

B-SET for Career Network

Prepare – Connect – Employ

Boston Special Education Transition Project

Goal

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.

Overview

Need: 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 poverty rate for people with disabilities in Massachusetts was 28.6% and 8.9% for those without disabilities. The employment rate (workforce participation) was only 33% compared to 79.6% for people without disabilities.

While there have been 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.

Response: Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC) received a Boston Foundation grant in 2013 to address the need and design a systemic response through its Boston Special Education Transition (B-SET) project. MAC and the foundation then convened a Planning Group - including Boston Public Schools, Boston Private Industry Council, Commonwealth Corporation, UMass Boston/Institute for Community Inclusion, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (MOWD), and SkillWorks – to create a broad-based, multi-sectoral task force that would identify resources and gaps to create a comprehensive action plan for the Boston community to respond to the need. Since it was initiated in 2014, the project grew to 70 member organizations representing secondary and post-secondary schools, disability service agencies at state and local levels, youth service organizations, the business community, state agencies, organized labor, workforce training and intermediary organizations, disability advocates and city government.

Action Plan: In October 2015, the task force released the report and action plan: *Inclusive Employment & Career for Boston Youth with Disabilities: Pathways to the Talent Pipeline*. The report presents findings about the major barriers and conditions for change to connecting youth with disabilities to education and career pathways and pipelines. It delineated the following goals:

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.

The report contains 88 action steps that includes what stakeholders are already planning or doing as well as new recommendations. Taken together these comprise the Action Plan to be implemented.

Where we are today

With funding from the State Street Foundation and the JE & ZB Butler Foundation, in February MAC launched the implementation phase of the B-SET project as the “B-SET for Career Network.” Fifty-six organizations gathered at State Street Corporation in South Boston and began work in Operational Groups organized by the first six goal areas listed above and chaired by a “lead” agency:

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| 1. Public and Charter Schools | Boston Public Schools |
| 2. Family/Community | Boston Special Education Parent Advisory Council |
| 3. Post-secondary Pathways | UMass Boston |
| 4. State Agencies | Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission |
| 5. Opportunity Youth | Boston Private Industry Council |
| 6. Employer Engagement | Work Without Limits |

As the Operational Groups (OGs) work to implement the action steps, they will be guided by a Coordinating Committee which will develop the overall metrics for the project and which will foster communication among the OGs to assure coordination among the goal areas. The Coordinating Committee is comprised largely of the OG leads, members of the original Planning Group and representatives of key sectors, such as employers, state agencies, youth services and youth with disabilities. The Network will be convened once or twice a year to enhance collaboration and education across the sectors of education, workforce development, disability and youth services. The Network and component parts described above are designed as a “collective impact” model of effective collaboration among many stakeholders, all dedicated to improving the life opportunities of youth with disabilities.

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