boston  
Bridge Over Troubled Waters  
Butler Foundation  
Bunker Hill Community College  
City on a Hill Charter Public Schools  
Commonwealth Corporation  
Crittenton Women's Union  
CVS Health  
Disability Task Force  
East Boston Neighborhood Health Center  
Easter Seals  
EDCO Youth Alternative High School Program  
El Centro de Cardenal - HiSET Program  
Federation for Children with Special Needs  
Freedom House  
Goodwill Industries, Inc.  
Greater Boston Employment Collaborative  
Health Resources in Action  
Hull Lifesaving Museum/Maritime Apprenticeship Program  
J.E. & Z.B. Butler Foundation  
Jewish Family & Children's Service  
Jewish Vocational Service  
Justice Resource Institute  
Massachusetts Advocates for Children  
Massachusetts Community Action Network  
Massachusetts Department of Career Services  
Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Massachusetts Department of Mental Health  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health  
Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission  
Mayor's Office of Workforce Development  
MGH Aspire  
MIRA Coalition/New American Integration Institute  
More Than Words Bookstore  
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Massachusetts  
NESCA (Neuropsychology Education Services for Children and Adolescents)  
Notre Dame Education Center  
Partners for Youth with Disabilities  
Roxbury Community College  
SkillWorks  
Spaulding Rehabilitation Network/Partners HealthCare  
State Street Corporation  
The Boston Foundation  
TJX Companies  
Triangle, Inc.  
UMass Boston Institute for Community Inclusion  
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley  
Work Inc.  
Work Without Limits  
Year Up  
Youth Options Unlimited  
Youth Violence Prevention Funders Learning Collaborative  
YouthBuild

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Eileen Nash, Paula Donnelly, and now Karla Estrada and Cindie Nielson of the Boston Public Schools were also key members of the Planning Committee whose participation in the task force has been essential, as the Boston’s school system is the locus for transition planning and preparation for over 4,000 transition-age students.

Other members of the Planning Committee also were instrumental in their guidance, including Neil Sullivan of the Boston Private Industry Council, Larry Smith of the Mayor’s Office of Workforce Development, Susan Lange of the Commonwealth Corporation and the aforementioned representatives from the Boston Foundation, SkillWorks and the Institute for Community Inclusion.

Members of the MAC B-SET Team, led by Julia Landau and including Jodi Guinn, Liza Hirsch, Leslie Hughes, Leslie Lockhart, Catherine Mayes, Tom Mela and Johanne Pino, were instrumental in conducting the case advocacy and community training portions of the B-SET grant, along with providing staff support at the task force meetings. Others who generously volunteered their time as facilitators, recorders or logistical at the task force meetings were Kaitlyn Bean of SkillWorks, Edison Reyes and Tim Regele of the Boston Foundation, Jean Whitney of the Disability Task Force, Laurie Jo Wallace of Health Resources in Action, and Margaret Liepsitz of the Youth Violence Prevention Funders Learning Collaborative.

Most of all, the work of this task force could not have been possible without the contributions of its members, who not only brought their expertise, energy and passion for this issue to the meetings but also completed surveys and patiently answered questions, participated in interviews and provided connections to other individuals and organizations that provided information to assist in the development of this Action Plan.

***Jerry Mogul and Dore Penn***

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# Executive Summary

There are over 4,300 Boston youth age 14-22 attending public K-12 schools who have disabilities. Like all young people, they are capable and talented, and have dreams and hopes for their future. And like all youth, they will need support from family, school and the community to become independent successful adults. With the right employment supports, young people with disabilities can not only avoid a life of poverty and dependence but can also achieve the satisfaction of feeling valued in their work while bringing value to their place of work.

Some of the 4,300 students with disabilities will graduate and go on to post-secondary education or work. Others will stay in school and transition to the state adult service system, depending on the type and severity of their disability. But based on current trends, the vast majority of them, about 60%, will follow a third pathway: they will either drop out, not transition to adult services or will graduate but then become disconnected from post-secondary school or career pathways. Many of them will be on a dead end road to poverty, where only one in three Massachusetts adults with disabilities are employed and where the poverty rate for people with disabilities is three times than for those without. Some will even travel the “school to jail” pipeline rather than the school to career talent pipeline.

It is incumbent upon the Boston community to come together and reverse those trends, to better prepare young people with disabilities and to connect them to the career pathways and talent pipelines for employment in the private, non-profit and public sectors. To do so will require overcoming significant system barriers: the various education, disability and workforce/employment sectors that impact this population are generally overlapping and uncoordinated with different funding streams, eligibility requirements, missions,

policies and procedures that can be at cross-purposes and are extremely difficult for youth, their families and agency staff to navigate. Further, stakeholders in different sectors don’t have a common framework, language or understanding of disability issues, special education rights, employment pipeline models or the myriad pathways from school to successful employment. Schools are just beginning to provide required transition assessments and services for all students with disabilities. In addition, federal and state funding for disability and for workforce development programs has eroded over the last decade. Partly as a result, there is the issue of scale, as schools, businesses, state agencies, intermediaries and others have only been able to successfully engage and support a relatively small proportion of the population.

And yet, these are hopeful times. New federal and state laws have been enacted and policies adopted that have the potential to result in sweeping change. The Boston Public Schools have prioritized transition services and is implementing a strategic plan. An increasing number of youth-serving agencies are raising awareness about inclusion and building it into their program design. An infrastructure of services and supports is being strengthened to re-connect disconnected “opportunity youth” with education and career pathways. The interest and enthusiasm of so many diverse stakeholders in this Task Force indicates a readiness and momentum for significant change. The very richness of resources in the Boston area - intermediaries, disability experts, youth development infrastructure, employer networks, etc. – serves as a platform for the collaboration, knowledge dissemination and innovation called for in this Action Plan to improve workforce outcomes for Boston youth with disabilities.

This Action Plan contains a “dashboard” with the following **goal areas**:

1. **Continue to improve transition services** and supports in the Boston Public Schools and charter schools for students with disabilities.
2. **Strengthen family and community supports** for transition-age youth with disabilities.
3. **Ensure that students with disabilities in public and private colleges and other post-secondary pathways** have access to accommodations and to career services.
4. **Increase capacity and improve service coordination** among state adult service, workforce development, transitional assistance and youth service agencies.
5. **Re-connect “Opportunity Youth”** to school and career pathways by supporting youth-serving agencies to better meet the needs of older youth who have hidden or undiagnosed disabilities.
6. **Increase capacity of employers** in the private, non-profit and public sectors to hire and retain youth/young adults with disabilities.
7. **Strengthen the infrastructure** to raise awareness and resources, improve system navigation, and promote collaboration to support the transition to employment and career for Boston youth with disabilities.

Each goal area includes many of these key **cross-cutting strategies** in the dashboard:

1. **Promote youth voice, self-advocacy and self-determination skills** for Boston’s young people throughout all components of the system designed to support them.
2. **Ensure that youth with disabilities have necessary assessments, accommodations, supports and wraparound services** (health care, housing, social services, legal, e.g.) that will enable them to be successful and stay in their school or job.

3. **Increase knowledge base** through training and professional development among educators, families, youth service providers, job developers and intermediaries, and supervisors on the job.
4. **Improve school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures** to promote diversity and be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.
5. **Increase opportunities for coordination, collaboration and partnerships** among schools, employers, agencies and programs within and across multiple systems.
6. **Integrate work-based learning experiences** at all levels that are particularly effective in building competencies for youth with disabilities.
7. **Improve the system navigation** capacity of youth, families and professionals through regularly updated web-based resource directories and other means.
8. **Increase funding and capacity** within each sector so that schools, state agencies, job developers and intermediaries, youth serving agencies and employers can reach more young people.
9. **Improve data collection and metrics** so as to more effectively plan and monitor progress toward successful goal outcomes.

These are the key **action steps** in the dashboard that the community is already taking or needs to take to prepare, connect and employ Boston youth with disabilities:

1. **Ensure that all transition-age students** in Boston Public Schools (including those who have dropped out and are returning) and charter schools receive self-advocacy training and support, assessments to help them identify their strengths and interests, seamless transition to adult services in state agencies, when appropriate, and meaningful pre-employment or work-based learning opportunities while still in school.

2. **Increase the percentage** of Boston Public School transition-age students with disabilities who are in inclusive classrooms with the appropriate supports.
3. **Provide training and information to youth and their families** about the importance of self-advocacy, transition rights and services for which they are eligible, and access to higher education and career opportunities.
4. **Provide training and information to community-based staff, job developers, educators, coaches, mentors** and others about how to identify and support youth and young adults with hidden or undiagnosed disabilities to be successful in post-secondary inclusive higher education or workforce settings.
5. **Improve the capacity of public colleges** in the Boston area to provide appropriate supports through their disability and career service offices to better retain students with disabilities and provide them with access to career pathways.
6. **Increase the number of businesses** able to successfully hire and retain young adults with disabilities by creating inclusive workplaces that reduce stigma, use the principles of universal design to expand access, and institutionalize culture change through such mechanisms as supervisor training and internal affinity groups of employees with disabilities and their family members.
7. **Create a system navigation capacity** to assist youth, family members and providers to ensure that they can access the right services at the right time from the right organization(s).
8. **Increase the number of young adults with more severe disabilities** to: a) receive services through the state Department of Developmental Services to obtain competitive or integrated employment by implementing the Employment First Blueprint; and b) participate in college through the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative.
9. **Ensure that the provisions of the new federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)** regarding additional pre-employment resources and other transition assistance services are provided to Boston youth and young adults with disabilities or who are disconnected .
10. **Establish interagency coordination and accountability agreements across state agencies** at the cabinet as well as individual agency levels to ensure more efficient and effective employment and training services for consumers and their families.

The Action Plan also calls for the creation of a new coordinating vehicle to keep the many stakeholders from multiple sectors together to implement the action steps, continue to build collaborations and synergies among members, and raise awareness and resources.

# Preface



These are hopeful times. July 26, 2015 marked the 25th anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. An entire generation of young adults has grown up under the protections of this law. Although simple passage and implementation of the provisions of the law did not eliminate stigma or eradicate the undermining and destructive impacts of living with a disability in a non-inclusive world, it did establish the conditions for improvement that have led to the development of ever more inclusive schools, workplaces and communities. And while this generation didn't grow up without stigma, many of its members can envision a world without it – a world in which they fully belong, live, work and thrive. Further, advances in a range of technologies that impact mobility, connectivity, architectural design, educational and workplace access means that the expectations that people with disabilities have of themselves and others have of them are also undergoing profound change. Most important among these is that many, many people with disabilities can and will work.

**Youth with disabilities are, first and foremost, youth.<sup>1</sup>**

We are fully cognizant of the multiple and seemingly intractable barriers that keep so many young people with disabilities in Boston from attaining the independence and meaning in life that work can provide. But change is afoot. New laws have been enacted and policies adopted that have the potential to result in sweeping change. Policymakers, grantmakers, government agencies and professional associations in sectors spanning disability, workforce development, education and youth development have been holding conferences and public hearings on matters related to transition and workforce development for people with disabilities. Increasing numbers of youth-serving agencies are raising awareness about inclusion and building it into their program design. The interest and enthusiasm of so many stakeholders from diverse sectors and agencies that have participated in this Task Force is indicative of a readiness in the larger environment that is building momentum for significant change.

The urgency that propels us forward stems from a very human need that confronts us every day. Young people already struggling with their identity, compounded for many by the impact of class and race inequities, are faced with the added burdens of feeling limited by the weight of a disability and the barriers they encounter that can leave them without hope for their future. And for their parents and families, the clarity of hopes and dreams for their children is shrouded in a fog that only thickens as transition age approaches. It is to restore hope and the prospects of a bright future that compels us to come together for our young people in Boston.

<sup>1</sup> Federal Partners in Transition Workgroup, The 2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan: A Federal Interagency Strategy, February 2015, p. 12.

# Organization of the Action Plan



*The goal of this Action Plan is to ensure that Boston youth with disabilities are part of the local talent pipeline to employment in the private, non-profit and public sectors.*

The Action Plan presents a series of strategies and actionable recommendations designed to equip youth with disabilities with the self-determination, educational and work-based skills they will need to be successful and to ensure that the higher education and workplace destinations into which they will arrive are inclusive and welcoming.

The plan begins with an introduction to the three major functions of the community – preparing, connecting, and employing youth for employment and career. This is followed by a set of essential concepts that form a common foundation for the remainder of the plan. Next is a profile of Boston youth with disabilities followed by a description of the barriers and challenges that face them and their families in attaining their goals. A brief section on conditions for change offers evidence that this is a propitious time for inclusive initiatives in the domains of education, workforce

development and disability. The Action Plan concludes with the enumeration of seven (7) goal areas, each with a set of strategies and action steps that are: 1) already in varying stages of implementation; 2) in the process of being planned, 3) new recommendations or 4) completed.

Several Appendices provide additional background information in the form of definitions, more detailed explanations or descriptions of terms and concepts used earlier in the plan. In the electronic version are only of this document, the Plan ends with a detailed “map” or description of relevant resources in the Boston area that can benefit young people with disabilities and their families. The electronic version also has the benefit of hyperlinks to the many resources listed throughout the document and the Resource Guide, as well as hyperlinks between the plan narrative and the relevant appendices.

# Introduction— Preparing, Connecting, Employing

It should be the case that every young person develops interests, skills, and preferences – talents, if you will – on the path they will travel in their journey to fulfillment and self-sufficiency as an adult. It should be no different for young people with disabilities. Unfortunately, the data and the experience of young people speak otherwise.

It will take our whole community – schools, employers, funders, service providers, intermediaries, public agencies, labor, supervisors, advocates, and the youth themselves and their families – to create the systems, relationships and scale needed so that the thousands of Boston youth with disabilities can find their unique pathway to successful adulthood. With the right supports, young people with disabilities can not only avoid a life of poverty and dependence but can also achieve the satisfaction of feeling valued in their work while bringing value to their place of work.

Connecting the many pathways that youth can travel to the pipelines that businesses use to recruit employees involves an alignment of multiple systems that are not sufficiently resourced or coordinated. For discussion purposes, the three major functions performed by the various systems are preparing, connecting and employing the young people with disabilities.

**PREPARING YOUTH** with disabilities for a fulfilling career and adulthood involves support from a community of adults to help them identify and cultivate their capabilities while also identifying and mitigating the effects of their disabilities. The community is responsible for inculcating and fostering four distinct skill sets: academic; vocational;<sup>2</sup> social/relational<sup>3</sup> critical to succeed in any workplace; and self-determination, including

self-advocacy. This preparation takes place in numerous settings, including the family, community-based enrichment programs, arts, sports, apprenticeship and job training programs, but it is the public schools that have the statutory responsibility to provide a range of transition services for those youth found eligible for special education entitlement.

Formal and informal assessments (educational, psychological, occupational, vocational, etc.) by the school and other entities will be critical to help identify each young person’s capabilities and disabilities and develop an individualized plan to find the right pathway to success through skills training in school and community vocational settings. Self-advocacy skills are particularly important, as accommodations in the workplace or higher education will not be possible unless the young person is comfortable and confident in disclosing his or her disability at the right time and to the right person.

This system of preparation is a “human services approach” that focuses on the young people, providing them with education, increasingly beyond high school up to four years of higher education; skills training and workplace experiences; and wraparound social services including medical care, legal aid and housing when needed to mitigate the instabilities of poverty and trauma in their lives. Success is achieved when the young person is deemed ready for employment.

**CONNECTING YOUTH** with disabilities to employment is no longer a matter of teaching them how to find a job on their own – create a resume, apply for a job, and prepare for the interview – though those skills are

<sup>2</sup> These include skill sets encompassing the full range of occupations and professions including artistic, athletic, entrepreneurial, trades etc.

<sup>3</sup> These include many non-occupational skills often referred to as “soft” but which are central to job and career success. The Massachusetts Work Based Learning Plan regards them as “foundational” and describes them as “Communication and Interpersonal Skills.” See <http://www.bostonpic.org/sites/default/files/resources/MassWBLP.pdf>

certainly essential. Increasingly this critical function is performed by organizations acting as intermediaries that build relationships with and understand the needs of employers. These intermediaries become one of the pipelines by which businesses recruit talent. Intermediaries can identify the candidates most likely to be prepared and successful in the particular job(s) for which the employer is seeking talent and can inform, educate and support the employer in providing the accommodations

These intermediaries can include workforce development agencies, college career offices, state agencies, career centers, community-based agencies, many of which serve specific ethnic/cultural or disability communities, and even the schools themselves, especially vocational technical schools and private schools that educate students with a particular type of disability.

Many of these intermediaries also prepare youth in some fashion. Some intermediaries specialize in or only connect youth with disabilities, while others serve youth in general and may or may not have expertise in connecting youth with disabilities.

**EMPLOYING YOUTH** is done, quite simply, by employers that hire individuals for a vast array of occupational categories – in the private, public and non-profit sectors. In larger companies, recruitment specialists and human resource departments have the capacity to be intentional in building the pipeline relationships with intermediaries in seeking out people with disabilities to hire. Further, these companies can use internships as a way-station to determine fit before committing to hire.

In order to best connect youth to employment, those involved in preparing youth need to understand the

## STATE STREET CORPORATION

### Employee Networks – Institutionalizing Inclusion

State Street Corporation has a long standing commitment to diversity and inclusion. It has earned recognition for its practices from a variety of organizations. In 2012 it launched a summer internship program for students with disabilities from local high schools and colleges. The pilot partnership with the Carroll Center for the Blind has since expanded to include five additional public and non-profit job intermediary organizations. Twenty interns with both intellectual and physical disabilities have been hired for paid internships, with five securing full time jobs with State Street and the remaining continuing in their internships until they complete their high school or college education.

State Street understands that inclusion is not just about increasing the numbers of employees with disabilities in the workplace, offering integrated competitive work, or tapping a new and underutilized talent pool. These are the “givens.” But retaining, developing and advancing individuals with disabilities, from transition age through retirement, also means creating a culture of inclusion. This involves supporting employees once they have been hired and including the

voices of employees with disabilities in the development and implementation of policies, practices and strategies that impact them and all employees.

One key way State Street does this is through employee networks or affinity groups, also known as Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). These are voluntary, employee-led groups that serve as a resource for members and organizations by fostering a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with organizational mission, values, goals, business practices, and objectives. They often include family members as well.

As the organization states, “Inclusion and diversity are strategic imperatives. Employee networks include employees united around a common goal, seeking to help shape our future with their unique perspectives.” One of its ERGs, the Disability Awareness Alliance, includes over 550 members nationally. This ERG has formed strong partnerships with community disability service agencies, engages senior management and produces monthly newsletters that promote internal and external resources.

“business-centric approach” that seeks qualified and skilled talent in order to best meet market goals and objectives. Businesses hire people with disabilities because of their qualities and talents; because they are loyal, hard-working, and improve morale; and because including people with disabilities in a diverse workforce sends a positive brand message to customers and the community. Effective practices include providing training to immediate supervisors, instilling a company-wide inclusive culture, putting the employees in positions to succeed, and using the concept of “universal design” to include and socialize employees with disabilities into the workforce. But the bottom line is that employers in both for-profit and non-profit sectors are seeking to recruit and hire employees who can help them meet the demands of the marketplace and/or fulfill their mission.<sup>4</sup>

The public sector also has an enormous role to play. Key among the actions state government can take to become a model employer of people with disabilities are: 1) Make disability employment part of the state workforce development strategy; 2) Support businesses in their efforts to employ people with disabilities; 3) Increase the number of people with disabilities working in state government; and 4) Prepare youth with disabilities for careers that use their full potential, providing employers with a pipeline of skilled workers.<sup>5</sup> These actions can also be taken by municipal governments, especially large cities such as Boston.

Connecting career pathways to employment pipelines works through an intricate web of relationships predicated on trust that builds over time between intermediaries and business recruitment specialists. What this means in practice is that most successful recruitment and hiring of young people with disabilities will

happen in ones and twos as much as en masse. The systems change recommendations in this Action Plan are designed to impact thousands of Boston youth with disabilities, but in the end, real change will come because of the commitment and actions of hundreds of people on the ground bringing and retaining one young person at a time into successful employment.

#### THE TJX COMPANIES

### Disability Recruitment and Universal Design

Through its brands – TJ Maxx, Marshalls and HomeGoods – The TJX Companies, Inc. provides work experience and pre-employment programs for youth and young adults. Local store Associates work closely with disability service providers and high schools to recruit and engage young people, including those considered at-risk.

Similar to other major corporations, TJX uses a variety of methods to ensure that managers and supervisors are skilled in developing employees and helping them advance in their careers. Key to TJX’s approach is its understanding of universal design in performance management. All employees, disabled or not, are evaluated for their skills and talents, the assets they bring and the contribution they make to the success of the company. Most importantly, supervisors are taught to recognize the specific needs and characteristics of the person they are supervising and adjust their communication style accordingly. Rather than imposing assumptions *on* the employee, supervisors listen carefully *to* the employee to ensure that there is mutual understanding of the individual’s specific situation and the company’s expectations. Effective performance management requires the alignment of these two factors, and that requires engaged listening and nuanced appreciation of all differences among employees, including the differences of disability.

<sup>4</sup> Private sector businesses, though market-driven, have multiple bottom lines, including a favorable community or social brand, while non-profits, though mission-driven, are also in a competitive marketplace for grants and donations from funders.

<sup>5</sup> National Governors Association, 20012-2013 Chair’s Initiative. *A Better Bottom Line: Employing People with Disabilities-Blueprint for Governors*, [https://governor.delaware.gov/docs/NGA\\_2013\\_Better\\_Bottom\\_Line.pdf](https://governor.delaware.gov/docs/NGA_2013_Better_Bottom_Line.pdf) 2013.

# Essential Concepts



To achieve the goal of making higher education and workplaces accessible to youth with disabilities, stakeholders from different sectors must share a common language to build the relationships necessary for successful outcomes. The concepts listed here are foundational to the goals, strategies and action steps to follow. (See Appendix 1 for additional detail).

1. **INCLUSION** – is the driving feature in disability rights under the special education and other laws: people with disabilities should be educated and have work and career opportunities alongside their peers to the greatest extent possible.<sup>6</sup> It is also essential in order for businesses to achieve the goal of employing a diverse workforce.
2. **UNIVERSAL DESIGN** – supports inclusion by representing the effort to create structures, learning and working environments that are conceived, designed, and constructed to accommodate, or include, the widest spectrum of users, including those with disabilities, without the need for subsequent adaptation or specialized design.<sup>7</sup>
3. **INDIVIDUALIZE** – means regarding each person as an individual, with strengths, interests, preferences and talents as well as a unique set of challenges that might require supports or accommodations.
4. **SELF-ADVOCACY** – is a set of skills students with disabilities need to learn in order to speak for themselves and ensure they get the supports they need to be successful in college, in job training programs or on the job.
5. **DISCLOSURE** - is the decision for people with disabilities to share personal information about their disability for the specific purpose of receiving accommodations.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> It is important to recognize that a small subset of young people with the most severe disabilities will need to be educated in specialized schools and have as their transition goal independent living within the community. Even there, inclusion in the life of the community is the driving force for their individualized plan and path to adulthood.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on universal design for learning see Center for Applied Technology <http://www.cast.org/>

<sup>8</sup> There are many resources about disclosure. They include: ReachHire – Young Adults Building Careers in Massachusetts, <http://reachhirema.org/>; Advising Youth with Disabilities on Disclosure: Tips for Service Providers, Office of Disability Employment Policy, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/advising.htm>; Learning Disabilities and The Law: After High School: An Overview for Students, Learning Disabilities Association of America, <http://ldaamerica.org/learning-disabilities-and-the-law-after-high-school-an-overview-for-students-2/>; The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities, National Collaborative on Work and Disability/Youth, <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure>; Work without Limits [http://workwithoutlimits.org/providers/quality\\_employment\\_practices/disclosure](http://workwithoutlimits.org/providers/quality_employment_practices/disclosure)

6. **ACCOMMODATIONS** - means modifying an environment (e.g., classroom or job site), teaching methods or the way in which a job is done so that the person with a disability can have equal access and opportunity.
7. **HIDDEN DISABILITIES** – include learning disabilities, emotional, communication, and attention deficit disorders, high-functioning autism and/or executive functioning disorders that are not visibly evident but can sabotage the ability to function successfully and meet the demands of school or the workplace.
8. **TYPES OF EMPLOYMENT** – include *competitive*,<sup>10</sup> *integrated*<sup>11</sup> and *supported*<sup>12</sup> that vary as to the level of support required to enable the employee with disabilities to succeed in the workplace.
9. **INTERMEDIARIES** – in this context refers to job developers who connect prospective employees to business pipelines.<sup>13</sup> Workforce intermediaries are organizations that proactively address workforce needs using a dual customer approach – one which considers the needs of both employees and employers. In other respects, intermediaries can refer to those entities that provide funding, training and/or technical assistance, enhance services, monitor outcomes, advocate policy change and conduct research.<sup>14</sup>



Research indicates that up to 75 percent of youth with disabilities have hidden or non-apparent disabilities.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The 2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan, op. cit., pg. 6. <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/20150302-FPT.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> US Legal Definitions <http://definitions.uslegal.com/c/competitive-employment-education/>

<sup>11</sup> US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/IntegratedEmployment.htm>

<sup>12</sup> US Legal Definitions, <http://definitions.uslegal.com/s/supported-employment/>

<sup>13</sup> “Workforce Intermediaries: Strategic Connections for Youth with Disabilities”, US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/workforce.htm>

<sup>14</sup> Lori Delale-O’Connor, and Karen E. Walker, “Rising to the Challenge: The Strategies of Social Service Intermediaries”, Public Private Ventures, Child Trends. <http://www.intermediarynetwork.org/documents/sectionIVgeneralresources.pdf> (2012)

# Profile of Boston Youth with Disabilities and their Pathways

Students are eligible for and entitled to transition services as part of their special education Individualized Education Program (IEP) starting at age 14. These services include assessments, plans, and pre-employment supports and placements.<sup>15</sup> In the 2013-14 school year, there were 4,350 students age 14-22 in Boston Public Schools or charter schools located in Boston<sup>16</sup> who had disabilities of many different types and severities that require individualized levels of supports, accommodations and services by the school so that the students can make educational progress.

The task force has developed a conceptual framework (see Chart 1) that graphically shows the major pathways students with disabilities can take as they progress through their schooling. This framework enables us to disaggregate the 4,350 students so as to identify and meet their needs more effectively. This framework is comprised by three pathways students can take as they leave high school:

**PATH 1:** Students exiting high school by graduating and connecting to college, training or employment.

**PATH 2:** Students on a non-diploma track until age 22 and exiting high school to adult services.

**PATH 3:** Students who exit high school by dropping out or by graduating and disconnecting from school

or work. Many of these students, known as “opportunity youth,”<sup>17</sup> have undiagnosed learning or other hidden disabilities that prevent them from connecting to school or work. These young people are highly at risk for entering the criminal justice system through the “school to jail pipeline.”

The framework as shown in Chart 1 on the next page is composed of a template for the total population of transition-age students and for each path consisting of: prevalent disability type and severity; data- number of students and type of disability; immediate destinations; services and resources; and intermediate destinations. The electronic version of this Action Plan will contain the Resource Map that lists and describes the resources by organization.

While this framework is a useful construct, in reality the pathways are more permeable with many youth traversing back-and-forth among them. For example, many youth and young adults come to the state adult agencies on their own, not through school; some of the “opportunity youth” receive services from adult agencies; and there is a constant back and forth between high school graduates who are connected and are disconnected, as many “stop out” of post-secondary training and education because of economic or family pressures and return, some completing and some not.

<sup>15</sup> According to the federal special education law transition services that must be provided by school districts are defined as a coordinated set of activities that 1) is designed to be within a results-oriented process focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of a child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities; 2) is based on the individual child’s needs, strengths, preferences, and interests; and 3) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cdynamic%2CTopicalBrief%2C17%2C>

<sup>16</sup> From Department of Elementary and Secondary Education for the 2013-14 school year. This number includes Boston students who are educated in public collaborative or private day or residential special education schools. It does not include Boston residents who are METCO students, in foster care in another town or in DYS custody. The total enrollment figures for 2014-2015 differ only slightly, adding up to 4,310 transition-age students in Boston schools.

<sup>17</sup> “Opportunity Youth” are defined as young people between the ages of 16 – 24 who are neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market. See <http://aspencommunitysolutions.org/>

# CHART 1 – PATHWAYS OF TRANSITION AGE STUDENTS IN BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2013-2014

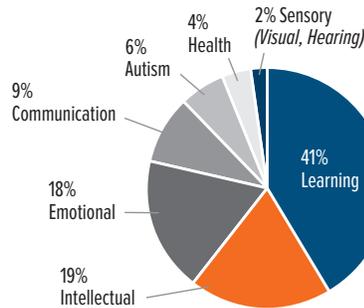


All Transition-age Students with Disabilities in BPS and Charter Schools =

**4,350**

Data source: DESE; 2013-14 for all transition age students; dropout data 2012-13

## TYPE OF DISABILITY



## BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS SERVICES

- Special Education Transition Services
- College and Career Readiness—Guidance
- Career and Vocational Technical Education (Madison Park and other school-based programs)

## STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (DESE)

Technical assistance, professional development, and monitoring for those BPS and charter school services



See Appendix 4 for a list of acronyms



### Projected “Destinations” by Pathway

Applying the most recent school enrollment and outcome data<sup>18</sup> available to the cohort of 4,350 students and assuming nothing else changes, we can project five years forward the following destinations for students and estimate the number in each the three pathways by the year 2019:

**PATHWAY 1:** 2,200, or about half will graduate. More than half of these 2,200 graduates will have a learning disability (compared to 41% in the total cohort). Of the graduates, half, or 1,100, will be enrolled in post-secondary education within 16 months of graduation, but only 60% of them (660) will still be enrolled in college after two years. For the other 1,100 graduates who do not go on to post-secondary education plus the 450 who did not persist in higher education, at most 30% (460) will be employed. Thus, it is estimated that only 50% of the students who graduate will be connected to either school or work two years after graduation.

**PATHWAY 2:** 1,450 will be on a non-diploma track at BPS (34%). But only 530 of those will “age out” at 22 and seek eligibility in adult services (70% of those aging out will have either an intellectual disability or autism). Some of them will not be found eligible for adult services. The remaining 920 students will leave BPS before they turn 22, very unlikely to be connected through work or a different school. Some of them may also seek adult services but without documentation needed to demonstrate eligibility, including lack of a transition plan. The effort for the youth or family to secure documentation at this stage can be very challenging.

**PATHWAY 3:** 750 will drop out (17%) and become part of the broader “opportunity youth” population. When added to those who do not remain connected in Pathway 1 or Pathway 2, of the cohort of 4,350, the vast majority – about 60% - are estimated to leave school and end up in Pathway 3: disconnected from school and work.

The term “opportunity youth” refers to all youth and young adults age 16-24 who are disconnected from school or work. According to 2010 American Community Survey data, there were 12,281 opportunity youth in Boston who were disconnected from both work and school. Of this group 1,552 (12%) were 16-19 and 10,729 (88%) were 20-24<sup>19</sup> Based on conservative estimates that 30% of these young people have disabilities,<sup>20</sup> a broader perspective than is shown in Chart 1 estimates that 465 aged 16-19 and 3,220 aged 20-24, or 3,685 can be considered to be in Pathway 3.

<sup>18</sup> From the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education data sets, including DART for Success After High School. A second methodology used the same assumptions but tracked the educational outcomes of 17 year old BPS students with disabilities from 2010-11 to 2014-15. The results were similar to the methodology used in this section that is taking the total transition age population and projecting forward five year.

<sup>19</sup> Cited in “The Boston Opportunity Agenda, The Boston Private Industry Council Application for Support From The Opportunity Youth Incentive Fund,” Executive Summary. [http://bostonpic.org/sites/default/files/BostonOYIF\\_%20executivesummary.pdf](http://bostonpic.org/sites/default/files/BostonOYIF_%20executivesummary.pdf); note that Boston PIC and Center for Labor Market Studies staffs thought this figure significantly underestimated the size of the population.

<sup>20</sup> This estimate is based on a base of 20% who are or were enrolled in special education in Boston, plus 10% who providers estimate have undiagnosed disabilities. Sub-populations connected to state systems, such as DYS, DCF and DTA, are estimated to have up to 50% with diagnosed or undiagnosed disabilities.

Recent comprehensive research by the Center for Collaborative Education and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University thoroughly documented the persistent achievement and opportunity gaps facing Boston Black and Latino male students.<sup>21</sup>

There is significant overlap between that population and the subject of this report, as Black and Latino males are overrepresented in special education, especially in the segregated settings that will lead many to Pathway 3.<sup>22</sup>

### PROJECT SEARCH – CROSS SECTOR COLLABORATION

#### Spaulding Rehabilitation Network, Goodwill Industries, Boston Public Schools and Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services

The Project SEARCH High School Transition Program is a national model for career exploration and job placement transition for young adults with developmental disabilities. The project was developed in 1996 at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center and has grown to over 250 sites across 40 states and four countries. The program takes place at a worksite where total immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process, as well as the acquisition of marketable work skills. The program is offered in healthcare, government or business settings. Young adults with disabilities participate in three internship rotations to explore a variety of career paths.

In Boston, Spaulding Rehabilitation Network, Goodwill Industries and the Boston Public Schools with support from the state Department of Developmental Disabilities partnered to launch Project SEARCH in school year 2014-2015. Spaulding was the worksite and provided classroom facilities. The Project SEARCH onsite team comprised of a Charlestown High School special education teacher and Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries’ vocational services staff provided job readiness, job coaching, job placement, and program coordination services.

Eight students from Charlestown High School spent six hours each day for the entire school year rotating through three internships. Placements included gym assistants (organizing and cleaning equipment, creating personalized reference books for each patient), materials assistants (delivering supplies around the building), housekeeping, cafe services and patient meal tray preparation.

Seven students graduated in June (The eighth student left mid-year for an art program in another agency) with one attaining employment at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in the Environmental Services Department. Three achieved summer employment while actively applying for positions within the Partners HealthCare network. Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries provides post program support for graduates with job development and placement services.

A second group of Charlestown High School seniors with disabilities will be recruited for Project SEARCH for the 2015-2016 school year. Based on the project’s initial success, additional hospital departments plan to participate and offer internships.

<sup>21</sup> H.P. Miranda, et al, Opportunity and equity: Enrollment and outcomes of Black and Latino males in Boston Public Schools. Boston, MA and Providence, RI: Center for Collaborative Education and Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University. <http://www.bostonpublicschools.org/cms/lib07/MA01906464/Centricity/Domain/24/Opportunity%20and%20Equity%20Full%20Report%20FINAL.pdf> (2014).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, pg. 10

# Barriers & Challenges

Low rates of employment and high poverty for adults with disabilities are the ultimate measures of the failure to adequately prepare young people with disabilities for the labor market and economic self-sufficiency. In 2012, the state employment rate was 33% for people with disabilities and 79.6% for those without disabilities.<sup>23</sup> The poverty rate for people with disabilities is three times that of those without disabilities.<sup>24</sup>

Youth employment in general has plummeted, decreasing from 45% in 1999 to 26% in 2012.<sup>25</sup> For youth with disabilities, the national labor attachment data is even worse: in May 2014, the employment rate for youth with disabilities, ages 16 to 19, was 15.1%, as compared to 27.3% for their peers without disabilities. For youth with disabilities, ages 20 to 24, the rate was 30.2%, compared to 63.9% for youth without disabilities.<sup>26</sup>

Unaddressed needs and deficiencies in the various systems are not unique to Boston; transition from the K-12 education system to the workforce and/or post-secondary education is a national issue documented in numerous reports and research. The 2012 federal GAO Report<sup>27</sup> on transition services identified many “longstanding and persistent” challenges (see Appendix 2 for list).

The Task Force findings parallel those of the GAO report. While a fuller description is available in Appendix 2 of this Action Plan, they are consolidated into five general areas:

## 1. System fragmentation/Lack of common frameworks

There is no one system to support youth with disabilities transitioning out of school; instead there are a number of systems that are overlapping and uncoordinated with different funding streams, eligibility requirements, missions, policies and procedures that can be at cross-purposes and are extremely difficult for youth, their families and agency staff to navigate; this is especially true for young people with multiple, complex disabilities.

Stakeholders in different sectors don't have a common framework, language or understanding of disability issues, special educational rights, employment pipeline models or the myriad pathways from school to successful employment. This lack of coordination also creates confusion among youth, their families and providers about the impact of wages on the amount of benefits such as SSI/SSDI one can receive, thus leading to a disincentive for young people found eligible for SSI/SSDI to seek employment.

## 2. Inadequate student preparation

Boston students with disabilities are less prepared for the workforce: they have worse educational outcomes (MCAS score, dropout rate, graduation rate, college enrollment and retention, e.g.) than their counterparts.<sup>28</sup> Students with disabilities in school historically have received few or inadequate transition assessments and services tailored to their individual

<sup>23</sup> Employment and Disability Institute at the Cornell University ILR School <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/>

<sup>24</sup> Annual Disability Statistics Compendium, <http://www.disabilitycompendium.org/compendium-statistics/poverty/4-3-poverty-gap---civilians-ages-18-64-years-living-in-the-community-for-the-u-s->

<sup>25</sup> P. Harrington and N.Snyder, Signaling Success: Boosting Teen Employment Prospects. Commonwealth Corporation, [http://www.commcop.org/resources/documents/BoostingTeenEmploymentProspects\\_042013.pdf](http://www.commcop.org/resources/documents/BoostingTeenEmploymentProspects_042013.pdf) (April, 2013)

<sup>26</sup> US Department of Labor, ODEP, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/youth/youthemployment.htm> (2014)

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office report to the ranking member, Committee on Education and Workforce, House of Representatives, “Students with Disabilities: Better Coordination Could Lessen Challenges in the Transition from High School,” GAO-12-594, July 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Both Boston students without disabilities and Massachusetts students with disabilities.

strengths, interests and preferences. A high proportion is educated in separate rather than inclusive classrooms. Boston's vocational technical high school is inadequate, undersubscribed and has fallen behind its successful counterparts around the state. Further, while many students with disabilities can be successful in four-year college with proper preparation, the full range of post-secondary education and training opportunities often are not presented to students with disabilities (and other students as well) in Boston Public Schools. These include occupational skills training certificate programs, apprenticeships, and other two year higher educational degrees.

### 3. Impact of “hidden” disabilities

While there is an infrastructure of support and services for young people with more severe disabilities in school and the community, for those with less severe or less visible disabilities, there has been no parallel infrastructure in schools or the community, resulting in lack of supports including not teaching the students how to self-advocate. As a result, youth are vulnerable to losing their job or dropping out of post-secondary education and training because they did not learn how to disclose their disability in order to seek accommodations. The psychological impacts can also be powerful as the burden of concealing a disability creates strain in social and work situations that might negatively affect health and well-being.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, disclosure relieves the strain of hiding the condition and increases the likelihood that the person will find and develop a social support network with others who might have similar conditions or experiences.

National studies reveal that only 37% of students with disabilities informed their postsecondary school of their disability. Only 55% of students who had an IEP in high school considered themselves to have a disability when in a post-secondary school.<sup>30</sup>

### 4. Lack of knowledge about disabilities in youth and job development settings

Many job developer intermediaries or community based agencies that serve youth generally do not have the expertise or resources to help young people who don't disclose their disability or whose disabilities are undiagnosed. Outside the disability serving agencies, and particularly among some intermediaries/job developers, in post-secondary institutions and among businesses, there is a need for knowledge about working with individuals with invisible disabilities such as learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder, executive functioning, communication disorders and emotional/mental health disorders.

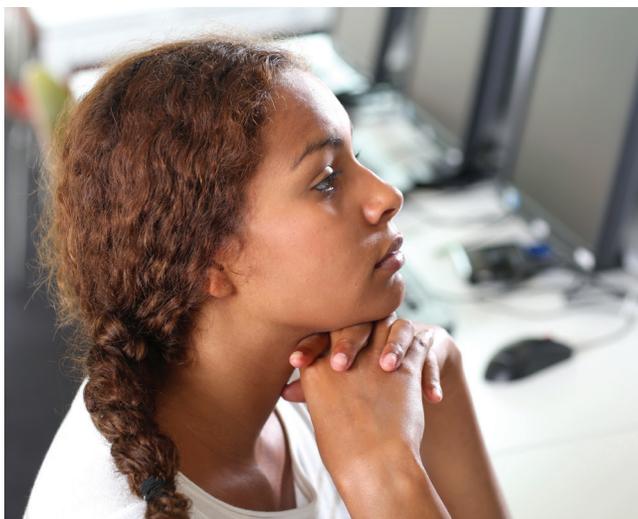
### 5. Lack of financial resources for basic services and “scaling up”

Federal and state funding for disability and for workforce development programs have eroded over the last decade. While Boston has numerous model programs, the lack of sufficient resources throughout the education, youth service, disability and workforce systems means that these promising practices cannot be scaled up to the levels required to reach the thousands of young people with disabilities who need support.

<sup>29</sup>S. R. Chaudoir and D. M. Quinn. “Revealing concealable stigmatized identities: The impact of disclosure motivations and positive first disclosure experiences on fear of disclosure and well-being.” *Journal of Social Issues*, 66, 570-584 cited at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-wide-world-psychology/201306/invisible-disabilities> (2010).

<sup>30</sup>Federal Partners in Transition Workgroup, op. cit., p. 5.

# Conditions for Change



Factors crossing a broad range of domains and disciplines—a recovering economy, new federal legislation and government policies, widespread support for work based learning, and emerging and long term demographic trends—make this a signal moment in the support for broader diversity in school, work and the community and the inclusion of people with disabilities in all these arenas of public life. They are reflected in the following five areas: (A fuller description of these conditions for change is available in Appendix 3).

## 1. It's the economy...

The economy is recovering from the Great Recession and hiring is up. At the same time declining birth rates and the retirement of the “baby boom” generation means that businesses will face workforce shortages in the coming years.<sup>31</sup> People with disabilities are a ready and able workforce waiting to be engaged.

Yet, while many baby boomers will retire, others are working longer and businesses are often interested in retaining these workers for their knowledge, loyalty

and productivity. As these employees age, many are developing age-related disabilities (e.g. hearing, vision, mobility) that require the kinds of workplace accommodations that create a comfort-level and provide the impetus for employers to create universal design workplaces to benefit all employees, including those newly-hired young adults.

## 2. Federal and state workforce initiatives

**WIOA** (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act) is the first new federal workforce development legislation in 17 years signed into law in July 2014 and scheduled to begin implementation starting in July 2015. Its provisions specifically require more workforce development services for job-seekers with disabilities, a greater focus of job development on disconnected youth and increased collaboration between the vocational rehabilitation agencies (Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission) and other adult service agencies and the schools. **Employment First** is the state Department of Developmental Services (DDS) initiative designed to eliminate the use of sheltered workshops, ensure that people with intellectual disabilities are paid minimum wage and work in inclusive jobsites in the community. And most recently, Governor Baker convened a **Task Force** on Economic Opportunity for Populations Facing Chronically High Rates of Unemployment designed to develop a strategic plan to address chronic unemployment among specific target populations, including people with disabilities.<sup>32</sup>

## 3. Renewed emphasis in schools and a new pathway to higher education

While robustly defined in the federal special education law, the implementation of transition provisions has lagged because of the lack of expertise and the

<sup>31</sup> R. Strack, J. Baier, and A. Fahlander. “Managing Demographic Risk,” Harvard Business Review <https://hbr.org/2008/02/managing-demographic-risk/ar/1> (2008)

<sup>32</sup> Task Force to Present Strategic Plan to the Governor by November <http://www.mass.gov/governor/press-office/press-releases/fy2015/executive-order-to-target-chronic-unemployment.html> (March 12, 2015)

challenge for educators to reach beyond the four walls of the school to the broader community. Recognizing this gap in services, Boston Public Schools has made transition a priority within the special education department, developing an infrastructure to deliver and monitor transition services based on a strategic plan, which when fully implemented should result in students with disabilities receiving self-advocacy training and individualized transition assessments, plans written into their IEP, and community or school-based work/career exploration or immersion experiences.

A new Individualized Education Program (IEP) form and process being developed by the state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will make it easier for schools to document transition-related goals, assessments and service needs. Legislation creating the “Transition Specialist Endorsement” credential recognizes and institutionalizes the need for educators to build the expertise and knowledge that will improve the planning and delivery of transition services in school districts across the Commonwealth. Boston participation in the state’s **Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (ICEI)** is enabling older students with more severe intellectual disabilities or autism to take college classes, travel independently, participate in the life of the campus and receive education and job coaching for career exploration.

#### **4. Support for Vocational Education and Work Based Learning**

Work based learning is the foundational pedagogy of career and vocational technical education (CVTE), the apprenticeship model and on-the-job training. In its *Blueprint for the Next Century*, Associated Industries of Massachusetts (AIM) states: “Employers, government and citizens must together elevate the role of vocational education and its potential to provide people

### **Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative at Roxbury Community College**

In the fall of 2013, Diane was a participant in the state-funded Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (ICEI) at Roxbury Community College that provides public high school students age 18 to 22 years old who are diagnosed with severe intellectual disabilities or autism the opportunity to participate in inclusive college courses to increase their school and work success.

To participate in the program, Diane had to learn how to use public transportation, since she had little prior experience traveling independently. Her family expressed concerns about her safety but wanted Diane to have the experience of taking a college course. Diane received “travel training” to get prepared. Diane’s mother confessed that she had a sleepless night before the first day at college. However, despite her family’s apprehension, Diane arrived on campus safely with excitement about the weeks ahead.

Diane had a very successful semester in an introductory art class. The professor reported that she was consistently an active class participant who completed all of her assignments and demonstrated notable gains in her classwork. Her class attendance was perfect. Throughout the semester, Diane also demonstrated leadership skills by, for example, helping other program participants navigate the college campus. In the spring of 2014, Diane received her high school diploma and took a course outside of the ICE Initiative where she learned about strategies for success in college and beyond. With the knowledge and self-confidence she gained from the ICE Initiative, Diane went on to take two art classes during the 2014-2015 academic year.

the skills they need to realize their economic dreams. The message should be that college is not the only pathway to success.”<sup>33</sup> The ascendance and support

<sup>33</sup>“Blueprint for the Next Century,” Associated Industries of Massachusetts, pg. 8 [http://www.aimnet.org/userfiles/files/AIM\\_%20Blueprint%20for%20the%20Next%20Century\\_wb2.pdf](http://www.aimnet.org/userfiles/files/AIM_%20Blueprint%20for%20the%20Next%20Century_wb2.pdf) (2015)



of this model is evidenced in *provisions of WIOA*, in the federal *American Apprenticeship Initiative*,<sup>34</sup> and in endorsement from the business community.<sup>35</sup>

For many students with learning disabilities, attention and self-organizational challenges, traditional classroom based education is ineffective. Making practical applications of academic lessons in real time can be the key to their success in school and at work.

Although many students with disabilities will be successful in college and will find a college education to be the path to their career aspirations, the methods and content of vocational education as it expands to include careers in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, information technology and other occupations is an equally viable path for all students<sup>36</sup> and especially for students and young adults with specific types of learning challenges.

### **5. The business case for hiring people with disabilities**

Without a strong case for hiring people with disabilities and the development of inclusive workplaces, youth with disabilities will have a hard time finding their way to the talent pipelines to meaningful work. There are very positive indications that businesses are becoming more aware of the advantages of hiring people with disabilities and that they are being included by employers in diversity goals, plans, strategies and organizational development. From national surveys that demonstrate consumers prefer to do business with companies that hire people with disabilities<sup>37</sup> to studies that document increased retention, productivity and positive impact on morale at companies that employ people with disabilities,<sup>38</sup> the “business case” for hiring people with disabilities is being made.

<sup>34</sup> US Department of Labor, American Apprenticeship Grants, <http://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship/grants.htm>

<sup>35</sup> See for example *Making Youth Employment WORK: Essential Elements for a Successful Strategy*, US Chamber of Commerce, <http://www.uschamberfoundation.org/sites/default/files/Making%20Youth%20Employment%20Work.pdf> (2015)

<sup>36</sup> W.C. Symonds, R. Schwartz; R. Ferguson, *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. Harvard Graduate School of Education [http://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Pathways\\_to\\_Prosperty\\_Feb2011-1.pdf](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Pathways_to_Prosperty_Feb2011-1.pdf) (2011).

<sup>37</sup> G.N. Siperstein, et al, “A national survey of consumers attitudes towards companies that hire people with disabilities.” [http://www.worksupport.com/documents/romano\\_siperstein.pdf](http://www.worksupport.com/documents/romano_siperstein.pdf) (2005) All participants responded positively towards companies that are socially responsible, including 92% of consumers who felt more favorable toward those that hire individuals with disabilities. The participants also had strong positive beliefs about the value and benefits of hiring people with disabilities, with 87% specifically agreeing that they would prefer to give their business to companies that hire individuals with disabilities.

<sup>38</sup> H.P. Hartnett, et al. *Employers’ perceptions of the benefits of workplace accommodations: Reasons to hire, retain and promote people with disabilities*. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*. 2011, Vol. 34 Issue 1

## CVS HEALTH AND MRC PHARMACY TECHNICIAN PROGRAM

### Meeting a Business Need

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) and CVS Health shared a long history of helping people with disabilities find employment through traditional job development and candidate preparation methods. In 2013 this private-public partnership moved to an entirely new level. Driven by CVS Health's business need to address a shortage of pharmacy technicians, the company called upon MRC and agreed to share its proprietary training curriculum so that MRC could recruit, screen, train and prepare candidates with disabilities for these positions as well as anticipated future shortages. MRC and CVS collaborated on the development of the training process, curriculum, video and materials tailored to participant and company needs and requirements.

The first graduating class in the summer of 2014 included 28 individuals that participated in the 8 week CVS Health and MRC Pharmacy Technician Program. 25 individuals successfully completed the class and were hired which represents an 89% placement rate. The second class of 36 individuals

completed their 8 week program in the winter of 2015. At this time there are 20 hires which reflect a 56% placement rate with on-going hiring across the state. As of summer 2015 there were 20 hires, a 56% placement rate with on-going hiring across the state. The average wage is \$10.50 per hour.

In May 2015 this pioneering program received the 17th Annual John Gould Education & Workforce Development Award at the Associated Industries of Massachusetts' (AIM) 100th Annual meeting.

The partners agreed that the keys to success were:

- Willingness to partner based on long term "trusted broker" relationship
- Champions at each organization who understood the project in detail and advocated for it
- CVS' agreement to release proprietary training materials to MRC

Importantly, just as those preparing young people with disabilities for employment need to share information and best practices, businesses that plan to employ them need to do the same. The growth of business to business (B2B) networks supporting inclusion in the workplace has grown internationally,<sup>39</sup> nationally, for example, through the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN)<sup>40</sup> and locally. Resources to assist businesses in ensuring that they are more inclusive have proliferated in recent years.<sup>41, 42</sup>

To ensure that service providers and other intermediaries understand and can prepare young people to meet the needs of businesses, sufficient research has been conducted and promising practices established to set standards and principles for the provision of effective transition services for youth and conditions for success in the workplace.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup>International Labour Organisation, "Employers make the case for hiring people with disabilities," Proceedings of 101st session of the ILO Business and Disability Network, [http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS\\_183673/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_183673/lang--en/index.htm) (June 2012)

<sup>40</sup>US Business Leadership Network <http://www.usbln.org/>

<sup>41</sup> See for example *Recruiting, Hiring, Retaining, and Promoting People With Disabilities: A Resource Guide for Employers* [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/employing\\_people\\_with\\_disabilities\\_toolkit\\_february\\_3\\_2015\\_v4.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/employing_people_with_disabilities_toolkit_february_3_2015_v4.pdf). (February 2015). See also Work Without Limits <http://www.workwithoutlimits.org/employers>, "Become an Employer of Choice Toolkit", "The Business Case: Employing People with Disabilities" and "Employing People with Disabilities: A Menu of State Agency Resources for Massachusetts Employers" among other resources on the site.

<sup>42</sup> See <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/Employers.htm>, US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) for numerous publications designed to assist businesses in all aspects of creating inclusive workplaces.

<sup>43</sup> See "Guideposts for Success", National Collaboration on Workforce and Disability/Youth, <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/guideposts>

# Goal Areas, Strategies and Action Steps



There is a richness of resources in the Boston area - intermediaries, disability experts, youth development infrastructure, employer networks, etc. – represented on this task force that serves as a platform for collaboration, knowledge dissemination and innovation in the pursuit of a very wide-ranging set of goal areas, strategies and action steps to improve workforce outcomes for Boston youth with disabilities.

## Cross-cutting Strategies

A number of themes were mentioned repeatedly throughout these data gathering activities across sectors. These nine (9) themes constitute cross cutting strategies that undergird the goal areas and inform the action steps.

1. Promote “youth voice,” self-advocacy and self-determination skills for Boston’s young people throughout all components of the system designed to support them.
2. Ensure that youth with disabilities have necessary assessments, accommodations, supports and wraparound services (health care, housing, social services, legal, e.g.) that will enable them to be successful and stay in their school or job.
3. Increase knowledge base through professional development and training – among educators,

families, youth service providers, job developers and intermediaries, and supervisors on the job.

4. Improve the school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures to be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.
5. Increase opportunities for coordination, collaboration, and partnerships among schools, employers, agencies and programs within and across multiple systems.
6. Integrate work-based learning experiences at all levels that are particularly effective in building competencies for youth with disabilities.
7. Improve the system navigation capacity of youth, families and professionals through regularly updated web-based resource directories and other means.
8. Increase funding and capacity within each sector so that schools, state agencies, job developers and intermediaries, youth serving agencies and employers can reach more young people.
9. Improve data collection and metrics so as to more effectively plan and monitor progress toward successful goal outcomes.

## Goal Areas and Action Steps

The seven goal areas starting on the next page represent the schools (#1) and three pathways (#3-#5) from Chart 1, a focus on family and community (#2) and employers and intermediaries (#6), ending with system wide improvements (#7). Each goal area is presented with a rationale, cross-cutting strategies that apply to it, and action steps listed for each of these strategies. Action steps are identified as either in process of implementation (I), being planned (P), a recommendation (R) or complete (C). The online version of the Dashboard will track changes and progress in implementing the action steps. See [www.b-setforcareer.org](http://www.b-setforcareer.org)

# Dashboard for Goal Areas, Strategies and Action Steps

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process    P = Planned    R = Recommendation    C = Complete (including to full scale)

## GOAL AREA #1: Continue to improve transition services and supports in the Boston Public Schools and charter schools for students with disabilities.

**Rationale:** Schools are the institutional starting place to provide special education services and supports to enable students with disabilities to successfully transition from school to post-secondary education, jobs, careers or independent living pathways. School districts also have the infrastructure and responsibility to provide vocational technical education, as well as college and career readiness and information for all students, including students with disabilities. The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) provides technical assistance to and oversight of local school districts.

### CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY

#### 1.1 Promote “youth voice,” self-advocacy and self-determination skills for Boston’s young people throughout all components of the system designed to support them.

ACTION STEPS	STATUS
1.1.1 Teach self-advocacy skills and support student involvement in IEP meetings so it is a positive experience that will help reduce stigma and encourage them to disclose their disability and secure effective accommodations appropriately in post-secondary education and work settings.	I
1.1.2 Hold annual transition conference for youth, parents, mentors and others who support youth in general and with disabilities on self-advocacy, self-determination and disclosure.	I
1.1.3 Disseminate new state Advisory on self-determination to guide schools in assisting students in transition and future planning.	C

### CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY

#### 1.2 Ensure that youth with disabilities have necessary assessments, accommodations, supports and wraparound services (health care, housing, social services, legal, e.g.) that will enable them to be successful and stay in their school or job.

ACTION STEPS	STATUS
1.2.1 Conduct assessments appropriate to the needs of each student starting at age 14, ensuring that all staff responsible for assessments are familiar with the range of assessment tools and their purposes, and that the choice of assessment instrument is appropriate to the student and situation.	I
1.2.2 Use assessment results to develop transition plan for each student that is incorporated into the IEP.	I
1.2.3 Adapt current IEP form to record transition supports and services until the new state IEP form is operational.	P

Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

Action Step Status Key: I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

ACTION STEPS // continued	STATUS
1.2.4 Conduct assessments and develop transition plans with services in the community for older youth with disabilities who had dropped out and are either returning through the BPS Re-Engagement Center or are seeking Hi-SET certification in alternative community-based settings.	R
1.2.5 Provide travel training for all students who need it to become independent.	I
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>1.3 Increase knowledge base through professional development and training – among educators, families, youth service providers, job developers and intermediaries, and supervisors on the job.</b>	
ACTION STEPS	STATUS
1.3.1 Provide professional development for special education staff on conducting assessments and use of internal communications and accountability on-line system.	I
1.3.2 Provide professional development for educators in the use of labor market data to develop internship, apprenticeship and job opportunities for students.	R
1.3.3 Continue to send special education staff to UMass Boston and other institutions of higher education to upgrade their transition specialist skills and knowledge base.	I
1.3.4 Share best practices on transition among BPS and charter schools through the Boston Compact.	R
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>1.4 Improve the school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures to promote diversity and be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.</b>	
ACTION STEP	STATUS
1.4.1 Increase inclusive placements, especially in middle and high schools, and especially for males of color with disabilities.	I
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>1.5 Improve the school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures to promote diversity and be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.</b>	
ACTION STEPS	STATUS
1.5.1 Ensure equitable distribution of transition resources across all BPS schools.	I

Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

ACTION STEPS // continued	STATUS
1.5.2 Build relationships with multiple intermediaries and directly with employers to provide career/higher education exploration and other pre-employment opportunities for each student based on individual interests and strengths.	I
1.5.3 Ensure flexible staffing in BPS so that students, particularly 18-22 year olds, can spend as much time as possible in external community, work or higher education settings as possible and so that staff can provide the necessary supports and technical assistance in the community.	I
1.5.4 Through Guidance services, better prepare students with disabilities for college application and success or for post-secondary alternative pathways to career.	I
1.5.5 Partner with state agencies as early as possible to develop “688” and other post-secondary plans, especially with Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) for pre-employment activities required under the new WIOA law.	I
1.5.6 Continue to use online tools at BPS such as Schoology and explore other opportunities to share best practices online and in person.	I
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>1.6 Integrate work-based learning experiences at all levels that are particularly effective in building competencies for youth with disabilities</b>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
1.6.1 Pre-employment activities for students, especially those in conjunction with MRC as required by the new WIOA law, should be as meaningful and close to work-based learning as possible.	R
1.6.2 Assist students with disabilities at Madison Park High School and career vocational technical education programs in other schools to find and be successful at work-based learning opportunities in school or the community.	I
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>1.7 Improve the system navigation capacity of youth, families and professionals throughout the system through regularly updated web-based resource directories and other means.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEP</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
1.7.1 Provide information and assistance to parents and students about services to which they are entitled while in high school and about adult services for which they may be eligible when they exit high school.	I

Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**1.8 Improve data collection and metrics so as to more effectively plan and monitor progress toward successful goal outcomes.**

**ACTION STEP**

**STATUS**

1.8.1 Continue the roll out of systems designed to measure student progress and outcomes.

I

**GOAL AREA #2: Strengthen family and community supports for transition-age youth.**

**Rationale:** Immediate and extended family remains a primary source of support, information and networking about higher education, jobs and career, for most youth, including those with disabilities. Neighborhood and community supports through mentors, community-based organizations and health and social service providers offer another layer of information and networking support, especially in immigrant or low-income communities.

All action steps delineated here must reflect a culturally and linguistically competent approach to immigrant families and English language learners, and take into account the role of organizations advocating for immigrant rights and acting as gatekeepers within various ethnic communities.

While most of the action steps below are being implemented in some programs and some places in the city, these activities need to be more systemic so that all families, youth and community organizations have access to consistent information, training and technical assistance.

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**2.1 Promote “youth voice,” self-advocacy and self-determination skills for Boston’s young people throughout all components of the system designed to support them.**

**ACTION STEPS**

**STATUS**

2.1.1 Teach self-advocacy and self-determination skills to youth with disabilities in afterschool programs so it is a positive experience that will help reduce stigma and encourage them to disclose their disability and secure effective accommodations appropriately in post-secondary education and work settings.

I

2.1.2 Engage community organizations and service providers in school-led and/or community based transition conferences for youth, parents, mentors and others who support youth in general and with disabilities on self-advocacy, self-determination and disclosure.

R

Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

Action Step Status Key: I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>2.2 Promote “youth voice,” self-advocacy and self-determination skills for Boston’s young people throughout all components of the system designed to support them.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
2.2.1 Provide education and/or coaching for parents and other family members, youth, mentors and community-based organizations about the following:	
2.2.1.1 Transition rights	I
2.2.1.2 Self-advocacy, self-determination and disclosure	I
2.2.1.3 Youth development for young people with disabilities	R
2.2.1.4 Labor market information	R
2.2.1.5 Financial literacy	R
2.2.1.6 College and non-college career pathways	I
2.2.1.7 Social Security Benefits (SSI & SSDI), Childhood Disability Benefit (CDB), health insurance, work incentives	R
2.2.2 Ensure students and their families understand the financial implications of taking out student loans to attend public, private or for-profit post-secondary institutions, especially as it may take longer for students with disabilities to complete coursework/training.	R
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>2.3 Improve the school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures to promote diversity and be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEP</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
2.3.1 Increase the number of afterschool and other community-based programs that have inclusive programming and are welcoming of children and youth with disabilities.	R
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>2.4 Improve the system navigation capacity of youth, families and professionals throughout the system through regularly updated web-based resource directories and other means.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEP</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
2.4.1 Encourage better coordination of information dissemination and navigation activities within and among BPS, CBOs and SpedPac (Special Education Parent Advisory Council). Consider including SpedPac in BPS professional development activities as appropriate	R

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

**GOAL AREA #3: Ensure that students with disabilities in public and private colleges and other post-secondary programs have access to accommodations and to career services.**

**Rationale:** Many students with milder or more moderate disabilities who graduate from high school and connect immediately to higher education or workforce pathways (e.g., job training, apprenticeship programs) either do not know they have a disability and may be eligible for services or have not learned self-advocacy skills or choose not to disclose their disability. As a result, they are more likely to struggle and disconnect from a school or job training pathway, as they no longer have the protection of the special education law that supported them in public school.

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**3.1 Improve the system navigation capacity of youth, families and professionals throughout the system through regularly updated web-based resource directories and other means.**

ACTION STEPS	STATUS
3.1.1 Ensure that students access college support services (e.g., health services, homelessness/housing, mental health) when needed so they can stay connected to the higher education pathway.	I
3.1.2 Communicate pro-actively through college disability offices with all students at orientation about the services, especially accommodations, they provide to help students with disabilities be successful in higher education.	R
3.1.3 Improve communication between high school and higher education, specifically college disability offices, so that, with the students' permission, and as part of the transition process, up to date information about disabilities and accommodations is available to the college prior to matriculation.	R

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**3.2 Increase knowledge base through professional development and training – among educators, families, youth service providers, job developers and intermediaries, and supervisors on the job.**

ACTION STEPS	STATUS
3.2.1 Ensure that college-based coaching or support services, e.g., Success Boston and others, are knowledgeable about disability issues and encourage students to disclose with the college's disability office.	R
3.2.2 Provide training about disabilities and accommodation needs to occupational skills training programs and apprenticeship settings.	R

Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

Action Step Status Key: I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>3.3 Improve the school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures to promote diversity and be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEP</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
3.3.1 Encourage the development of inclusive policies and practices in occupational skills training, apprenticeship and other post-secondary training and education institutions with the goal of having the population of students/apprentices with disabilities in these programs be proportional to their prevalence in the general population.	R
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>3.4 Increase opportunities for coordination, collaboration and partnerships among schools, businesses, agencies and programs within and across multiple systems.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
3.4.1 Ensure that college disability offices and career offices coordinate so that students with disabilities (including students participating in the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative) can take advantage of and receive the appropriate support of college career office pipelines to employers.	R
<b>ACTION STEPS // continued</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
3.4.2 Use the Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities (COSD) national conference scheduled for Boston in 2016 to engage and improve the college career and college disability office coordination efforts with the business community.	R
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>3.5 Increase funding and capacity within each sector so that schools, state agencies, job developers and intermediaries, youth serving agencies and businesses can reach more young people with disabilities.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
3.5.1 Provide public college career offices with job development and placement capacity for students with disabilities.	R
3.5.2 Seek the involvement of alumni associations to provide job leads for students with disabilities.	R

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

**GOAL AREA #4: Increase capacity and improve service coordination among state adult service, workforce development, transitional assistance and youth service agencies.**

**Rationale:** Building blocks are in place to achieve results in this goal area. The Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD) has created a steering committee to implement the provisions of the new federal WIOA law (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act), including a youth workgroup of the committee that includes cross-cabinet membership of key state agencies, such as MRC, DESE, Workforce Investment Boards (WIB), Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), as well as selected career centers and municipal offices. The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) is taking the lead in implementing the principles of Employment First, which should extend to all state agencies. The Department of Mental Health (DMH) is a leader in promoting empowerment activities for the young people found eligible for its services, including programs that promote self-determination, peer mentoring models and governance roles on numerous advisory boards. The Mass Commission for the Blind (MCB) also provides direct workforce services to eligible people with vision impairments.

Beyond the adult service agencies and others that serve as a pathway with the schools through the 688 referral process, young people with disabilities are clients in other state agencies as well: foster youth in the Department of Children and Families (DCF) who have a unique set of needs as they age out at 18; incarcerated youth in DYS who will be returning to the community; young parents (virtually all of them young women) who are seeking employment, child care and Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) services through DTA; young parents in the Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter system, or young people who are still part of their parent’s EA shelter household through the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD); young people with drug addictions seeking treatment through the Department of Public Health funded centers; MassHealth-eligible youth up to age 21 with mental illness or behavioral disorders that can access services through the Children’s Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI); and the network of career centers and workforce investment boards through EOLWD agencies.

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**4.1 Promote “youth voice,” self-advocacy and self-determination skills for Boston’s young people throughout all components of the system designed to support them.**

**ACTION STEP**

**STATUS**

4.1.1 Integrate youth voice, governance, self advocacy and self-determination skills into all state agencies and their programs that serve youth and young adults with disabilities, building on the models at DMH and other state agencies.	R
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**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**4.2 Increase knowledge base through professional development and training – among educators, families, youth service providers, job developers and intermediaries, and supervisors on the job.**

**ACTION STEPS**

**STATUS**

4.2.1 Train all youth and adult employment and training staff in state agencies and one-stop career centers about the strategy and practices that make Employment First effective.	R
4.2.2 Train the staffs of all community-based providers in methods that support competitive and integrated employment opportunities for DDS-eligible young adults receiving employment and training services.	I

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>4.3 Improve the school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures to promote diversity and be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEP</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
4.3.1 Promote the principles of Employment First - that people with more severe intellectual disabilities have access to and can be successful in competitive and integrated employment - across the public employment and training systems in Boston and across the state.	R
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>4.4 Increase opportunities for coordination, collaboration and partnerships among schools, businesses, agencies and programs within and across multiple systems.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
4.4.1 Oversee the implementation of WIOA, especially for people with disabilities and disconnected youth, across state agencies, including the provision of opportunities for community and public input.	I
4.4.2 Establish interagency coordination and accountability agreements across agencies at the cabinet as well as individual agency levels to ensure more efficient and effective employment and training services for consumers and their families. For example, the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), as the federally-designated vocational rehabilitation agency (VR) that is part of EOHHS, should play a central role alongside the Department of Career Services (DCS) and EOLWD and the Massachusetts State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) coordinating these disparate pathways into employment pipelines.	R
4.4.3 Strengthen the formal agreements (MOUs) between MRC and other state agencies, such as DDS, to ensure seamless coordination of employment finding and post-hiring supports.	R
4.4.4 Involve state agencies in school and community-based services before the student is eligible for adult services.	I
4.4.5 Ensure that state agencies begin all formal transition planning services starting at age 14.	I
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>4.5 Improve the system navigation capacity of youth, families and professionals throughout the system through regularly updated web-based resource directories and other means.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
4.5.1 Ensure that all community-based agencies and schools serving youth and families are knowledgeable about programs and benefits, eligibility requirements, the impact of work on SSI eligibility, where to make referrals and up-to-date information across all relevant agencies, including DTA, DPH, DCF, DCS, DHCD, and programs serving homeless youth and families, among others.	R

Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

ACTION STEPS // continued	STATUS
4.5.2 Ensure staff in all youth serving programs, schools and agencies-, youth and adult employment and training staff, and disability organizations are knowledgeable about the services available and required under WIOA by the workforce development and vocational rehabilitation systems.	R

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**  
**4.6 Improve the system navigation capacity of youth, families and professionals throughout the system through regularly updated web-based resource directories and other means.**

ACTION STEPS	STATUS
4.6.1 Fully fund initiatives that are part of Employment First.	P
4.6.2 Increase funding for the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (ICEI) so that more students with intellectual disabilities and autism can participate in postsecondary education leading to employment training experiences.	P
4.6.3 Increase funding for shelter and housing options to reduce homelessness among young parents, many of whom have disabilities.	P
4.6.4 Restore DTA employment and training funding to levels that ensure beneficiaries receive high quality services connected to WIOA.	P
4.6.5 Identify and advocate for other funding increases for state agency services that would bring to scale services and supports for young adults with disabilities.	P

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

**GOAL AREA #5: Re-connect “Opportunity Youth” to school and career pathways by supporting youth-serving agencies to better meet the needs of older youth who have hidden or undiagnosed disabilities.**

**Rationale:** As described in the “Profile of Boston Youth with Disabilities and their Pathways” section of the Action Plan narrative (pg. 19), about 60% of transition age students can become disconnected by dropping out before graduation, not being eligible for adult services and/or failing to engage in work or higher education after graduation. They may show up in any of a number of community based “destinations” and youth development programs. Many community-based agencies that serve this population are under-resourced and with insufficient expertise to provide them with the educational and social supports they need. They need access to disability experts for a range of situations that can arise that are beyond their expertise to resolve. But, referrals to outside resources can be difficult to make because agencies and programs are so segmented, thus program staff are not aware of the range of services and options available for their students. Even within these networks, programs may be unaware of the conditions, expectations and components of other programs. The particular requirements of skills training programs and the occupational requirements of the specific jobs for which individuals are trained are especially important to consider when making referrals.

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**5.1 Ensure that youth with disabilities have necessary assessments, accommodations, supports and wraparound services (health care, housing, social services, legal, e.g.) that will enable them to be successful and stay in their school or job.**

**ACTION STEPS**

**STATUS**

5.1.1 Improve program intake and assessment processes and documentation to screen for hidden disabilities by including questions that might better identify behaviors characteristic of certain types of disabilities. Include a uniform question about SSI/SSDI benefits on intake forms/processes at all agencies that serve youth and families to assist staff in determining the likelihood that a student or young adult may be receiving disability related benefits.	R
5.1.2 Use “universally designed” asset-based intake and assessment instruments that include questions about work experience and general self-advocacy skills (not only disability-specific) that have been shown to be associated with work and learning success in adulthood.	R

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**5.2 Increase knowledge base through professional development and training – among educators, families, youth service providers, job developers and intermediaries, and supervisors on the job.**

**ACTION STEPS**

**STATUS**

5.2.1 Provide training to staff of agencies working with “opportunity youth” about hidden disabilities (e.g., learning, non-verbal learning, attentional, autism spectrum, executive functioning, emotional/behavioral), universal design, self-advocacy and disclosure, trauma, system navigation, youth development, etc.	P
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Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

5.2.2 Use capacity building models such as case studies/"grand rounds" where especially challenging situations are presented to experts with program staffs from the same or different agencies in attendance to maximize learning; distance technologies and other internet based group meeting modalities should be considered to maximize efficiency and learning.	R
5.2.3 Establish mechanisms to systematically embed and institutionalize knowledge in agencies and systems. Suggestions include using a train the trainer model from the outset; assign a lead at each program; have leads meet at regular intervals for updates and to share best practices; and hold trainings at least annually.	R
<p><b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b></p> <p><b>5.3 Improve the school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures to promote diversity and be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.</b></p>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
5.3.1 Provide technical assistance as needed to agencies working with "opportunity youth" to ensure that inclusive program practices and policies are integrated into the infrastructure.	P
<p><b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b></p> <p><b>5.4 Increase opportunities for coordination, collaboration, and partnerships among schools, businesses, agencies and programs within and across multiple systems.</b></p>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
5.4.1 Ensure that youth service agencies have systematic access to the latest information on theory and best practices in the disability field by creating or expanding linkages to resources at academic institutions, state agencies and other entities that have expertise in fields such as neuropsychology, learning and other disabilities and special education.	R
5.4.2 Improve information sharing by ensuring that for those students with IEPs who drop out of high school and re-engage in secondary education through a youth serving agency, every effort is made to ensure that the "receiving" school or program has access to the IEP and other relevant documentation if the student/family has agreed to share this information.	I
<p><b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b></p> <p><b>5.5 Improve data collection and metrics so as to more effectively plan and monitor progress toward successful goal outcomes.</b></p>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
5.5.1 Review, revise /or augment existing performance measurement and outcome measurements to account for barriers specific to disconnected youth.	R
5.5.2 Improve systems to collect and report data accurately and consistently in a timely manner to ensure that planning, policies, funding and other decisions are evidence-based.	R

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

**GOAL AREA #6: Increase capacity of employers in the private, non-profit and public sectors to hire, retain and advance youth/young adults with disabilities.**

**Rationale:** The Boston area has many companies known for employing people with disabilities and business and provider partnerships across the state that are supporting innovation in the training and placement of persons with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment. These partnerships provide a platform to build upon and expand the number of businesses and employers that will commit to recruit and hire young people with disabilities for their talents and abilities. Boston also has numerous intermediary or pipeline agencies. But many of them do not identify participants with hidden disabilities and thus are not able to tailor the work and non-work related supports that will help them be successful.

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**6.1 Increase knowledge base through professional development and training – among educators, families, youth service providers, job developers and intermediaries, and supervisors on the job.**

ACTION STEPS	STATUS
6.1.1 Incorporate internal training strategies of companies/employers to increase the understanding of disability, inclusion, self-advocacy, disclosure, universal design and trauma for young people as part of supervisor professional development capabilities in growing and managing a more diverse workforce.	I
6.1.2 Actively engage and provide training and information resources to non-disability specific service and intermediary organizations that work directly with business “pipelines” about disability, inclusion, self-advocacy, disclosure, universal design, trauma and policies and practices related to working with students with hidden disabilities to make their programs and pipelines inclusive. Use creative ways to engage and increase involvement of staff, such as webinars, peer training, case conferences, etc.	R

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**6.2 Improve the school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures to promote diversity and be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.**

ACTION STEPS	STATUS
6.2.1 Use universal design, affinity groups, employee resource groups and other strategies (e.g., the “CEOs Against Stigma” initiative of the MA chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness) to create and sustain inclusive organizational cultures that promote the development of a diverse workforce that includes young people with disabilities.	I
6.2.2 Encourage business, human resource and trade associations (e.g., Boston Chamber of Commerce, Retail Association of Massachusetts, Associated Industries of Massachusetts, Society of Human Resource Management, the New England Council etc.) to establish member policies and practices that create increased inclusive employment options for youth with disabilities.	R
6.2.3 Provide training to human service and non-profit sector agencies and employers on creating trauma-informed workplaces.	I

Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

Action Step Status Key: I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>6.3 Increase opportunities for coordination, collaboration, and partnerships among schools, businesses, agencies and programs within and across multiple systems.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
6.3.1 Establish a coordinated statewide initiative to engage CEOs and other business executives that have created inclusive companies to recruit and educate colleagues in their own or other industries about creating employment options for youth/young adults with disabilities.	R
6.3.2 Launch a similar initiative to support the engagement of small businesses in creating employment opportunities for youth/young adults with disabilities.	R
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>6.4 Integrate work-based learning experiences at all levels that are particularly effective in building competencies for youth with disabilities.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
6.4.1 Use industry-based curricula and current labor market information in pre-employment and job training services in the schools and community in order to prepare transitioning youth for 21st century jobs and careers. Employers need to be involved in articulating the demand-side by: 1) breaking down the job description into detailed sets of required tasks; 2) working with skills training schools and programs to design training; and 3) collaborating with disability service agencies to understand needed support.	R
6.4.2 Extend the development of industry based internship and apprenticeship models from the trade industries to other business sectors such as information technology, health care, and advanced manufacturing for students as part of the employment and training services offered.	P
6.4.3 Provide technical assistance to companies to develop work based learning models such as internship and apprenticeship for recruiting and engaging transitioning youth with disabilities.	R
<b>CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY</b>	
<b>6.5 Increase funding and capacity within each sector so that schools, state agencies, job developers and intermediaries, youth serving agencies and businesses can reach more young people with disabilities.</b>	
<b>ACTION STEPS</b>	<b>STATUS</b>
6.5.1 Continue to develop and expand employment collaboratives and networks that convene and provide technical support and other resources to businesses and intermediaries, with the goal of increasing outreach to, engagement with and hiring of youth and young adults with disabilities.	I

Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process P = Planned R = Recommendation C = Complete (including to full scale)

6.5.2 Increase the numbers of young adults with disabilities hired by employers with federal contracts as part of the mandate to increase the hiring of people with disabilities in accordance with the requirements of Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 503) at 41 CFR Part 60-741.<sup>1</sup> R

**GOAL AREA #7: Continue to build an infrastructure that raises awareness and resources, that addresses systems issues, and that promotes collaboration to support the transition to employment and career for Boston youth with disabilities.**

**Rationale:** It is challenging enough for organizations to do their job and engage in collaborations that directly enable them to serve their clients or achieve their mission. Yet there are multiple systems that can either pave or block the pathway to employment and career success for Boston youth with disabilities, and most organizations working in their own spheres do not have the full knowledge to take advantage of potential resources for their clients. Creating this task force was the first step to raise awareness and build relationships among organizations and people working in these multiple systems.

Having such an organized entity to continue can be instrumental in reporting and sharing implementation results of action plan recommendations; continuing to learn from each other so as to improve system processes and outcomes; serving as the voice for Boston youth with disabilities in larger city or state efforts around improving workforce development opportunities for all people in need; collaborating to address long-standing or newly-identified barriers; and serving as a vehicle to raise awareness and resources from public or private funders, especially when having a collaborative in place is a requirement of funding.

A common refrain among service providers, businesses, schools, advocates, youth and families is the difficulty in knowing what resources exist in the community and how to access them. Whether in the form of case management or professional development or web-based data, information about services, eligibility requirements and other resources needs to be more easily accessible. The system should be designed to respond to the ways in which consumers experience the need for information. e.g., based on the individual’s age, location, career and employment interests. For businesses, working with a coordinated system of intermediaries is central to their engagement.

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**7.1 Improve the system navigation capacity of youth, families and professionals throughout the system through regularly updated web-based resource directories and other means.**

**ACTION STEPS**

**STATUS**

7.1.1 Improve the system navigation capacity of youth, families, and professionals across multiple sectors through the development of a staffed web-based resource directory that is centralized, easily accessible, and multilingual with understandable descriptions of programs and services, recruitment and application procedures, up to date and reliable contact information, and maintained and updated as programs and staffing change. P

<sup>1</sup> Section 503 prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating in employment against individuals with disabilities (IWDs), and requires these employers to take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote, and retain these individuals. The new rule was implemented on March 24, 2014.

Goal Areas, Strategy & Action Steps Dashboard // continued

**Action Step Status Key:** I = In process    P = Planned    R = Recommendation    C = Complete (including to full scale)

7.1.2 Ensure that the resource directory can be queried in ways that are responsive and relevant to employers' requirements.	R
7.1.3 Augment the centralized electronic directory with field expertise at strategic intersections of education, disability service and workforce development intermediaries to provide training and technical assistance to consumers, providers and other stakeholders throughout the various sectors and systems.	R

**CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGY**

**7.2 Increase opportunities for coordination, collaboration, and partnerships among schools, businesses, agencies and programs within and across multiple systems.**

**ACTION STEPS**

**STATUS**

7.2.1 Create a new coordinating vehicle to keep the many stakeholders from multiple sectors together to implement this Action Plan and work towards developing a model of collective impact, by identifying key indicators and appropriate metrics, representing this constituency in broader city or state initiatives, continuing to build collaborations and synergies among members, raising awareness and resources, and, if appropriate, overseeing the development of training and knowledge dissemination and managing the system navigation function (see #7.1 above).	R
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# Appendix 1: Essential Concepts



This task force is composed of people and organizations from different sectors – education, workforce development, disability, government, business – not to mention different subsets of each sector. In order to work together on behalf of Boston young people with disabilities, it is vitally important to share a common language and understanding in order to build the kinds of relationships necessary for successful outcomes.

## 1. Inclusion

Inclusion is the central premise that underlies the goal and objectives of the task force to increase post-secondary higher education and employment opportunities. It is the driving feature in disability rights under the special education laws and with the state DDS Employment First initiative: people with disabilities should be educated and have work and career opportunities alongside their peers to the greatest extent possible.<sup>1</sup> But apart from inclusion in work or school settings, there is a more fundamental principle of inclusion: all youth need support in transitioning to

work or higher education after high school; students with disabilities are no different, but need additional or specialized support to enable them to succeed. In that respect, years of research have distilled a developmental perspective of what all youth, including youth with disabilities, need to succeed during the critical transition years:<sup>2</sup>

- Access to high quality standards-based education regardless of the setting;
- Information about career options and exposure to the world of work; including structured internships;
- Opportunities to develop social, civic, and leadership skills;
- Strong connections to caring adults;
- Access to safe places to interact with their peers; and,
- Support services and specific accommodations to allow them to become independent adults.

Inclusion, however, does not mean invisibility. Disabilities are real and often require supports and accommodations. Adapting these youth development principles to more explicitly include young people with disabilities results in the following set of assumptions to guide policy makers and providers:

- High expectations for all youth, including youth with disabilities;
- Equality of opportunity for everyone, including nondiscrimination, individualization, inclusion, and integration;
- Full participation through self-determination, informed choice, and participation in decision-making;

<sup>1</sup> It is important to recognize that a small subset of young people with the most severe disabilities will need to be educated in specialized schools and have as their transition goal independent living within the community. Even there, inclusion in the life of the community is the driving force for their individualized plan and path to adulthood.

<sup>2</sup> See “Guideposts for Success,” National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/sites/default/files/LD-Guideposts.pdf>

- Independent living, including skills development and long-term supports and services;
- Competitive employment and economic self-sufficiency, which may include supports; and,
- Individualized, person-driven, and culturally and linguistically appropriate transition planning.

## 2. Universal design

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a strategy from the disability sector that can serve to effectively integrate and include young people with disabilities into mainstream youth development activities, whether in school or workforce settings. It is the application of the “universal design” architectural movement concepts to education. The architectural goal is to create structures that are conceived, designed, and constructed to accommodate, or include, the widest spectrum of users, including those with disabilities, without the need for subsequent adaptation or specialized design.<sup>3</sup>

These principles were codified for learning and have gained currency since the 1990s. They impact curriculum design, teaching methods and access to materials. For many young people with hidden disabilities and who are reluctant to disclose their disability for fear of receiving an accommodation and being stigmatized by their peers in school or in the workplace, UDL facilitates inclusion. The more policies and practices of a school or workplace are designed to be inclusive of common accommodations that can benefit all, the less stigmatized people with disabilities will feel.

## 3. Individualize

Central to inclusion is treating each young person – as a student, trainee or employee – as an individual, with strengths, interests, preferences and talents as well as a unique set of challenges that might require supports or accommodations. Individualizing does not mean holding young people with disabilities to lower standards; rather, whether in school or in the workplace, it is about identifying and building on their unique talents and abilities, tailoring accommodations and supports to their individual needs, putting them in the best position to succeed and expecting them to meet the same standards as their fellow-students or employees.

## 4. Self-advocacy

When students leave school and the protection of the special education law, they will have to advocate for themselves in order to get the supports they need to be successful in college, in job training programs or on the job. Therefore, self-advocacy is the central skill to be taught in school as part of the IEP process. Self-advocacy begins in the school transition process, where students are required to be invited to their IEP meetings beginning at age 14. It is considered best practice for them to be active participants in drafting their vision statement. They are further encouraged to lead their IEP meetings when desired and appropriate.

## 5. Disclosure

Disclosure is the decision for people with disabilities to share personal information about their disability for the specific purpose of receiving accommodations.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> For more information on universal design for learning see Center for Applied Special Technology <http://www.cast.org/>

<sup>4</sup> There are many resources about disclosure. They include: ReachHire – Young Adults Building Careers in Massachusetts, <http://reachhirema.org/>; Advising Youth with Disabilities on Disclosure: Tips for Service Providers, Office of Disability Employment Policy, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/advising.htm>; Learning Disabilities and The Law: After High School: An Overview for Students, Learning Disabilities Association of America, <http://ldaamerica.org/learning-disabilities-and-the-law-after-high-school-an-overview-for-students-2/> The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities, National Collaborative on Work and Disability/Youth, <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure>; Work without Limits [http://workwithoutlimits.org/providers/quality\\_employment\\_practices/disclosure](http://workwithoutlimits.org/providers/quality_employment_practices/disclosure)

This is particularly important for young people once they are out of school and in higher education or workplace settings where it is up to them to initiate the disclosure. The nature of the disability (e.g., hidden or apparent) will also inform the nature of the conversation. Where there is an intermediary involved in placing the young person in an internship or position with an employer, with the permission of the young person, the intermediary may disclose the nature of the disability to the employer to assist in structuring the support and accommodations that might be necessary.

### 6. Accommodations

For youth with disabilities to be included with peers in school or on the job, accommodations are essential. Accommodations in school are included in the IEP and must be provided by classroom teachers. Part of the disclosure process in a higher education or workplace setting is for the young person to not only share information about their disability but also about what type of accommodation works best for them. College accommodations are available through the disability office of the college. Job accommodations means modifying a job, job site, or the way in which a job is done so that the person with a disability can have equal access to all aspects of work. Job accommodations can make it possible for people with disabilities to apply for jobs, perform essential job functions, be as productive as their co-workers and accomplish tasks with greater ease or independence. Job accommodations also allow people with disabilities to enjoy the same benefits as their co-workers, such as access to the employee cafeteria or use of company-provided transportation.<sup>5</sup>

### 7. Hidden disabilities

Traditionally, people with disabilities identified for workplace hiring and higher education enrollment were those with physical or visible disabilities. Accommodations were developed for people with physical limitations or with vision or hearing impairments who were otherwise behaviorally and cognitively normative in order to fully participate in the workplace. People with severe intellectual disabilities or autism were channeled into supported work through state adult service agencies. However, most students with disabilities in school have learning disabilities, emotional, communication, and attention deficit disorders, high-functioning autism and/or executive functioning disorders that are not visibly evident but can sabotage their ability to function successfully and meet the demands of school or the workplace. Research indicates that up to 75 percent of youth with disabilities have hidden or non-apparent disabilities.<sup>6</sup> Many have been impacted by traumatic experiences. While fully protected by federal disability laws, they are least likely to disclose their disability because of fear of stigma and are thus most vulnerable to failure in school and the workplace.

### 8. Types of employment

**Competitive employment** refers to work in the competitive labor market that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis in an integrated setting and for which the individual is compensated at or above minimum wage, but not less than the customary wage and levels of benefits paid by the employer for the same or similar work performed by individuals who are not disabled.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For additional resources on accommodations see Job Accommodation Network <http://askjan.org>

<sup>6</sup> The 2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan, pg. 6. <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/20150302-FPT.pdf> (February 2015)

<sup>7</sup> US Legal Definitions <http://definitions.uslegal.com/c/competitive-employment-education/>

**Integrated employment** refers to jobs held by people with disabilities in typical workplace settings where the majority of persons employed are not persons with disabilities, where they earn at least minimum wage, and where they are paid directly by the employer. These individuals may be in jobs without dedicated support, in jobs in which they are supported to learn and perform tasks that are associated with a standard job description, or in jobs where tasks and conditions of work are customized to match the characteristics of the worker and the needs of the employer.<sup>8</sup>

**Supported employment** is competitive work in integrated work settings, in which individuals are working toward competitive work, consistent with the strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, interests, and informed choice of the individuals, for individuals with the most significant disabilities who, because of the nature and severity of their disability, need intensive supported employment services from the designated State Unit and extended services after transition in order to perform this work.<sup>9</sup> Supports can be provided by a co-worker (natural supports)<sup>10</sup> or a staff member of an intermediary (an employment training specialist). Supported employment can be described as “place then train” as opposed to other traditional approaches that use the approach of “train then place”.

## 9. Intermediaries

Workforce intermediaries are organizations that proactively address workforce needs using a dual customer approach — one which considers the needs of both employees and employers. Examples of organizations that can function as workforce intermediaries include faith-based and community organizations, employer organizations, community colleges, temporary staffing agencies, workforce investment boards and labor organizations.

The scope of intermediary work has expanded in recent years. It can include “assistance with fundraising, distribution of funding, providing technical assistance, offer supporting, enhancing services, monitoring outcomes, advocating policy change, collecting data, and conducting research.”<sup>11</sup> In the social service field, intermediary organizations are “nonprofit organizations that distribute funding they receive from other sources, as well as provide technical assistance and other services to support services offered by (other) nonprofits.”<sup>12</sup> They are typically positioned between funding entities (e.g., the federal government, foundations and corporations) and secular or faith-based direct service organizations. Intermediaries play an important role in connecting organizations that share a common interest, both to enhance the services these organizations provide and to build larger service networks.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/IntegratedEmployment.htm>

<sup>9</sup> US Legal Definitions <http://definitions.uslegal.com/s/supported-employment/>

<sup>10</sup> Natural supports is a best practice where the intent is for the job coach or employment training specialist to fade his/her supports and transfer that function to coworkers and/or assist the company in job restructuring so that the tasks may be done more independently by the individual with a disability.

<sup>11</sup> Lori Delale-O'Connor, and Karen E. Walker, “Rising to the Challenge: The Strategies of Social Service Intermediaries”, Public Private Ventures, Child Trends. <http://www.intermediarynetwork.org/documents/sectionIVgeneralresources.pdf> (2012)

<sup>12</sup> “Workforce Intermediaries: Strategic Connections for Youth with Disabilities”, USDOL, Office of Disability Employment Policy. <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/workforce.htm>

<sup>13</sup> Delale-O'Connor and Walker, op. cit.

# Appendix 2: Barriers & Challenges



Unaddressed needs and deficiencies in the various systems are not unique to Boston; transition from the K-12 education system to the workforce and/or post-secondary education is a national issue documented in numerous reports and research. A recent federal GAO report identified “longstanding and persistent” challenges in transition services.<sup>14</sup>

- Difficulty navigating multiple programs that are not always coordinated;
- Delays in service while waiting to access adult programs;
- Limited access to transition services for students who have less visible disabilities (e.g., learning, mental health, autism) or hearing or visual impairments, who are in the juvenile justice system, homeless or parents themselves, and who live in communities with inadequate public transportation;
- Lack of adequate information or awareness of the part of parents, students and service providers of available programs after high school;

- Inadequate preparation by school districts for post-secondary education or the workforce;
- Adult programs not always designed to meet the needs of transition-age youth in ways that will help them find or maintain employment;
- Low expectations by parents, service providers and even youth themselves about what young people with disabilities can achieve.<sup>15</sup>

Task force research mirrored these findings and are described below:

## **1. People with disabilities are very likely not to be in the job market and to live in poverty.**

Low rates of employment and high poverty for adults with disabilities are the ultimate measures of the failure to adequately prepare young people with disabilities for the labor market and economic self-sufficiency.

In Massachusetts in 2009, as the impacts of the Great Recession were reflected in labor market data, the employment rate (workforce participation) for people with disabilities was only 35%, compared to 80% for people without disabilities. In 2012 the employment rate was 33% for people with disabilities and 79.6% for those without disabilities.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while there was little change from 2009 to 2012 for either population, the gap in workforce participation remained substantial.

Regarding national labor attachment data for youth with disabilities, in 2005, 57% of out-of-high-school students with disabilities were employed compared to 66% of students in the general population. Young adults with disabilities earned an average of \$10.40 per hour compared with \$11.40 per hour for young adults in the general population. Although employment outcomes for transition-age youth with disabilities have improved over the past decade, youth with disabilities

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Government Accountability Office report to the ranking member, Committee on Education and Workforce, House of Representatives, Students with Disabilities: Better Coordination Could Lessen Challenges in the Transition from High School, GAO-12-594, July 2012.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp. 9-17

<sup>16</sup> Employment and Disability Institute at the Cornell University ILR School <http://www.disabilitystatistics.org/>

continue to lag behind their peers without disabilities in finding a job.<sup>17</sup> In May 2014, the employment rate for youth with disabilities, ages 16 to 19, was 15.1%, as compared to 27.3% for their peers without disabilities. The employment rate for youth with disabilities, ages 20 to 24, was 30.2%, and 63.9% for youth without disabilities.<sup>18</sup>

As a result of this employment disparity in Massachusetts the poverty rate for people with disabilities is three times that of those without disabilities. In 2013 the poverty rate for adults with disabilities aged 19-64 living in Massachusetts was 26.9 percent compared to 9.6 percent for those without disabilities.<sup>19</sup>

## **2. Publicly-funded service systems suffer from lack of coordination and difficulty in navigating.**

The number of federal, state and local agencies with responsibility for assisting people with disabilities represents an important asset for the Commonwealth. But with numerous agencies that have different eligibility requirements, prioritization of services, time limits, programs and service delivery models, there is a critical need for coordination within individual agencies, among federal, state and local entities, and across different systems. The lack of accountability, clear role definitions, inter (and intra) agency collaboration and information sharing contributes to confusion among professionals working within the different disability and youth service agencies, across these agencies and across the systems with which they intersect. Ultimately this lack of coordination contributes to a range of gaps in services.

## **3. Confusion in community among families, providers and youth about fear of losing SSI benefits if young person gets a job.**

The regulations governing social security benefits are confusing, difficult to understand, and often contain or are perceived to contain disincentives to work. They continue to be a deterrent to work for families and young adults at the time of age benefits redetermination. Despite efforts made to simplify and clarify these regulations by agencies,<sup>20</sup> or in the form of a plethora of online planning tools available from the Social Security Administration and other sites,<sup>21</sup> the process remains difficult to understand for many.

It is also the case that there continues to be a tension between encouraging young people with disabilities to work as opposed to securing public assistance such as SSI. While many youth with disabilities need social security income to survive, for others there is a danger of developing dependency which can compromise development, independence, self-esteem, and expectations about their capacity to work. Once receiving benefits, it is difficult for some young people to consider losing them in order to pursue work or other employment goals.

## **4. Students with disabilities in school historically have received no or inadequate transition services and have faced low expectations and stigma.**

Boston Public Schools and charter schools in Boston have the statutory responsibility to provide transition assessments, plans and services for all students with disabilities starting at age 14. Transition plans are developed based on assessments and must be

<sup>17</sup> National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 <http://nlts2.org/index.html> cited in 2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan, op. cit., p. 6, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/20150302-FPT.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> US Department of Labor, ODEP, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/youth/youthemployment.htm> (2014)

<sup>19</sup> Employment and Disability Institute at the Cornell University ILR School <http://www.disabilitycompendium.org/compendium-statistics/poverty/4-3-poverty-gap---civilians-ages-18-64-years-living-in-the-community-for-the-u-s->

<sup>20</sup> See BenePLAN: Making Work Possible <http://www.beneplan.org>

<sup>21</sup> See Social Security website, <http://www.ssa.gov/disability/>

integrated into each student’s IEP. The public schools must identify those students who will need adult services when they turn 22 and start the “688” transition process to the appropriate adult agency at least two years before the student will exit high school. The BPS Special Education department has prioritized transition services and is taking significant steps to improve the range of services provided. These efforts are being taken to correct the deficiencies of a system in which historically assessments were not conducted for many students until age 18, and then only for those on the non-diploma track. This was often too late for the assessment to be relevant to transition planning. Further, assessment tools were not individualized and students were often offered placements based on what was available, not on their individual interests and preferences.

#### **5. Lack of self-advocacy, self-determination and disclosure skills training for most youth**

Self-advocacy is a critical skill to be taught while the student is in school and protected by the special education law. Once the students leave school they will have to advocate for themselves in order to secure the supports they need to be successful in college, in job training programs or on the job. Further, learning and mastering these skills improves self-confidence as well as young adult’s sense of “agency” and independence. Confidence, agency and independence are fundamental to positive, healthy youth development and ensuring that the individual can request accommodations and negotiate situations in training, higher education and the workplace that will enhance their capacity to be successful. Historically, as Boston youth were generally not invited to play a meaningful role in their IEP team meetings starting at age 14, these skills were not taught to them.

#### **6. Stigma, low expectations, focus on disability limitation rather than strengths**

Social stigma that focuses on the limitations instead of the talents and abilities of individuals with disabilities is a persistent debilitating barrier to success, both for the individual and family, for the community, for industry and for our society as a whole. Legislation, public awareness campaigns, advances in education, leadership in a small number of “champion” companies and technological progress all have made access to education, work, and services easier and more readily available to individuals with a widening range of disabilities. Nonetheless, even when we manage to mitigate outright stigma, the insidious influence of low expectations can be just as destructive to the dreams and achievable aspirations of those with disabilities as outright prejudice. This pernicious dynamic can contribute to the vicious cycle of stigma, low expectations, diminished self-esteem and hopelessness that continue to frustrate those who can and want to do more.

#### **7. Disparities in high school graduation and college enrollment rates.**

The four year graduation rate for Boston students with disabilities is only 45%, well below their counterparts statewide (68%) and all BPS students (66%). The disparity remains the same for the five year graduation rate.<sup>22</sup>

The rate of college enrollment (19%) and continuation for two years (11%) is lower for BPS students with disabilities who do graduate high school compared to their counterparts statewide (35%, 25%) and to all BPS students (40%, 31%).<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup> MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, DART for Success After High School – High School Student Indicators, 2013 data.

<sup>23</sup> MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, DART for Success After High School – Postsecondary Education Outcomes, 2011 graduation cohort.

**8. While there is an infrastructure of support and services for people with severe disabilities, it has traditionally been mostly segregated.**

There exists an infrastructure for and general awareness of the needs of non-diploma track youth and young adults with severe disabilities (approximately 700 in BPS ages 18-22). These include the array of state agencies that are charged with providing services in K-12 schools and other settings (e.g., DDS, DESE, DMH, MCB, MCDHH, MRC) and which are responsible for providing services to eligible participants in their adult service divisions once a person with disabilities turns 22. However, the services and programs are by and large limiting and segregated. Pre-employment and vocational opportunities have taken the form of sheltered workshops and a subset of job categories (e.g., maintenance, recycling, grocery bagging) that have been driven more by the type of disability and less by the strengths and preferences of each individual as required by law and as supportive of human dignity. State initiatives and federal directives, including Employment First and provisions of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), are requiring more integrated employment opportunities, and many of these youth and young adults can succeed in inclusive settings given the appropriate supports.

**9. For those with less severe or less visible disabilities, there is less of an infrastructure.**

For the larger number of Boston Public Schools and Boston charter school students age 14 and over who have more mild or moderate disabilities and are on a diploma track, there is little infrastructure and insufficient awareness of their needs and potential. This “invisibility” is evident in the general lack of programming, supports and services in the mainstream of schools, community agencies and workforce development programs.

For the most part, schools are not teaching youth with disabilities the skills to self-identify and self-advocate, so they lose out on accommodations in college, job training or employment settings. Likewise, in many of these settings, the concept and practice of inclusion is not well understood; thus, accommodations can seem to be difficult to implement and are not provided. As a result, many youth with disabilities that cause them to struggle in school academically, socially or functionally are unprepared to succeed in the workforce and other post-secondary settings.

**10. Complexity of some disabilities – multiple, interaction with trauma, substance abuse.**

Any individual may suffer from multiple disabilities. This does not preclude them from being able to succeed in school and work, but it often requires interagency collaboration and more customized approaches to providing accommodations. The systems that serve them tend to suffer from a lack of coordination, both across agencies and within different stratum within agencies, with administrative barriers including conflicting eligibility requirements, funding, and disconnects between policies established at federal and state levels and operations in the field. Further where some disabilities are co-incident with trauma histories (which often contribute to learning and social emotional challenges), transition planning can be especially complex and requires coordination among numerous state and local agencies and community programs.

**11. Staff in youth-serving, alternative education and re-engagement programs do not have the expertise or resources to help young people who don't disclose their disability or whose disabilities are undiagnosed.**

While several alternative education programs in Boston receive special education training and support, most programs are operated by community based

organizations whose staff receive no training in special education and disability related issues. Yet students in these programs present behaviors that are clear indicators of a range of disabilities, including attention deficit, executive function, nonverbal learning disabilities/communication disorders, behavioral health issues and more traditional learning disabilities such as dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia.

Alternative education staffs recognize the behaviors but do not have a common language to discuss them with one another and to organize and design the physical and programmatic infrastructures of their programs for appropriate and effective interventions.

Additionally, in many cases these students dropped out of high school before the disabilities were diagnosed or, because of stigma, don't want to disclose their disability or IEP history. Students and/or families must give permission for the information to be released to the alternative education program. The sources of stigma may be as broad as the general societal attitude or as narrow as fear of being shamed or shunned by peers. Often there are cultural or familial reasons that prevent disclosure. Thus, when they re-engage and attend alternative education programs there is no documentation of their disabilities.

Staff also lack the expertise to assist the students regarding the disability and the critical life success skills of self-advocacy and self-determination, central to healthy adult development for anyone, and especially so for young adults with disabilities.

**12. In post-secondary institutions and among businesses there is a need for knowledge about working with individuals with invisible disabilities such as learning disabilities, autism spectrum challenges, executive function, communication disorders and mental health issues.**

While most two and four year colleges provide a range of services for individuals with disabilities, most other post-secondary schools and training agencies do not have such resources. These include both for-profit and non-profit credential-granting occupational skills training programs, apprenticeships, and on the job training.

For businesses, compliance with the ADA and the requirement to make reasonable accommodations for those employees who disclose a disability may serve as a strong incentive to learn about disabilities. For those companies that have contracts with the federal government, Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was amended and strengthened to prohibit federal contractors from discriminating in employment against individuals with disabilities and required more stringent tracking of the recruitment, hiring, promotion and retention process for individuals with disabilities.<sup>24</sup>

However, providing accommodations for those who disclose does not begin to address the issues related to ensuring that the business is benefiting to the greatest extent possible from the work of those employees with hidden disabilities who do not disclose. In order to effectively manage those with hidden disabilities, those responsible for managing the work of individuals should have a basic knowledge of these challenges

<sup>24</sup>On September 24, 2013, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs published a Final Rule in the Federal Register that made changes to the regulations implementing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (Section 503) at 41 CFR Part 60-741. Section 503 prohibits federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating in employment against individuals with disabilities (IWDs), and requires these employers to take affirmative action to recruit, hire, promote, and retain these individuals. The new rule was implemented on March 24, 2014 and strengthened the affirmative action provisions of the regulations to aid contractors in their efforts to recruit and hire IWDs, and improve job opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The new rule also made changes to the nondiscrimination provisions of the regulations to bring them into compliance with the ADA Amendments Act of 2008. <http://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/section503.htm>

and what are often the no-cost to relatively inexpensive accommodations that can be implemented to ensure that the company is getting the best return on its investment by supporting each worker's ability to be successful.

**13. Funding for disability services and for workforce development services have been cut in recent years.**

According to the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center's analysis, support for the combination of workforce development, youth development, disability employment and education programs that focus on job and career preparation has been declining for the last decade.<sup>25, 26</sup>

Of the four areas, education funding has been the most consistent and youth funding the most erratic. But the trends in workforce development and disability funding have shown the most significant overall declines. For example, workforce development funding was cut in half from \$81.3M in FY2006 to \$39.5M by FY2014. Disability employment funding<sup>27</sup> declined by 36% from 24.5M in FY2006 to \$15.8M by FY2014. Governor Baker has proposed increasing each of these budget items by about 5% in FY2016.<sup>28</sup>

The cuts have a two-fold impact. First, they reduce the number of consumers who can be served and/or dramatically increase the caseloads of those who work with them on the delivery of foundational services (e.g., job readiness, occupational skills training and job development). Second, despite the cuts, many of



the programs that use these resources are also developing innovative and successful models for workforce preparation and transition. However, funding limitations reduce possibilities of replicating and scaling up these models.

**14. The full range of post-secondary education and training opportunities are not presented to students with disabilities in BPS.**

Although changing, beliefs about the potential for students with disabilities of all kinds to be successful in college has led students and families to not consider this as a viable pathway, and high school guidance departments generally have not included students identified with disabilities in their college preparation activities. This failure stems from a lack of information among guidance counselors about special education.

<sup>25</sup> This includes state funding and federal funding administered by the state for worker training in specific occupations, business sponsored training and job placement, e.g., state's Workforce Training Fund, Workforce Competitive Trust Fund (state only) and one stop career centers (federal dollars administered by the state).

<sup>26</sup> See Jobs and Workforce Budget, Mass Budget & Policy Center. <http://workforce.massbudget.org/>

<sup>27</sup> Among the resources Included here are community based employment programs, vocational rehabilitation training and employment support for the blind and implementation of Employment First.

<sup>28</sup> Workforce development programs would be funded for 44.6M; disability employment funding would rise to 20.5M.

But students with a range of disabilities, and with the proper supports both in high school and in college, can succeed.

On the other hand, college is not for everyone – and what was considered the “traditional” four year college degree is no longer considered the only ticket to a good career. Occupational skills training programs of much shorter duration can award industry-recognized credentials much in demand by employers. Community colleges and other two year higher educational degrees and credentials can provide sufficient preparation for a range of “middle skill” jobs in many industries.<sup>29</sup>

Stereotypes, class prejudice and lack of information about certain careers and professions, including the building and other blue collar trades, among staffs preparing students for work and career, mean that all students miss the opportunity to learn about the many career pathways available to them. The apprentice training model unique to these occupations is now expanding to include preparation for certain healthcare, advanced manufacturing and information technology jobs, among others. The applied learning techniques which are the hallmark of this model are often better suited to the learning styles of youth with disabilities. All students need to be aware of the range of entry points into various occupations.

<sup>29</sup> See W.C. Symonds, R. Schwartz; R. Ferguson, Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century. Harvard Graduate School of Education [http://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Pathways\\_to\\_Prosperty\\_Feb2011-1.pdf](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Pathways_to_Prosperty_Feb2011-1.pdf) (2011). See also Bridge the Gap: Rebuilding America’s Middle Skills, Harvard Business School, <http://www.hbs.edu/competitiveness/research/Pages/research-details.aspx?rid=66> (November 2014)

# Appendix 3: Conditions for Change



## 1. First post ADA generation

July 26, 2015 was the 25th anniversary of the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act. An entire generation of young adults has grown up under the protections of this law. Although simple passage and implementation of the provisions of the law did not eliminate stigma or eradicate the insidiously undermining and destructive impacts of living with a disability in a non-inclusive world, it did establish the conditions for improvement that have led to the development of ever more inclusive schools, workplaces and communities. And while this generation didn't grow up without stigma, many of them can envision a world without it – a world in which they fully belong, live, work and thrive. Further, advances in a range of technologies that impact mobility, connectivity, architectural design, educational and workplace access means that expectation that people with disabilities have of themselves and others have of them are also undergoing profound change. Most important among these is that many, many people with disabilities can and will work.

## 2. Economic and demographic factors

The economy is recovering from the Great Recession and hiring is up. At the same time declining birth rates and the retirement of the “baby boom” generation means it is likely that businesses will face workforce shortages in the coming years.<sup>30</sup> People with disabilities are a ready and able workforce waiting to be engaged.

Yet, while many baby boomers will retire, others are working longer. In fact the largest growing population of people with disabilities in the workforce are older workers. And while many older workers face barriers related to age discrimination, many businesses are often interested in retaining these workers for their knowledge, loyalty and productivity. As these employees age, many are developing age-related disabilities (e.g. hearing, vision, mobility) that require the kinds of workplace accommodations that create a comfort-level and provide the impetus for employers to create universally designed workplaces to benefit all employees, including those newly-hired young adults.

## 3. WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act)

The passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in July 2014 signals a shift in the integration of disability services in the workforce development system. In Massachusetts, the new law will have significant implications for the policies and operations of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), the Department of Developmental Services (DDS) and the local and state workforce development boards and One-Stop Career Centers. Among the provisions that will have an impact on people with disabilities: A much larger role for public vocational rehabilitation (VR), as people with disabili-

<sup>30</sup>R. Strack, J. Baier, and A. Fahlander. Managing Demographic Risk, Harvard Business Review <https://hbr.org/2008/02/managing-demographic-risk/ar/1> (2008)

ties make the transition from school to adult life; efforts intended to limit the use of sub-minimum wage including a prohibition against local educational agencies and state educational agencies contracting with programs that will pay youth (defined as under age 24) a subminimum wage; required agreements between state VR systems and state Medicaid systems, and state intellectual and developmental disability (IDD) agencies; a definition of “customized employment” in federal statute, and an updated definition of “supported employment” that includes customized employment; a definition for “competitive integrated employment” as an optimal outcome with a focus on youths/students with significant disabilities; enhanced roles and requirements for the general workforce system and One-Stop Career Centers in meeting the needs of people with disabilities; an expanded obligation of the general workforce system to serve youth with disabilities; and the development of strategies to support career pathways for individuals with disabilities to enter and retain employment and the responsibility of local workforce investment boards to ensure adequate capacity.

The law requires the state to provide assurances with respect to students with disabilities including strategies it has developed and will implement regarding needs assessments, identification of goals and priorities and carrying out pre-employment transition strategies (through the VR/MRC). It goes further here directing states to establish a local pre-employment transition coordinator for local offices that will attend individualized education program (IEP) meetings, coordinate with local workforce development boards and other local entities and coordinate with schools to carry out services described in the law.<sup>31,32</sup>

#### **4. Employment First**

In Massachusetts, the state Department of Developmental Services (DDS) initiated an Employment First policy in 2010 and published a 2013 *Blueprint for Success: Employing Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities in Massachusetts* for a major statewide change that was designed to result in a phase out of sheltered workshops by June 30, 2015, transitioning adults into individual or group supported employment in integrated settings that pay at least minimum wage. The goal for FY2015 is to move all adults in sheltered workshops to individual or group supported employment or to the new Community-based Day Supports (CBDS) which provide a range of services including career exploration. These new centers will provide a pathway to employment or serve as a supplement for those in part-time employment. By FY2016 it is expected that a larger number of DDS clients will move to individual or group supported employment. At present, there is no established target or quota which requires a certain percentage of clients to be employed at competitive wages. The Blueprint also calls for staff training in provider agencies on delivering integrated employment services and for greater collaboration with the business community to maximize resources and share best practices.

#### **5. Task Force on Economic Opportunity for Populations Facing Chronically High Rates of Unemployment**

On March 12, 2015 Governor Baker signed an Executive Order to establish a task force which is designed to develop a strategic plan to address chronic unemployment among specific target populations, including people with disabilities.

<sup>31</sup> D. Hoff, “WIA is Now WIOA: What the New Bill Means For People with Disabilities,” Institute for Community Inclusion [http://www.communityinclusion.org/pdf/IB31\\_F.pdf](http://www.communityinclusion.org/pdf/IB31_F.pdf) (August 2014)

<sup>32</sup> The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Title IV, Amendments to the Rehabilitation act of 1973, August 2014, American Network of Community Options and Resources. [http://www.ancor.org/sites/default/files/news/ancor\\_summary\\_on\\_wioa\\_14august2014.pdf](http://www.ancor.org/sites/default/files/news/ancor_summary_on_wioa_14august2014.pdf)

The task force meets regularly to study and identify the challenges in the target populations seeking work, review current workforce development practices, recommend strategies to reduce barriers to employment, and develop goals for recommended programs, policies, and practice. They actively gather input from community-based organizations, business leaders, local officials and advocates. The task force will make policy recommendations to the governor by November 15, 2015.

### **6. Boston Public Schools priority and investment in transitions**

The Boston Public Schools Department of Special Education and Student Services has prioritized and taken significant steps to improve transition services. Among activities undertaken in 2014-2015 were: holding a first- ever conference and resource fair for 100 students with disabilities which included students with disabilities on the planning committee who will serve as peer leaders in the planning of the next fair; offering travel training for over 100 staff and 45 students; conducting joint staff training between special education and guidance departments to increase access to college for students with disabilities and to ensure that guidance staff are conversant with the issues that impact students with disabilities; piloting flexible scheduling to enable students and staff to be off-site in community job or higher education placements; increasing the array of transition assessment tools to be used by staff; creating an online site for staff from schools to share resources and assessment tools; expanding relationships with outside agencies to broker job placements for students; conducting professional development to build capacity for staff to develop relationships with local businesses; developing a system wide resource map of programs and best practices; and reorganizing so that the specialized program for non-diploma track students comes under the special education department rather than career and technical education.

### **7. New IEP for transition age students**

The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has responsibility for supporting and monitoring special education, college and career readiness and career vocational technical education (in separate administrative divisions). The special education division is in the midst of working with experts in the field to revise the IEP form that would enable transitions assessments and services to be recorded and to emphasize student self-determination as a key function of transition, among other changes to make it more “student driven.”

### **8. Transition Specialist Endorsement credential**

Acknowledging the critical role of educators to effectively address transition, in 2013 the Massachusetts legislature enacted “An Act Relative to Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education, Employment and Independent Living” to provide educators with the opportunity to acquire specific knowledge and skills necessary to address the transition needs of youth with disabilities. The purpose of the Massachusetts transition specialist guidelines is to strengthen the preparation of educators working with youth with disabilities ages 14-22. Guidelines were published by DESE in 2014<sup>33</sup> and the credential is currently offered by University of Massachusetts Boston, Lesley University, and Simmons College.

### **9. Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative**

Funded by the Commonwealth since 2007, the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment (ICEI) Initiative offers grant funded programs supporting public high school students with severe disabilities, ages 18-22, who have not passed MCAS the opportunity to participate in inclusive college courses (credit or non-credit) to increase their school and work success. The program is limited to students who are considered to have severe disabilities and, in the case of students ages 18 and 19, is limited to students with severe disabilities who have been unable to achieve the competency

determination necessary to pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System exam. The goal of the program is to meet the transition needs of students with severe disabilities by developing the capacity of school districts, working in partnership with institutes of higher education, to support college success, participation in student life of the college community, competitive employment, and provision of a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

Preliminary research shows that students that attend college benefit academically and transition to young adulthood more readily when they have the opportunity to engage in all college-related activities (e.g., establishing new social networks, participating in campus-wide events, learning to use public transportation to and from campus, completing course assignments, obtaining employment) rather than staying at high school. Student participation in this grant program may be incorporated into a student's transition program, as determined through the school district's special education process. Grant activities include transition support to student participants and their families. In addition, public high school personnel involved in the grant program gain valuable knowledge about promising inclusive practices through technical assistance and trainings.<sup>34, 35</sup>

The ICEI program currently serves Boston students at UMass Boston, Roxbury Community College, and Bunker Hill Community College.<sup>36</sup> Through this part-

nership between the colleges and BPS, students can take inclusive college classes, participate in the life of the college, and receive employment and career coaching and opportunities (e.g., jobs, apprenticeships, internships).

#### **10. Support for vocational education and work based learning and importance as a teaching modality for youth with disabilities**

It is well known that work-based learning experiences, be they summer jobs, internships, or volunteer activities are the best predictors of future employment. This is particularly true for young people with disabilities.<sup>37</sup> Career and technical vocational education is built on the model of work based learning. Fundamental to this approach is “teaching to the job” based on industry-recognized credentials and/or the requirements of businesses that contribute to, if not determine, the skills required to perform the jobs.

The apprenticeship model largely prevalent in the building trades is expanding to include healthcare, biotech, information technology, advanced manufacturing and other industries and occupations. The model itself is not new, but as the labor market changes and the recognition that many jobs do not require a four-year college degree is acknowledged, apprenticeship as a learning model is gaining new currency.<sup>38</sup> For youth with disabilities, this model is especially promising. The Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) issued a report in 2008 that specifically

<sup>34</sup> Massachusetts Department of Higher Education. <http://www.mass.gov/edu/birth-grade-12/higher-education/initiatives-and-special-programs/inclusive-concurrent-enrollment/>

<sup>35</sup> See Massachusetts Advocates for Children-Legislation <http://massadvocates.org/legislation/>

<sup>36</sup> In addition, there are ICE initiatives at: Bridgewater State University, Cape Cod Community College, Holyoke Community College, Middlesex Community College, University of Massachusetts, Amherst and Westfield State University.

<sup>37</sup> National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition, <http://www.nasetalliance.org/careerprep/research.htm>

<sup>38</sup> <https://21stcenturyapprenticeship.workforce3one.org/view/4201425941094577219/info>

identified the need to overcome barriers to youth with disabilities' participation in apprenticeships and encouraged the expansion of the model beyond the building trades.<sup>39</sup>

A trend towards applied learning and expansion of the apprenticeship career development model is evidence that the “college for all” imperative of late 20th century US is not the only or even the best model for a 21st century workforce.<sup>40</sup> “Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity,”<sup>41</sup> the report by Vice President Joe Biden released in coordination with the passage of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA), highlights the important role of the apprenticeship model, work based learning and on the job training (OJT) in the skill development of the US workforce.<sup>42</sup> WIOA itself places strong emphasis on work based learning. The US Department of Labor is awarding 100M in grants under the American Apprenticeship Initiative in April 2015. The model largely prevalent in the building trades is expanding to include healthcare, bio-tech, information technology, advanced manufacturing and other industries and occupations.

We know that for many students with attention and organizational challenges, focusing on task and experiential learning can be the key to their success. Further, it is well known that work-based learning experiences, be they summer jobs, internships, or volunteer activities are the best predictors of future employment. Fundamental to this approach is “teaching to the job” based on industry-recognized credentials and/or the

requirements of businesses that contribute to, if not determine, the skills required to perform the jobs.

Work based learning, and apprenticeship in particular, is a model that incorporates key features of effective learning environments for people who learn differently including:

- Mentoring (journeyworkers are described as “mentors” on the Massachusetts workforce website).<sup>43</sup>
- Individual instruction: apprentices generally work in highly structured individual and small group settings.
- Immediate application of “hands on” skill development: many individuals with specific learning disabilities cannot imagine a job without actually doing it. Apprenticeship provides this opportunity.
- Students learn and see connections between abstract and practical learning.

**11. The business case and resources for hiring people with disabilities: recognition by businesses of the value of hiring people with disabilities and the sharing of established and emerging practices to support inclusion.**

The aspiration for fully integrated employment for people with disabilities as public policy was articulated in the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The ADA was passed in 1990. And there have been modest programs and initiatives to increase the employment of people with disabilities since that time. In fact, it was not until 2001 that Congress authorized the establishment of the

<sup>39</sup>I. Lynn. and D. Mack. “Improving Transition Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities by Increasing Access to Apprenticeship Opportunities”. <http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/youth/apprenticeship/ApprenticeshipIssuePaper.pdf> (December 2008)

<sup>40</sup>W.C. Symonds, R. Schwartz; R. Ferguson, *Pathways to Prosperity: Meeting the Challenge of Preparing Young Americans for the 21st Century*. Harvard Graduate School of Education [http://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Pathways\\_to\\_Prosperty\\_Feb2011-1.pdf](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/documents/Pathways_to_Prosperty_Feb2011-1.pdf) (2011).

<sup>41</sup> *Ready to Work: Job-Driven Training and American Opportunity*, [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/skills\\_report.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/skills_report.pdf) (July 2014)

<sup>42</sup>Ibid, pp. 8-9

<sup>43</sup>Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Labor Standards, Apprenticeship for Workers <http://www.mass.gov/lwd/labor-standards/das/apprenticeship-program/overview-of-apprenticeship-for-work.html>

Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) of the US Department of Labor tasked with developing policies and providing funding and technical assistance to projects that increase the employment of people with disabilities.<sup>44</sup>

Without a strong case for hiring people with disabilities and the development of inclusive workplaces, youth with disabilities will have a hard time finding their way to the talent pipelines to meaningful work. There are very positive indications that businesses are becoming more aware of the advantages of hiring people with disabilities in particular and that they are being included by employers in diversity goals, plans, strategies and organizational development. From national surveys that demonstrate consumers prefer to do business with companies that hire people with disabilities<sup>45</sup> to studies that document increased retention, productivity and positive impact on morale at companies that employ people with disabilities,<sup>46</sup> the “business case” for hiring people with disabilities is being made.

Importantly, just as those preparing young people with disabilities for employment need to share information and best practices, businesses that plan to employ them need to do the same. The growth of business to business (B2B) networks supporting inclusion in the workplace has grown internationally,<sup>47</sup> nationally, for example, through the US Business Leadership Network (USBLN)<sup>48</sup> and locally. Resources to assist businesses in ensuring that they are more inclusive have proliferated in recent years.<sup>49,50</sup>

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) represent another relatively recent innovation in the promotion of inclusive workplaces. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are voluntary, employee-led groups that serve as a resource for members and organizations by fostering a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with organizational mission, values, goals, business practices, and objectives.<sup>51</sup> While ERGs have been around for some time<sup>52</sup> they have been experiencing growth in recent years. For employee with disabilities they not

<sup>44</sup> In that same year Congress authorized the Ticket To Work program of the Social Security Administration to support the employment of people with disabilities while protecting their SSI and SSDI benefits by reducing benefits in proportion to increases in employment income

<sup>45</sup> G.N. Siperstein, et al, “A national survey of consumers attitudes towards companies that hire people with disabilities.” [http://www.worksupport.com/documents/romano\\_siperstein.pdf](http://www.worksupport.com/documents/romano_siperstein.pdf) (2005) All participants responded positively towards companies that are socially responsible, including 92% of consumers who felt more favorable toward those that hire individuals with disabilities. The participants also had strong positive beliefs about the value and benefits of hiring people with disabilities, with 87% specifically agreeing that they would prefer to give their business to companies that hire individuals with disabilities.

<sup>46</sup> H.P. Hartnett, et al. *Employers’ perceptions of the benefits of workplace accommodations: Reasons to hire, retain and promote people with disabilities*. Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation. 2011, Vol. 34 Issue 1 <http://content.iospress.com/articles/journal-of-vocational-rehabilitation/jvr530> (2011)

<sup>47</sup> International Labour Organisation, “Employers make the case for hiring people with disabilities,” Proceedings of 101st session of the ILO Business and Disability Network, [http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS\\_183673/lang--en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org/skills/pubs/WCMS_183673/lang--en/index.htm) (June 2012)

<sup>48</sup> See <http://www.usbln.org/>

<sup>49</sup> See for example *Recruiting, Hiring, Retaining, and Promoting People With Disabilities: A Resource Guide for Employers* [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/employing\\_people\\_with\\_disabilities\\_toolkit\\_february\\_3\\_2015\\_v4.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/employing_people_with_disabilities_toolkit_february_3_2015_v4.pdf). (February 2015). See also Work Without Limits <http://www.workwithoutlimits.org/employers>, “Become an Employer of Choice Toolkit”, “The Business Case: Employing People with Disabilities” and “Employing People with Disabilities: A Menu of State Agency Resources for Massachusetts Employers” among other resources on the site.

<sup>50</sup> See <http://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/Employers.htm>, US Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) for numerous publications designed to assist businesses in all aspects of creating inclusive workplaces.

<sup>51</sup> See for example: Catalyst, <http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/topics/ergs-employee-resource-groups>, Diversity Best Practices, <http://www.diversitybestpractices.com/events/top-five-employee-resource-groups-us-workers>

<sup>52</sup> For more information about the history of ERGs see ERGs Come of Age: The Evolution of Employee Resource Groups A study by Mercer’s Global Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Practice, [http://www.orcnetworks.com/system/files/story/2011/5849/ergs\\_come\\_of\\_age\\_2011\\_study\\_pdf\\_30909.pdf](http://www.orcnetworks.com/system/files/story/2011/5849/ergs_come_of_age_2011_study_pdf_30909.pdf) (June 2011)

only provide support but can also function as advisory bodies to a business' senior management about inclusive policies and practices.

There is a vast array of resources available to businesses to guide businesses in implementing recruitment, engagement, hiring, retention, promotion and support practices to create and develop workplaces that are truly inclusive. The Campaign for Disability Employment's website features the "What You Can Do" campaign with toolkits for businesses, youth, families and employee.<sup>53</sup>

To ensure that service providers and other intermediaries understand and can prepare young people to meet the needs of businesses, sufficient research has been conducted and promising practices established to set standards and principles for the provision of effective transition services for youth and conditions for success in the workplace.<sup>54</sup>

## **12. Ready availability of career development tools informed by labor market understanding**

Information about the labor market – what jobs exist, what those jobs pay, what is in demand, what training is needed and what the future might hold – has been accessible to the general public since Department of

Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics began systematic publication of the Occupational Outlook Handbook in 1949.<sup>55</sup> However, it was never an effective instrument to guide students and families in assessing their educational and career plans. And the complexity of the labor market, the rapid change in occupations and industries, has only accelerated since that time. Although the audience for the handbook was targeted to school counselors and students, the handbook was difficult to come by for the general public. And even when it could be found, despite the efforts of the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics to produce a guide in the form of the "Occupational Outlook Handbook" (published since 1949), it was difficult to understand.

Career development literature, both as it applies to students with disabilities and others, emphasizes the need to help families and children begin learning about work, careers and opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship early. All students need the best information they can have – about themselves, their assets, their limitations and what the world of work demands and provides – in order to make informed choices for life success. New tools that assist youth and adults to match their skills, preferences and interests to emerging occupations are available.<sup>56</sup> Websites on

<sup>53</sup> "What can you do? The campaign for disability employment." <http://www.whatcanyoudocampaign.org/index.php>

<sup>54</sup> See for example "Evidence based practices", National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC), <http://nsttac.org/content/evidence-based-practices>, and "Guideposts for Success", National Collaboration on Workforce and Disability/Youth, <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/guideposts>

<sup>55</sup> The first "Occupational Outlook Handbook" was published by the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics in response to a need by the Veterans Administration to provide accurate information as part of the post WWII demobilization.

<sup>56</sup> Examples: My Next Move, <http://www.mynextmove.org/>, Massachusetts Career Information System, <https://masscis.intocareers.org/materials/portal/home.html>

career development and transition for young people with disabilities are also being developed. In Massachusetts, a collaboration between the Department of Mental Health, the University of Massachusetts Medical School's Disability, Health and Employment Policy Unit and their Work Without Limits program, launched ReachHire.<sup>57</sup> This site provides guidance and a wealth of resources to help young people think about work, post-secondary education and financial independence.

### **13. Resources for parent training in the community**

The passage of the transition services amendment to the Massachusetts special education law in 2008 requires that beginning age 14 or sooner if determined appropriate by an IEP team, school age children with disabilities are entitled to transition services and measurable postsecondary goals. This required that parents, students and service providers be educated about this central transition entitlement. Recognizing that many transition-age (age 14-22) students were not receiving the special education transition services (e.g., assessments, plans, community-based placements and opportunities, self-advocacy support) they are entitled to under the law, nor did many of them or their families even know about those rights, the MAC

B-SET project has conducted training across the city and developed written and online educational material for youth and parents translated into four languages. Other agencies providing transition training for parents have included the Federation for Children with Special Needs, the Disability Law Center and Urban Pride.

This need continues both locally and nationally as reflected in the award of one of six national grants under the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services/ US Department of Education (OSERS) in 2014 to the Federation for Children with Special Needs' (FCSN) LINK Center. "Connecting to Your Future" will establish a Parent Training and Information Center on Transition (PTIC) to assist individuals with disabilities and their families to participate more effectively with professionals in meeting the vocational, independent living and rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities. The LINK Center will provide technical assistance and training to help individuals achieve their employment and independent living goals and will work closely with the Federation's Parent Training and Information Center (PTIC) to provide families with much-needed information about transition, vocational rehabilitation, independent living and other adult services.

<sup>57</sup> See [www.ReachHirema.org](http://www.ReachHirema.org)

# Appendix 4: Acronyms

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AIM	Associated Industries of Massachusetts
BCIL	Boston Center for Independent Living
BCYF	Boston Center for Youth and Families
BHCC	Bunker Hill Community College
BPIC	Boston Private Industry Council
BPS	Boston Public Schools
B-SET	Boston Special Education Transition project
BYSN	Boston Youth Services Network (Alternative Education)
CBHI	Children's Behavioral Health Initiative
CBO	Community Based Organization
CDB	Childhood Disability Benefit
COSD	Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities
CSA	Community Service Agency
CVTE	Career Vocational Technical Education
DAS	Division of Apprenticeship Standards
DCF	Department of Children & Families
DCS	Department of Career Services
DDS	Department of Developmental Services
DESE	Department of Elementary and Secondary Educations
DHCD	Department of Housing and Community Development
DHE	Department of Higher Education
DLC	Disability Law Center
DMH	Department of Mental Health
DPH	Department of Public Health
DTA	Department of Transitional Assistance
DYS	Department of Youth Services
EOE	Executive Office of Education
EOHED	Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
EOHHS	Executive Office of Health and Human Services
EOLWD	Executive Office of Workforce Development
ERG	Employee Resource Group
FCSN	Federation for Children with Special Needs
GAO	General Accounting Office
GBLS	Greater Boston Legal Services
GLBTQ	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning
ICEI	Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative
ICI	Institute for Community Inclusion
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

## Appendix 4: Acronyms // continued

IEP	Individualized Education Program
ILP	Individualized Learning Plan
JVS	Jewish Vocational Service
MAC	Massachusetts Advocates for Children
MCAS	Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System
MCB	Massachusetts Commission for the Blind
MCDHH	Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
MOBD	Massachusetts Office of Business Development
MOWD	Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (formerly the Mayor's Office of Jobs & Community Services)
MRC	Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission
MWBLP	Massachusetts Work Based Learning Plan
NAMI	National Alliance on Mental Illness
NGA	National Governors' Association
ODEP	Office of Disability Employment Policy (US Department of Labor)
OFE	City of Boston Office of Financial Empowerment
OJT	On the job training
OSCC	One Stop Career Centers
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (US Department of Education)
PTIC	Parent Training and Information Center (project of Federation for Children with Special Needs)
PIC	Boston Private Industry Council
PYD	Partners for Youth with Disabilities
RCC	Roxbury Community College
SBA	Small Business Administration
SPEDPAC	Special Education Parent Advisory Committee
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
TAFDC	Transitional Assistance to Families with Dependent Children
TBF	The Boston Foundation
UDL	Universal Design for Learning
USBLN	US Business Leadership Network
USDOL	United State Department of Labor
VR	Vocational Rehabilitation
WIB	Workforce Investment Board (in Boston, the Boston Private Industry Council)
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
WWL	Work Without Limits
YOU	Youth Options Unlimited
YVPFLC	Youth Violence Prevention Funders Learning Collaborative

**“ Our vision is that all youth programs are based on universal design principles so that youth, regardless of their individual challenges, including disability, are equipped to pursue a self-directed pathway to address their interests, aspirations, and goals across all transition domains including community engagement, education, employment, health, and independent living that will ultimately result in positive, everyday social inclusion. ”**

Federal Partners in Transition Workgroup, *The 2020 Federal Youth Transition Plan: A Federal Interagency Strategy*, February 2015



**A REPORT BY**

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