

8 Case Studies

Improving Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Indiana

A long and winding road is how many families and interagency teams view the transition from high school to adult life for students with disabilities. There are clear roadways, as well as uncharted territory, that are better explored in unified teams rather than in isolation. The case studies highlight schools' and families' experiences in a seamless transition pilot. For the first six case studies, from different pilot locations, we use the metaphor of carving a path to illustrate a team's journey through rough and smooth terrain. Every team member on each journey has different perceptions of the experience while helping each other along the trek. The teams navigate the way, lighting the best path they can find for others to use in the future. The last two case studies consist of collective family insights and interagency teams' learning experiences across pilot locations.



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INDIANA INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY AND COMMUNITY
**CENTER ON COMMUNITY
LIVING AND CAREERS**

8 Case Studies

Improving Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Indiana

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The Center on Community Living and Careers (CCLC) is one of seven centers located at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, Indiana University, Bloomington. The mission of the Center on Community Living and Careers is to promote partnerships between schools and support organizations to bring about positive changes in the lives of individuals and families as they live, work, and participate in their communities.



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Introduction

Indiana's Department of Education and Division of Disability and Rehabilitation Services hopes to increase the number of individuals with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment from 23% to 38% by 2027. To further this mission, the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services partnered with [TransCen](#), a nationally renowned organization dedicated to inclusive education and employment, to pilot *seamless transition* programs across the state. This pilot, "[Improving Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Indiana](#)," began in the spring of 2023 and ended in the spring of 2025.

Eight schools joined the pilot, representing diverse regions across Indiana. The pilot aimed to improve team capacity, engagement of employers and families, and employment outcomes for students with significant disabilities. Schools were tasked with developing interagency teams that included, at a minimum, the student, their family, and adult service providers and partners like Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). Six interagency teams were established to support the eight schools.

At each pilot site, the Center for Community Living and Careers at Indiana University's Indiana Institute on Disability and Community evaluated seamless transition activities through interagency team focus groups and interviews with students and their families. Eight short vignette case studies highlight the major themes uncovered in professional team focus groups and family member interviews.

We protected the confidentiality of group members and family participants by not indicating school locations or any personal identifying information. We describe roles, processes, and elements that worked within and across groups, and identify areas for improvement.

Eight Case Studies

The following case studies highlight schools' and families' experiences in the Seamless Transition pilot. For the first six case studies, from different pilot locations, we use the metaphor of carving a path on a team journey through both rough and smooth terrain. Every team member on each journey has different perceptions of the experience while helping each other along the trek. The teams navigate the way, lighting the best path they can find for others to use in the future. The last two case studies consist of one with collective family insights and suggestions across pilot locations, and one with the collective interagency teams' learning experience across pilot locations.

Click one or more of the links below to access a specific case study.

1. [Cultivating Dreams and Aspirations](#)
2. [Strengthening Team Bonds](#)
3. [Paths of Least Resistance](#)
4. [Expanding the Transition Team](#)
5. [Changing Perceptions](#)
6. [Changing the Course](#)
7. [Collective Stories of Families](#)
8. [Collective Stories of Interagency Teams](#)



Case Study One

Cultivating Dreams and Aspirations

Students transitioning from high school to adult life need the support of their families and transition professionals who work together. This teamwork ensures a seamless transition to employment, education or training, and independent living. The following case study uses the metaphor of carving a path on a team journey through both rough and smooth terrain. Every team member on the journey had different perceptions of the pilot experience while helping each other along the trek.

The teams navigated the way together to light the best path for others to use in the future.



The Journey Begins

“What would you like to be when you grow up?”

It’s a question asked to youth repeatedly, starting at a young age. This career focus is meant to spark interests and help guide a youth’s employment experiences, developing skills leading to their desired outcomes. When supported, youth can flourish and achieve their employment goals. This support is most effective when implemented by a passionate, interagency team that reflects the needs of the individual. This team recognizes where the individual’s interests are and works together to create an educational plan that aligns with their employment goals. Such a team exists.

Navigating the Terrain

“What’s in a job?”

While working with this team, a student expressed career interests in animal work, such as vet assistance or animal care. This career path was meaningful to the student and excited them enough to accept the guidance of the interagency team. During the initial assessments, this team recognized some bumps in the path but felt they had the tools to help. The high school student did not currently have the necessary skills to achieve a successful work opportunity within these fields. The team felt that the student needed foundational skills before being able to find success in any job setting. These skills develop best in a supportive work environment that offers learning opportunities and gradual skill enhancement.

Foundational skills such as arriving at work on time, being prepared for work with the appropriate uniform, and clocking in or out were necessary as the student had not been previously exposed to a work setting or initial work requirements. The parents were unsure about this avenue; they would prefer their student experience fashion or animal-themed work opportunities. The misaligned expectations were considerably difficult for the team to overcome, especially with the lack of communication from either side. Ultimately, the interagency team helped the student land a job, using business connections they had built, and begin the process of learning the foundational skills needed to be successful in a working environment.

In this position, the student is applying and strengthening essential workplace skills while acquiring proficiency in critical areas such as time management, organizational strategies, and customer service delivery. These are quintessential tasks to master in any job. The student is supported in this position by a job coach funded through VR and also gains experience in school through her class work and Pre-ETS involvement. Although the goal of finding work in animal care or fashion is not yet complete, the milestones are being met for the student to have a deeper understanding of the working world and be able to apply them to her desired career paths.

Lighting the Way

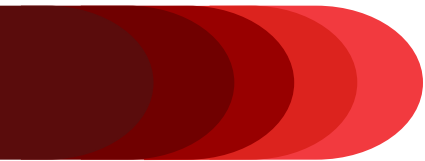
“How fast can I grow?”

Thanks to the passion of the interagency team and the tenacity of the student, trackable achievements were made, bringing the student closer to her goal. The student continues to hone much-needed skills for long-term success in her career of interest. Although it was the VR job coach who connected her to her current employer, the remainder of the interagency team continues to increase their knowledge about other programs in the area that could help the student experience a working activity or even employment in her desired industries. This drive helps to provide necessary skill-building and networking opportunities for their students that might not exist without passion from these providers. With the dedicated support of a student’s parents, the rate of a student’s success increases exponentially.

Smoothing the Path

“Is there a focus on team membership?”

Each member of an interagency team should be actively connecting with other members to know what services are being rendered and who is involved. This connection must extend to



parents, the most versatile advocates and connectors of the entire team. Remember, the interagency team's nucleus is the student, and the parents are very closely aligned. The connection must start at the nucleus to meet its full effectiveness. Interagency teams must recognize this for success to continue long-term. For the parents, this communication connection would provide clarity on how to navigate new services and identify what steps may need to be implemented. The wheel should not be reinvented at every step but rather built upon to continue the success of the employment journey.

Case Study Two

Strengthening Team Bonds

Students transitioning from high school to adult life need the support of their families and transition professionals who work together. This teamwork ensures a seamless transition to employment, education or training, and independent living. The following case study uses the metaphor of carving a path on a team journey through both rough and smooth terrain. Every team member on the journey had different perceptions of the pilot experience while helping each other along the trek. The teams navigated the way together to light the best path for others to use in the future.



The Journey Begins

“How do we embark on this joint journey when we’ve been going at it alone?”

In an under-resourced school district, a team has been working hard to support their students as each of them knows best. However, they faced challenges in effectively using each other and their community as resources. This team routinely worked independently, not having time to commit to creating a cohesive team. Each team member carried the heavy burden of navigating and carrying out their role without collaboration. This limit created holes in the quality of services provided, undue stress on the students, and a lack of clear direction for the next steps for the parents.

Navigating the Terrain

“How can strengths of the team be leveraged?”

The team received initial training to illustrate the positive impact a cohesive interagency team could have on their students. Although this team felt that the training was insightful, and they now had a vision of what could happen for students, the team felt overwhelmed by exactly how to forge the road ahead, given their limitations. They needed role clarification and leadership. With a team-wide commitment to make up for lost time, they created a plan formed around three unspoken key elements: meet consistently, meet often, and meet with intention. This deliberate focus helped to build a foundation identifying the team’s purpose and the barriers to the team’s sustained success.

Now that the team was on solid ground with an understanding of the components of their group and its purpose, it was time to get to work. The team encountered significant hurdles in this rural county, as students and families struggled with limited business buy-in, insufficient community connections, and inadequate general support. The interagency team faced a daunting task in creating a cohesive environment of support due to a shortage of trained personnel, limited Pre-ETS supports, and low parent attendance. With their work list in hand, the team got busy breaking down barriers. By each member bringing their connections and resources to the team, they build off each other's work, instead of reinventing the wheel.

Relief came in the form of an employment agency that hired an employment consultant to work with the targeted students. This added a much-needed layer of support as the role was able to take on multiple student cases, make connections with local businesses, and provide the job support students needed to learn new skills. This connection also fostered a closer relationship with VR who offered to provide an informational day and complete student referrals for their program. The plan was in motion, and it was working! The team continued to build upon these successes, bringing in a transition fair and a connection with local employers. The fruits of their intention were blooming. They even expanded their program to serve students not formally enrolled in the pilot, building stronger bridges to other students using seamless transition principles and resources.

Lighting the Way

“Does teamwork make the dream work?”

This team's story shows that even the best of intentions can be ineffective when siloed. Before the team unified, the time spent individually recreating lessons and skills with each professional wasted valuable student interaction time. This time could have been spent brainstorming needs, bringing in community resources, and advocating for a mindset change in their rural area when it came to connection. In this case, the dedication of the team leader was integral to the interagency team's ability to strengthen their team bonds. They clarified and expanded roles, fostering respectful and compassionate relationships, which build trust among the team members through a shared commitment to the process. With this change, they overcame the tough terrain of finding effective and impactful resources in a rural community.

Smoothing the Path

“Does the mindset matter?”

Adopting the perspective that no endeavor should be undertaken alone is crucial for developing an inclusive mindset. With this view, an individual can develop a team that includes others

beneficial to the end goal – in this case, the student employment journey. The term ‘work smarter, not harder’ applies well here. When a team acknowledges its limitations and embraces collaboration, it gains access to a wealth of resources, knowledge, skills, and perspectives, directly benefiting the students they serve. Interagency team members should recognize that leveraging their connections is their most valuable contribution to maximizing opportunities and eliminating wasted time and effort. This mindset is central to reducing missed opportunities, which is essential for students’ success.

Case Study Three

Paths of Least Resistance

Students transitioning from high school to adult life need the support of their families and transition professionals who work together. This teamwork ensures a seamless transition to employment, education or training, and independent living. The following case study uses the metaphor of carving a path on a team journey through both rough and smooth terrain. Every team member on the journey had different perceptions of the pilot experience while helping each other along the trek. The teams navigated the way together to light the best path for others to use in the future.



The Journey Begins

“Who do you know?”

What a question! The potential of your network, including the people you know and those who can offer assistance, is frequently underestimated. It is true in our personal lives as well as our professional lives. One team in the pilot had abundant community social capital. By leveraging their resources, they identified contacts within businesses that interest their students. This pre-journey work helped to create a pathway to identifying specific business needs, streamlining the connection between students’ skills, talents, and interests with suitable job opportunities.

Navigating the Terrain

“Who can help?”

This interagency team of over ten members led the student family interviews on day one. This experience led to greater insight for the students, parents, and team members as they shared skills and abilities across settings. The students benefited from hearing the results of these interviews and the strength-based assessments. The outcomes also allowed the transition team to brainstorm employment possibilities in the community. This process utilized the collective social capital from students, their families, schools, and agency members as they assessed who had connections with whom. Students and families were excited to hear the number of possibilities and the willingness of team members to contact people they knew in the community. The team worked together and volunteered to call their personal connections at potential employment sites. Receptive employers took them up on their invitations to connect and scheduled site visits. This experience showcased that the close ties of the group created a stronger network, paving a less resistant path in a new terrain.

Lighting the Way

“Who will invite the team to tour their business?”

The strategic use of social capital illuminated the vocational pathway, transforming it from a daunting unknown into a visible and achievable route. At first, contacting employers felt intimidating for the team. However, using the collective model, arranging the business visits, and utilizing existing connections, proved to be easier than expected. On-site visits and candid conversations with employers unveiled the nuanced operations and internal culture of their businesses. Employers enjoyed showing off their business with the team members, educating them on strengths, processes, and needs. This helped illustrate where potential employment opportunities could arise and kickstarted team member creativity for student skill-building.

Potential employers were intrigued by the idea of customized employment to fill some of their business needs. Employers began to see the benefit of breaking down job tasks into bite-sized, skill-based opportunities. This openness to reconsideration of existing roles and practices was exciting to the team, invigorating their dedication to career development.

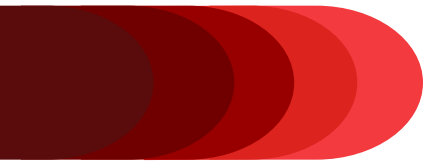
During this excursion, there was only one roadblock where an employer failed to remember the visit scheduled. They rushed to meet the team and seemed uninterested. Coincidentally, it was the only appointment made lacking a previous connection to a team member. This further highlighted the power of social capital as an invaluable element lighting the path to good employer connections.

Smoothing the Path

“Is it who you know, or what you know?”

Building social capital through networking and relationships is essential as it significantly enhances the ability to find job or training opportunities. Networking opens doors to job vacancies and training programs that may not be publicly advertised, and leverages connections for exclusive opportunities. Strong relationships with industry professionals enable team members to share valuable resources, which can benefit student development. Additionally, a network of experienced professionals provides mentorship and guidance, helping team members better assist their students in navigating their career paths. Being well-connected also builds reputation, making team members more credible and trustworthy, which can attract more students and employers, fostering community trust.

Connecting with the community also provides local insights into the job market and community needs. Community connections offer a support system, providing emotional and professional



support when needed. Engaging with the community can lead to collaborations with local businesses, creating more opportunities for students. However, building and maintaining long-term connections can come with challenges. Team members can navigate these by consistently attending networking events, following up with contacts, and staying active in professional groups. By focusing on building social capital, teams can enhance their ability to find valuable opportunities for their students, stay connected to the community, and navigate challenges to maintain long-term, beneficial relationships.

Case Study Four



Expanding the Transition Team

Students transitioning from high school to adult life need the support of their families and transition professionals who work together. This teamwork ensures a seamless transition to employment, education or training, and independent living. The following case study uses the metaphor of carving a path on a team

journey through both rough and smooth terrain. Every team member on the journey had different perceptions of the pilot experience while helping each other along the trek. The teams navigated the way together to light the best path for others to use in the future.

The Journey Begins

“How do you build an information pipeline?”

Connection is a crucial yet often overlooked aspect of our field. The importance of 'who you know' frequently surpasses 'what you know,' especially for families and individuals with disabilities. Despite the abundance of available information, accessing and understanding it can be challenging, and distinguishing between truth and myth in a complex system is daunting. Recognizing this issue, one team addressed the challenge by organizing a transition fair. They worked with an outside agency to create a space where various organizations could present their services in person, making those needed connections. This allowed students and families to learn about available services and ask specific questions relevant to their situations without barriers. Now, what if that idea was expanded until they reached the outermost circle of a student's community?

Navigating the Terrain

“Does it matter who I know?”

Building a knowledgeable and well-connected team is crucial for success in this field. The team leveraged their connections with teachers from K-12, VR, Pre-ETS, local districts, and an occupational therapist, who created a counsel to identify key information needs and access methods. They brainstormed beneficial services for families and individuals, focusing on both immediate and lifelong needs. Their enthusiasm was contagious, motivating the group to

continue. They recognized the importance of discussing Pre-ETS services earlier to better prepare students and inform parents. Additionally, they noted that teachers' limited information led to a lack of appreciation for transition assessments.

Their diligence resulted in over 30 local service providers agreeing to participate in the transition fair. While not every issue discussed by the team had a direct solution, their efforts significantly improved the information pipeline. This progress encourages all current and potential interagency team members to continue delivering impactful services.

Lighting the Way

“How big can the support circle go?”

Transition fairs are a fantastic way to bring together a wide range of resources and support systems for students with disabilities. But they can also help to identify larger circles of interagency teams that go beyond just the immediate circle of the student, their family, and their school staff. At a transition fair, you can start with the student's immediate support team and move outward. You would inevitably connect with broader networks like local businesses, community organizations, and government agencies. These outer circles can provide additional resources, job opportunities, and support services that the student might not have had otherwise.

Now, what if those outer circles were not only aimed at a single student, but for an entire district or even an entire state? Let's use a concentric circle model— a series of circles that get bigger as they get further from the center, to visualize this. Picture it like this; the innermost circle is the student. The second circle is their immediate resources such as their family and the school personnel or job coach assigned to that student's team. The next circle might include the school disability department and employment providers as well as representatives from local businesses who offer supports to students. The third circle would include professionals like vocational counselors, therapists, social workers, occupational therapists, the school district, and the local Chamber of Commerce. The fourth circle might then include state agencies, public support agencies, such as the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, and the state Chamber of Commerce or other policymakers and trainers who can influence larger systemic changes. As these circles grow, they create a more comprehensive and interconnected support system for students with disabilities, not only for employment but also for life.

Smoothing the Path

“Who does the heavy lifting?”

The seamless model should be seen, but not felt, when it is in use. Creating and sustaining the concentric circles, from the core outwards, presents a significant challenge that exceeds the capacity of an individual or single group. We see this exhaustion take place during this case study. The school representatives and the community transition team were taking parts of their day away from their traditional duties to create an event that would offer amazing connections, but only connections within their community. With the dedicated supports described in the circles above, this work could be evenly distributed and easier to obtain with existing resources. These resources can be used for transition fairs and student needs. The permeability of the circles keeps the process seamless.

As with all change, there needs to be buy-in. Using existing support groups on each level may be an appropriate starting point. The support group at the school already exists. Using the principles of seamless transition, the next circle out should already exist as well – the connection of vocational counselors, therapists, etc. This may need to be a more dedicated effort to the group becoming a whole, but the supports already exist and understand their position. Challenges arise as we move upward to non-client facing entities. By strategically engaging existing groups like Transition Cadres, a focused agenda item could effectively shift their attention from individual priorities to a unified effort toward the overarching goal. This mindset should exist as the circles expand. The necessary buy-in exists within departments, but this vision also requires a shift in perspective, not power.

Case Study Five

Changing Perceptions

Students transitioning from high school to adult life need the support of their families and transition professionals who work together. This teamwork ensures a seamless transition to employment, education or training, and independent living. The following case study uses the metaphor of carving a path on a team journey through both rough and smooth terrain. Every team member on the journey had different perceptions of the pilot experience while helping each other along the trek. The teams navigated the way together to light the best path for others to use in the future.



The Journey Begins

“How do we involve the parents who don’t understand?”

Interagency teams frequently use terms like *involving*, *engaging*, and *empowering* when discussing parents as team members. However, the concept of *partnering* with parents as full team participants is sometimes met with skepticism. Parent interviews were an eye-opening experience for many team members across schools. Not only did families gain more insights into their children’s strengths, but team members did too because of parents’ contributions. Team members who previously viewed some families as uninvolved or uninterested had their perceptions challenged.

Navigating the Terrain

“What if parents understand more than we know?”

The interagency team, comprised of over ten members, embarked on student/family interviews. They were surprised by the depth of the family relationships they encountered. These interviews revealed a level of hope and understanding from parents that had been missing from formal IEP meetings. Parents shared their aspirations and concerns, providing a richer, more nuanced picture of their children’s lives. The team learned about the various chores and family business activities that students participated in, highlighting the practical skills and responsibilities these students had already developed at home.

The interviews also uncovered deep-seated fears among parents, particularly fathers, about relinquishing their children to communities that might not value them or, worse, abuse them. These concerns underscored the rough terrain many families felt they were navigating. The parents' apprehensions about their opinions being valued and their children being respected in the broader community were palpable. This realization prompted the team to adopt an individualized approach to understanding and addressing these fears, which emphasized the need for a personalized compass of better team communication to guide each family through their unique challenges.

To move past these barriers, the team focused on building trust and open communication with the families. They acknowledged the fears and concerns expressed by the parents and worked collaboratively to find joint solutions. This involved addressing immediate worries and creating a long-term vision that everyone felt comfortable navigating. By fostering a sense of partnership and mutual respect, the team was able to bridge the gap between home and school to ensure that parents felt heard and valued. This collaborative approach paved the way for more effective support systems, tailored to the individual needs of each student, leading to a more cohesive and supportive environment.

Lighting the Way

“What perspective should be shared?”

The strength-focused Positive Personal Profile (PPP) that includes student and family perceptions became a beacon of light to use with other families. This tool provides a structured framework for gathering comprehensive information about the student, highlighting their strengths, interests, and support needs. The addition of the PPP allowed the team to reconsider aspects of students that may have been overlooked or were not fully fleshed out. The training

on how to use the PPP was helpful, especially modeling how to ask parents questions and achieve enough detail to satisfy measures of the assessment, such as job interests, resume-building experiences, and employer proposals.

The team discovered the value of deep discussions with family members, garnering more information on the student's identity. Parents voiced their hopes and dreams for their child, providing insights often missed during formal IEP meetings. This helped the team engage and utilize all aspects of the student's support systems more effectively. The collaborative discussions also led to parents becoming more hopeful about their student's future employment options, walking down a path they never thought possible.

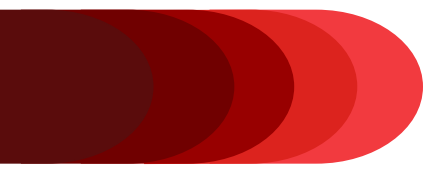
Parents' perspectives and responses to their interview questions increased interagency team members' hopes for the seamless transition model. Families valued the attention on their child, sharing positive feedback like, "you really think my son can work?!" This feedback was instrumental in boosting the team's confidence and comfort level in facilitating individualized work experiences for students and engaging families in the employment process. The collaborative spirit fostered by these discussions paved the way for a more personalized and effective transition plan, addressing not only the student's academic and vocational goals but also their emotional and social well-being.

What was once a dim path suddenly illuminated. The strength-focused PPP, combined with the collaborative efforts of the interagency team, illuminated new possibilities for students and their families. This approach not only provided a clearer direction for students' future employment but also strengthened the relationships between families and the interagency team. By working together and sharing their perspectives, the team created a supportive and adaptive environment that empowered students to achieve their goals and transition successfully into their future.

Smoothing the Path

"How can a joint vision and collaboration improve interagency teams' effectiveness?"

Applying the concept of a joint vision and collaborative approach to future situations can significantly enhance the effectiveness of interagency teams working with students and families. Establishing a joint vision that includes all stakeholders – students, families, school personnel, and community partners, ensures alignment and a shared commitment to the student's goals. Encouraging team members to view the path through their own lens and share their perspectives fosters a comprehensive understanding of the student's needs. Collaborative problem-solving, facilitated by structured frameworks, allows the team to address challenges effectively. Continuous feedback and adaptation ensure the support plan remains relevant and



responsive to the student's evolving needs. Building resilience and trust among team members through transparency, mutual respect, and shared responsibility strengthens relationships and enhances collaboration. By applying these principles, interagency teams can create a supportive and adaptive environment that empowers students to achieve their goals and successfully transition into their future.

Case Study Six

Changing the Course

Students transitioning from high school to adult life need the support of their families and transition professionals who work together. This teamwork ensures a seamless transition to employment, education or training, and independent living. The following case study uses the metaphor of carving a path on a team journey through both rough and smooth terrain. Every team member on the journey had different perceptions of the pilot experience while helping each other along the trek. The teams navigated the way together to light the best path for others to use in the future.



The Journey Begins

“What can we learn now?”

This team is always prepared and proactive in their work. Before engaging in the seamless transition pilot program, they had grown their own connections with a variety of resources that were all dedicated to the same outcome – student success. Not only did their connections exist, but a cohesive nature with a singular view toward that outcome existed as well. This dream team, made up of a menagerie of professionals, already had an agreed-upon mission to seek out novel ideas and tools to improve student services. The team was confident, connected, and collaborative – the perfect trifecta for advancing beyond entry-level support.

Navigating the Terrain

“Are all fits good fits?”

With the concept of a team and the vision already created, it was time to get to work on what next-level supports would look like for this team and their students. This team had a great understanding of how to connect students to employers. However, getting students in front of employers was only the first step; landing them meaningful employment was where the real issue started to come into play.

Before training, the team only connected students to employers with whom they were familiar. Sometimes, steps like informational interviews were overlooked before a placement would

occur. After the training, the team acknowledged that this was not in the best interest of the student. They altered their approach and aligned students' interests with work opportunities.

First, they gathered information from the employer about the business and its needs. Next, the team determined if any students matched the employer's needs. The team considered the student's strengths, preferences, and interests to set them up for successful employment. If a student is determined to be a good fit for a specific employer, a team member meets with the employer to discuss the mutually beneficial employment opportunity. This approach creates ongoing positive relationships with the employers as only those students who are a good fit with a vested interest are employed within a specific business. Ensuring student buy-in is not only available but also considered is a key part of ensuring meaningful employment. Now that this was being addressed, students could have more autonomy in their own vocational goals, learning the skills they are most interested in.

Lighting the Way

“Who helps build skills?”

When parents are active participants on transition teams, students have the advantage of working on employment goals at home and in the community. This mindset allows skill-building to take place in diverse locations outside of school and work such as community groups or clubs, church, sports teams, or even in the home. Building skills like time management, patience, or task focus helps facilitate new skills being introduced in the classroom or workplace. Parents and caregivers offer support to students outside of their work or school life that is necessary for success in multiple spaces.

Involving parents in the team ensures they are aware of their child's activities, objectives, and progress. Parents in this school district expressed a desire to be engaged in their child's learning experiences and achievements. They aim to contribute to their child's success by providing opportunities to develop and test their skills. However, this involvement is hindered when the team does not prioritize communication. Excluding parents or caregivers from the communication loop can negatively impact the achievement and sustainability of vocational goals. When milestones are reached or new objectives are set, it is crucial for the professional team to promptly inform the parents, who should be active members of the transition team. This facilitates a connection between the parents and the information, which in turn benefits the student. Parents serve as a vital link between different teams as their child progresses through life. Without comprehensive information to share, the growth of the student's goals can be impeded, leading to unnecessary repetition of efforts.

Smoothing the Path

“How do we get on the same page?”

Using tools like the employer or parent interview protocol and the PPP helps extract valuable information from the team and make it accessible to use at any time it's needed. These tools are essential steps toward gathering comprehensive information about a student. When teams have access to this information, it positively influences their perceptions of the opportunities available by framing what a student has done, wants to do, and can do, as well as what supports exist. This helps everyone be on the same page and encourages interactions with students, their families, and other team members. Both the information and a positive outlook are necessary to achieve each step towards a successful vocational outcome. The inclusivity required for success is extensive, involving family members, professionals, and employers. As the student grows, so does their circle of support. Clear communication among all team members is vital throughout the entire process. When everyone, including students and their families, is involved, the transition path becomes seamless and smooth.

Case Study Seven

Collective Stories of Families

Families want to understand seamless transition principles and processes that can lead to a good future for their child. The transition from high school to adult life can be exciting and yet stressful. Students and families need to feel the unified support of interagency transition teams. When interagency teams and families work together, there is hope, a plan, and a process leading toward the joint vision of success. The following collective family case study highlights the major themes across all pilot locations and offers insights and suggestions.



Hope

We had such hope for the future after the experience of being interviewed as a family.

Almost every family felt renewed hope for their child's future and expressed that something great would happen because of the seamless transition pilot. They were moved that their opinions seemed to count and that they learned so much from the variety of transition professionals working with their child, some of whom they had not met.

Communication

We need clear, consistent, and reciprocal communication.

All families participating in the seamless transition pilot reported feeling uninformed about the process. Although some families reported having good relationships with many of the educators, they needed more communication along the way. One parent explained, "The school communicates well with me overall and we have a good relationship, but no one said anything more about the pilot since the day I came in for the interview."

One family indicated that there were no updates or even a plan for follow-up after they participated in the interview on the first day of training. Therefore, they proactively asked at the end of the family interview, "So what are the next steps?" They were told, "We will figure it out and reach out to you next month." The family said that did not happen, so they reached out once more, but there was still some ambiguity about the process.

Each family involved wished for more communication throughout the pilot. Families wanted to understand exactly what seamless transition was, what they should expect from the process, how the employer interviews went, and what else they could do to participate. While some families sought clarification from schools, the majority remained uninformed, awaiting contact. This lack of communication, crucial for program success, left key members in the dark.

Confidence in Employment

The parent interview and PPP improved our confidence in meaningful employment.

Qualities for Employment: Students were praised by their families for having many innate qualities for work which kicked off interest in their employment journey. Parents often eagerly named traits and abilities their children showcased, even without any vocational training having been offered yet. Parents shared that their children learned new skills, repeated tasks, and independently accomplished chores at home. This gave parents the confidence that their child would benefit from finding meaningful work through additional employment training. Having real work experiences while in high school only added to the confidence level in their child's ability for employment success after graduating.

One family indicated that if they have a chance to try in their area of interest, with support at first, they are fully confident in future success—they just need the opportunity to try.

Home/Community experiences. Many parents and students indicated participation in some skill development through work at home. Some of these included washing and folding clothes, fixing simple meals, helping with car maintenance, and reading to the family and younger children. Other students are already active in their communities in leisure activities like working out and even using a bicycle for transportation. Parents want to continue to help their children develop more employment skills at home. One father created an employment experience for his son in his area of employment interest, showing confidence in his son's abilities. Another family sought out a vocational rehabilitation representative on their own to help with "the discovery process for an interest-based job" before the pilot started.

School Experiences. Families felt like they were heard more during the interview and the process to complete their child's Positive Personal Profile (PPP). They felt the transition professionals around the table asked child-centered questions and listened to their feedback. Some of the most frequently mentioned topics about their school experiences are listed below.

- Educators and /or Pre-ETS are teaching needed personal self-care skills.
- The Positive Personal Profile was meaningful and allowed for open dialogue from each team member's perspective.
- Parents felt the family interview helped professionals understand their child and generate a variety of good ideas.
- Parents think work experiences will help open doors for paid employment.

Concerns about Employment

We have multiple concerns when considering community-based employment.

Parents often worry about many workplace issues for their children. Families emphasized these stressors.

- Will they be afraid at first and need a lot of training?
- What are VR and Pre-ETS? Why does my kid need both? How will they help her?
- What happens if I change to another agency? Will my child be affected if providers change?
- How will they meet all the demands of the employer?
- How will they stay safe and what happens if:
 - they get hurt on the job?
 - people take advantage of them?
 - staff that know my kid leave and new staff start?
 - He doesn't have enough support on the job?
- What will my child do the rest of the day if they can't be employed full-time?

Confusion about the process

We want to be included to have the same information as transition professionals.

The Pilot: Several families said that they didn't understand the end goal of the pilot. Across locations, families would have liked additional training and engagement in the pilot. They felt that more information would have led to a better understanding of the pilot's purpose and helped them to understand the process, and how to better support the pilot. There were two in-person training days. The first day reviewed seamless transition principles including the family interview and PPP, and the second day visited the employers that were scheduled based on the information from the first training. Each family was invited to come in separately for about an hour on the first day. They were interviewed by team members, heard the results of

the PPP, shared their own insight, and helped brainstorm a few plausible employment options. Many families felt that they should have been invited to attend the full initial training. Some parents indicated that they would have been very interested in the employment interviews and tours as well. They felt they could have helped think through specific connections for other students, not just their own.

The Players: Most families did not know the roles and functions of several professionals on their team. One parent said, “I was a little confused in the process, and it was a huge learning curve for us to know who is who, and who does what... I still don’t think Pre-ETS is involved, and I wonder if any exploration of jobs is happening. There is very little communication about any meaningful employment options.”

The Suggestions: Parents need as much information about the pilot as the rest of the transition team. For this reason, parents made suggestions to improve their pilot experience. Overall, parents emphasized, “We don’t know what we don’t know.” Families tended to rely on one another because they didn’t feel like the information was being shared in a timely way. Further, families do not want schools to wait until circumstances are near perfect to share their child’s progress. With these concerns top of mind, families made the following suggestions.

Seamless Transition Training for Families

For parents to be involved to the extent possible, trainings to implement a seamless transition program should be held either with the interagency transition team or at a convenient time for students and families.

Schools should make accessible transition resources available when parents have questions. These resources may be tangible, like a PDF of new Indiana diplomas, but also virtual guidance and online options for many transition resources, like how to set up a meeting with a transition expert, understanding benefits, and positive examples of community-based customized employment.

Parent Networks

Parents tend to trust one another when sharing information. They make informal connections with one another to get the real scoop. This suggests that parents are resourceful and knowledgeable. To this end, interagency collaboration with parents broadens the pool of knowledge so that everyone benefits.

“We all just kind of lean on each other parent-wise ... you know, ‘When did you do this? You do need to be doing that if you haven’t yet. When do you start applying for BDS? When do you apply for guardianship?’ You know, all these different things — just to have a timeline early like in Jr. High to understand and to share with others.”

A Transition Timeline

One family wanted a transition timeline. One where they could visualize each step and create a task schedule. Essentially, the timeline should tell the reader *what should be done, why, and by when*. No later than eighth grade, parents could have an overview of the following:

- When do you consider guardianship or supported decision-making?
- When do you apply for the waiver?
- When do you apply for Pre-ETS and/or VR?
- What diplomas are available?

A Transition Resource List

This provides updated and valuable transition resources for families. The list should include information on benefits navigation, Medicaid Waivers, guardianship or supported decision-making, further education, and supported employment. Accessible transition resources can create more equitable partnerships by shifting from one-way professional communication to collaborative exchange.

Case Study Eight

Collective Stories of Interagency Transition Teams

Students transitioning from high school to adult life need the support of interagency transition professionals and their families to help them develop a vision for their future. This teamwork ensures a seamless transition to life after high school, including employment. When interagency teams and families work together on the plan and process leading toward a joint vision, relationships are strengthened, and potential employment possibilities are created. The following collective interagency team case study highlights broad overarching themes across all pilot locations, offering insights for a seamless transition in Indiana.



Team Power

We already have a good transition team –how can our team improve?

Each team had a history of working together in both good and challenging times. Most teams had good working relationships and yet, they wanted to elevate their team cohesion. There was a strong emphasis on a collective team effort with the motto, “This is not a one-person job.” The seamless transition strategies improved what was already in place across all locations. One location said a major contributor was “Getting all the team members in one room at one time, although it is challenging.” They had been doing business via email or piecemeal meetings. Another team acknowledged a lack of cohesiveness before the pilot. The leader decided to remedy that immediately by scheduling monthly meetings to work on areas of weakness and to create a plan to move forward with the seamless transition strategies. All members of the interagency teams felt the power of true teamwork.

Team Bonding = Relationship Building

Which comes first, connecting as a team or connecting with families?

All educators and agency members were astonished at how much they learned from participating in the PPP and the family interview. Each team member took turns asking the

student and family questions while listening carefully to the responses. Not only did team members learn things they didn't know before, but they also witnessed the intimate interactions between the family members. All interagency teams indicated seeing a different side of the student and their parents. This fostered a deeper understanding of each family member, strengthening their sense of group cohesion. The potential for relationship-building among team members and families was clear on the first day of the pilot.

Bonding with Families

Team members shared that during the training, the family interview was the most impactful element of the training. Focusing on students' strengths and gaining student and family insight made a difference for their teams. They acknowledged that parents know their child best so having the initial meeting, plus ongoing meetings with families highlighted a new perspective of the student and their family. Understanding parents' investment in their child's future led to the team valuing the parent's role in job stability over time. Parents reported to their teams that it was "eye-opening" for them to see so many others who believed in their child. This facilitated a greater desire to help plan for their future. While it was beneficial that this bonding happened now, earlier connections with families would be more beneficial. To build strong partnerships, teams agreed to initiate early middle school engagement, ensuring families understand and feel connected to their professional support network. A few teams did acknowledge that they hadn't communicated with family members since the training but had intended to.

Bonding with the Team

Role Clarification

There was some confusion about professional roles. Defining the roles of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) was vital, especially in locations with limited access to each service. Role clarification led to effective interagency communication and increased service utilization.

Communication

Communication between team members continued to improve during the pilot. One group acknowledged that team collaboration was not a priority before the pilot. After the training, they explained, "We are contacting students and sharing communication about students. Pre-ETS and VR are more involved. However, family contact/communication about the progress of students in the pilot is still in the early stages."

Team Expansion

Interagency teams examined gaps in team membership and filled them as resources allowed. One pilot site had an ongoing community transition group that included multiple agencies and K-12 educators from different school districts. They envisioned expanding the knowledge and purposes of this group to become a seamless transition advisory council that could model best practices.

Team Bridging— Community and Potential Employers

We've been working with employers for years—what is different now?

Collective Social Capital

After the family interviews the teams assessed each member's social capital to identify potential business connections aligning with student interests. The team member with the relevant connection scheduled a visit. We found that this direct approach fostered more productive experiences and stronger relationships. The employers warmly welcomed the team and gave them a good history of their business, thoughtfully answered questions from the group, and were proud to give a tour of their facility. The time invested by the team members was well-received by employers, who not only requested continued contact from at least one team member but also expressed a clear interest in engaging students as part-time employees.

Informational Employer Interviews

The teams all agreed that learning to approach employers using the philosophy of *'teach us more about your business so we can help you with any needs you may have'* was a superior method to what they had used in the past. Initially, they emphasized that they worked with students with disabilities who needed job experience. Although some team members at first felt awkward not disclosing their long-term intent, it gave some structure to get started and "get in the door easier." In addition, team members saw the value of learning about business needs as a first step in building these community employer relationships.

The informational employer interview gave the team time to see if there might be a match between certain employers and the skillsets of specific students. Finding the best possible match of student skillsets with specific employers' needs is key to developing trusting long-term relationships with employers. A byproduct of building these employer relationships was that team professionalism improved in how they scheduled and planned employer visits. In addition, the number of job sites increased.

Adaptations

Each team adapted the resources and practices from the seamless transition training to fit the needs of their location. Below are some of the most helpful tactics shared by teams across the state.

Professional phone call or email. Most pilot sites sent professional emails or made phone calls rather than sending a formal letter through the post office.

Personally meet with the business manager. This initial meeting following the email or phone call was to introduce the process of the informational employer interview and tour.

Database. Teams thought that it was helpful to create a database of employer's needs and another for student skills to make matching student skills to employer needs much easier now and in the future.

Early Seamless Transition meetings. Encouraging transition practices in middle school helps all team members, including the family, think about viable community employment possibilities.

Work-based experiences—Each location had different practices based on available support in their area. There were barriers in under-resourced areas with transportation and with providers. One family offered the use of an aunt's transportation company when the family or school were unable to provide. Some school staff volunteered their time during their time off in the summer. All areas needed to use creativity when making a match work for a student and employer.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS). Pre-ETS Personnel were more available in some areas than others. Some locations had 6 or 7 Pre-ETS providers for their students, while other locations had only one shared by multiple schools. Therefore, pilot locations needed to make adaptations for their area. Where services are more available there is an opportunity for services up to a 4-week window if paid, unpaid experiences can have a stipend for up to 8 weeks, with no limits on volunteer work, and some summer offerings.

Paraprofessionals—Some schools employed paraprofessionals to provide work experiences for students when there was no other job coach available.

Guidance counselor--Handled students' IEPs and 504s to facilitate meetings with employers and building knowledge between student interests and employer needs.

The Barriers

How can we sustain this program over time?

The teams indicated the most important barriers to sustaining the seamless transition practices over time and provided wish lists that would support their efforts.

Barriers:

- Time constraints
- Limited ability to make connections with employers during the workday.
- Scheduling difficulties for family interviews and the Positive Personal Profile (PPP).
- Logistical complexities in coordinating meetings for multiple students.
- Integration of employer connections and family insights into IEPs and Case Conferences.

Sustainability

Each team made some adaptations to what they had been doing to make transition activities more seamless for their other students during and after the pilot. This indicates their desire and commitment to use the tools provided. Their adaptable practices and positive attitude significantly contributed to the seamless transition pilot's success. However, addressing their combined wish lists would enhance student outcomes and acknowledge their valuable contributions.

Items on the interagency team's wishlist:

- **Hire a transition coordinator who works specifically on the coordination of the seamless elements.**
- **Schedule time at the beginning of each semester for seamless transition meetings.**
- **Implement training that teaches new staff the principles and practices.**
- **Prioritize ongoing professional development.**
- **Utilize virtual resources.**

Team Outlook and Resilience

Our attitudes and behaviors changed through this process!

Attitude Shift

The most valuable element was the dedication of each team to make the pilot work in each area, regardless of the challenges. Each team experienced some trepidation at the beginning of the pilot. They knew they had a good program or at least were doing the best with what they had, but the time commitment seemed overwhelming at first. Their resilience to see the pilot through, with limited time and staffing, was impressive. Many locations expanded seamless transition practices to other students, outside the pilot, when they saw a specific need and opportunity, showing their determination to implement these valuable practices.

Cognitive Shift

One group indicated, “This pilot is a mind-shift change that we are working on. We are asking ‘What do kids need?’ and then trying to figure that out. The meaningful assessment requirement for transition shouldn't be, ‘Oh no! it's coming!’ and then a hustle to send out the info that needs to be filled out.” When the team collaborated, efficiency improved, and program effectiveness was more apparent. They specifically gained new insight on working together as a team and on how to best approach parents and potential employers.

Affective Shift

Many schools articulated that, along with a mind-shift, there was a change in how they felt about meeting with families. The IEP process naturally lent itself to more parent communication. The difference with seamless transition was taking the time to come together and bring parents in for interviews to intentionally listen and discover the hopes and dreams for their child. This process was personalized and more meaningful than traditional transition case conferences. Parent interviews expanded the team's understanding of students' skills, family strengths, and support networks, inspiring a more comprehensive approach between schools, agencies, and families.