

Administration on Disabilities Partnerships in Employment Systems Change Project Semi-Annual State Profile



What is the Partnerships in Employment Project?

5-year grant awarded to 14 states: The Administration on Disabilities (AoD) awarded funding to eight states in 2011 and 2012, and six states in 2016: *District of Columbia, Hawaii, Kentucky, Massachusetts, South Carolina, and Utah.*

Focus on competitive integrated employment for youth with I/DD: This project promotes cross-system and cross-agency collaboration to improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for youth and young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). *Competitive integrated employment (CIE)* is when “individuals with disabilities earn wages consistent with wages paid workers without disabilities in integrated settings in the community performing the same or similar work.”

States form consortiums: The six 2016 Partnerships in Employment states formed a consortium or coalition of stakeholders that include:

- ▶ **Individual Level:** Individuals with I/DD, family members
- ▶ **Community Level:** Pilot sites, employers, providers
- ▶ **State Level:** Developmental Disabilities Agency, Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, State Education Agency, State Developmental Disabilities Council, other state agencies

AoD contractors perform project evaluation and provide technical assistance: The Lewin Group is conducting a comprehensive, longitudinal evaluation and the Youth Employment Solutions (YES)! Center is providing training and technical assistance to state grantees.

Massachusetts Partnership for Transition to Employment: October 2016 – February 2020

Overview

The Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS) was awarded the Partnerships in Employment (PIE) grant in September 2016. DDS leads the Massachusetts Partnership for Transition to Employment (MPTE) in collaboration with the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC), Massachusetts Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Institute for Community Inclusion/University of Massachusetts Boston, The Arc of Massachusetts (The Arc), Salem State University, and Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS).

MPTE focuses on increasing the amount of young adults with I/DD who leave school and obtain CIE; increasing

the number of young adults that use the public vocational rehabilitation (VR) and workforce development systems; increasing the availability and ease of access to quality employment services and supports; and increasing advocacy and support for CIE.

Project Goals and Vision

MPTE has several project goals, including:

- 1) Build and enhance cross systems collaboration
- 2) Increase access to work experience and paid employment for youth and young adults in integrated settings
- 3) Undertake a comprehensive effort to promote consistent parental support for CIE
- 4) Undertake a comprehensive effort to ensure systematic development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills for youth with I/DD

- 5) Disseminate tools, resources, policy guidance, and other materials to support transitions to employment and support sustainable change

This profile highlights MPTE activities and accomplishments from October 2016 to February 2020 related to PIE project objectives—developing or changing policies, removing systemic barriers, building cross-system and cross-agency collaboration, and implementing strategies and promising practices to support competitive integrated employment. For a full list of all activities and outcomes, please refer to PIE Semi-Annual Reports.

Policy Development

State and Federal Policies and Initiatives

Transition Pathways Services Project

The U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) awarded MRC the Transition Pathways Services project, a federally-funded research and demonstration project focused on work-based learning, for October 2016 through September 2021. MRC held a kick-off event in July 2017, which included state agency representatives and other stakeholders. MRC continues to recruit students for three demonstration project sites, and, as of the March to August 2019 reporting period, 256 students were participating in the project.

Blueprint for Success

Between September 2017 and February 2018, DDS updated the “Blueprint for Success: Employing Individuals with Disabilities in Massachusetts.” This blueprint was originally issued in November 2013 and was last updated in October 2014.

Home and Community Based Services (HCBS) Transition Plan

MPTE supported the implementation of the HCBS Transition Plan to maximize the time individuals spend in employment and in the community. MPTE specifically worked to ensure that the individual's day-to-day activities are reflective of their individual goals and preferences. MPTE is continuing to work with Community Based Day Service and Employment Service providers on supporting settings aligned with the HCBS Settings Rule.

Customized and Supported Employment

During the March to August 2018 reporting period, MPTE finalized a “Get the Facts” guidance document that explains CIE, Supported Employment, Customized Employment, and their relationships, with an emphasis that Supported Employment and Customized Employment are CIE. This document was disseminated in February 2019. The document was posted on the MPTE website and distributed via the MPTE Facebook page. The next “Get the Facts” publication will focus on guardianship.

During the March to August 2019 reporting period, MPTE worked with the DDS to support a Community of Practice on Customized Employment. The Community of Practice consists of service providers who focus on improving the availability, consistency, and quality of Customized Employment services. In December 2019, MPTE staff convened the Community of Practice for a four-day in-person meeting. The group also met monthly. As of February 2020, there are 22 providers participating.

Agency Procurement

DDS and MRC issued new procurements for employment services during the September 2018 to February 2019 reporting period. During the March to August 2019 reporting period, DDS completed its procurement for employment service providers, with 100 providers qualified. All of these procurements focused on a common vision of Supported Employment, reinforcing the Employment First philosophy. The procurements were also consistent with the definition of CIE and encouraged the use of more customized approaches.

Technology Forward Initiative

In the September 2019 to February 2020 reporting period, MPTE staff supported the initiation of the Technology Forward Initiative. The program focuses on use of technology for supports to advance the state's Employment First policies. The Massachusetts DDS is spearheading the effort.

Massachusetts Individualized Transition Plan

Massachusetts Chapter 688 of the Acts of 1983 requires individual transition planning for students who may require additional disability services after exiting school. As of February 2019, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services was in the process of revamping the Individualized Transition Plan document required under the state's transition legislation to reflect a more inclusive planning process with a greater emphasis on employment.

Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Accounts

During the March to August 2019 reporting period, MPTE sponsored the Arc's webinar for families on ABLE accounts. The webinar took place in May 2019 for 34 attendees. It served as a forum for parent and family engagement.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) Joint-Guidance

In January 2020, the Massachusetts public VR system, the MRC, in collaboration with DESE, issued a joint guidance on Pre-ETS. The advisory aimed to define and describe Pre-ETS, clarify which students may be appropriate for Pre-ETS, describe how to apply for the services, and recommend collaborative practices among MRC VR counselors, Pre-ETS providers, and Local Educational Agency (LEA) personnel. MPTE staff supported these efforts.

Program Development

Post-Secondary Education

Massachusetts Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative (MAICEI)

Several PIE project Steering Committee members participated in the procurement process between April and August 2017 to expand access to post-secondary education programs via MAICEI. The April 2018 MPTE consortium meeting featured a presentation on MAICEI. The model is currently in the process of being expanded, and the knowledge sharing taking place within the consortium is ensuring greater awareness about the availability of MAICEI and its coordination with other transition services.

In the September 2019 to February 2020 reporting period, the new director of the MAICEI joined the MPTE consortium, and three project partners continue to serve on the advisory group with MAICEI. The advisory group supports public high school students with intellectual disabilities, ages 18 to 22, to increase their academic and career successes through inclusion in a college or university. The Massachusetts College of Art is in the process of becoming a MAICEI site.

Improve or Enhance Existing Programs

National Best Practices Evaluation

Between April and August 2017, MPTE compiled information on national best practices with a strategic emphasis on the four PIE project focus areas. The focus areas include increasing access to work experiences and paid employment; a comprehensive effort to promote parental support for CIE; systematic development of self-determination and self-advocacy skills for youth; and cross-agency policy coordination. Resources on national best practices include the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). The MPTE Steering Committee is developing a framework for collecting information on additional promising practices nationally, locally, and by state. The MPTE Steering Committee is also developing criteria and characteristics to help identify and establish quality practices.

Community-Based Day Service (CBDS) Providers Community of Practice

A Community of Practice of CBDS providers began during the March to August 2017 reporting period and continued to meet to enhance access to community services. The Community of Practice includes representatives from 12 agencies that serve individuals with I/DD. A collaborative work group identified strategies and approaches to improve the quality of these services in alignment with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) HCBS Final Rule. DDS continued to develop a list of CBDS staff competencies to increase training for staff to help people with I/DD.

One-Stop Career Centers

Between September 2017 and February 2018, MPTE examined the use of One-Stop Career Centers (also known as American Job Centers) and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) youth services by individuals with I/DD to develop strategies on how to better use the workforce development system to improve employment efforts.

Project SEARCH™ Site

During the March to August 2018 reporting period, DDS provided seed funding to a Western Massachusetts Project SEARCH™ site that launched in August 2018 at a local community college. The site is working with young adults with autism and is working toward completing the first year of internships.

Statewide Educators Survey

In the September 2019 to February 2020 reporting period, MPTE staff conducted a statewide online survey of approximately 150 educators regarding their experiences in supporting work-based learning and employment experiences. The survey identified and reinforced various promising practices to support students, such as dedicated transition personnel, individualized employment experiences, and employer partnerships. Staff will analyze the survey results to determine next steps for the development of guidance and technical assistance (TA) materials, in addition to cataloging the promising practices on their webpage.

Increase or Build Program Capacity

Boston Public Schools Initiative

DDS, MRC, DESE, and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development are involved in an initiative with Boston Public Schools to improve school-to-employment practices for transition-age youth and young adults with I/DD.

“Building on Success: Expanding Opportunities” Conference

In November 2016, DDS held a one-day statewide employment conference called “Building on Success: Expanding Opportunities.” Almost 500 people attended the conference, which featured 28 different break-out sessions on various topics, including transition and integrated employment, career planning, collaboration

with businesses, Project SEARCH™, social security benefits and work, and Customized Employment.

Community-Based Support Services Providers TA

Through training and TA, DDS is working to assist providers of community-based support services to move toward the provision of services that are truly individualized, inclusive, and community-based. DDS is focusing on the use of generic, typical community resources and offering an array of meaningful and purposeful activities to support individuals on an employment pathway that will lead to integrated jobs.

Trainings and Conferences

MPTE partners offer an extensive six-day provider training at least twice per year. Each series held has reached full capacity. The training schedule includes: 1) one day on foundations of community employment; 2) one day on person-centered planning; 3) two days on job development; and 4) two days on job coaching and supporting strategies. Webinars delivered between April and August 2017 included “WIOA Restrictions on Sub-Minimum Wage,” “Project SEARCH™ in Massachusetts,” and “Using Social Media for Job Development.” Attendance averaged around 45 participants per event.

MPTE also supported the Massachusetts Self-Advocacy Conference for 500 attendees in October 2017, the Self-Determination in Transition Training Conference for 350 attendees in November 2017, the Mass Arc Transition Conference for 500 attendees in November 2017, and the MASS Self-Advocacy Conference for 250 and 400 attendees in September 2018 and October 2019, respectively. MPTE’s consortium partner, the Arc, presented a series of one-hour webinars for families, which were funded by PIE. Throughout 2018, the Arc held six webinars with an average of 55 attendees per session.

During the March to August 2019 reporting period, MPTE led a national webinar series with the YES! Center to facilitate conversations among educators and other stakeholders on issues related to supporting students in employment experiences. Staff also hosted webinars on topics including credentials to careers, special needs trusts, ABLE accounts, and preparing for housing. MPTE was also involved in conferences including Employment

First: Expanding Job Opportunities and Pathways to Work Conference and the DDS Family Support Conference.

MPTE hosted the Charting the LifeCourse training in partnership with University of Missouri – Kansas City staff in September 2018 with 200 attendees. Outreach for the training was conducted to educators, service providers, and state staff to encourage their participation. In November 2019, MPTE staff presented at the Charting the LifeCourse During the Transition Years, Arc of Massachusetts Transition Conference with 400 attendees. The Charting the LifeCourse materials were distributed at both trainings. MPTE launched the Charting the LifeCourse Ambassador Series online from February 2019 through June 2019 with 15 total participants.

Throughout the September 2019 to February 2020 reporting period, MPTE staff hosted seven major webinars with an average of 65 attendees per session.

Pre-ETS

Between October 2016 and March 2017, MRC reissued a Request for Response for Pre-ETS to expand the provider base. MRC continued to share information about the availability of Pre-ETS with educators, students, families, and other stakeholders. Partially due to MRC's efforts, the number of students receiving Pre-ETS increased from 40 in fiscal year 2016 to 104 in fiscal year 2017. Between September 2017 and February 2018, MPTE worked to ensure that Pre-ETS support and complement school efforts, and are individualized based on student need.

During the March to August 2018 reporting period, MPTE provided guidance to MRC and coordinated changes to Pre-ETS to ensure access to potentially eligible students and make Pre-ETS more widely available. During the March to August 2019 reporting period, MPTE conducted the same process to update Pre-ETS with MRC. The update went into effect on July 1, 2019.

Alternative Certificates, Diplomas, or Curricula

Commonwealth Corporation, a MPTE member, worked to implement Signal Success, an innovative soft skills curriculum for all youth, including those with I/DD.

Between September 2017 and February 2018, Commonwealth Corporation found that as a result of participation in the curriculum, students with I/DD were able to participate in the summer work program for all youth. MPTE worked to identify the lessons learned from this program, and reported that the effort “has been successful due to the availability of staff to support the students both in the classroom and on the job.”

During the September 2018 to February 2019 reporting period, MPTE developed a series of exploratory questions to assist with researching the experiences of other states in implementing a Workplace Skills Certificate for students who leave school without a diploma. During the March to August 2019 reporting period, MPTE worked with the YES! Center to write a white paper on efforts regarding diploma alternatives. In the September 2019 to February 2020 reporting period, staff continued to review options and requirements for a possible Workplace Skills Certificate. Members of the Steering Committee met with senior leadership at DESE as well as a legal team, who confirmed there were no legal barriers to moving the certificate forward. MPTE staff will present the certificate to key stakeholders as a next step.

Relationship Building

Collaboration Progress, Highlights, or Achievements

MPTE Consortium and Steering Committee

MPTE's consortium structure includes a Steering Committee, which includes all the lead Massachusetts state agencies, and PIE subcontractors. MPTE also includes four work groups that each focus on a different grant focus area. The focus areas are: 1) collaborative policies and practices; 2) accessing work experiences typical of youth without I/DD; 3) supporting parental involvement and expectations for CIE; and 4) building self-determination and independent living skills.

MPTE has actively recruited consortium members to provide input and guidance to implement project activities. MPTE has recruited 53 consortium members who represent all stakeholder groups and include other organizations and school systems involved in improving

integrated employment opportunities for youth with I/DD. The consortium also has three support staff. During the September 2019 and February 2020 reporting period, MPTE added two transition coordinators from Haverhill Public Schools and Boston Public Schools to its consortium. During each reporting period, MPTE holds two consortium meetings and monthly Steering Committee meetings. Between September 2019 and February 2020, MPTE held two consortium meetings and the work groups generally met monthly. In total, 12 consortium meetings and 34 Steering Committee meetings have been held since April 2017.

MPTE's Steering Committee includes all organization members that signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) along with the project partners and subcontractors. The Steering Committee meets monthly to develop plans to work together towards implementation of project activities. Committee members are developing working relationships and learning more about the individual initiatives and projects underway within each agency. During the March to August 2019 reporting period, three representatives from the Steering Committee began serving on the state Autism Commissions Committee on Employment.

Engaging Self-Advocates

Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong (MASS)
MASS, a subcontractor for MPTE, continued to conduct outreach and offer the "Explore-Prepare-Act" training for transition-age high school students. MASS also presented self-advocacy trainings across the state. MPTE continues to support self-advocacy workshops in schools through the "Explore-Prepare-Act" training curriculum. Both MASS and the Developmental Disabilities Council offered the Self-Advocacy Leadership Series (SALS) on an ongoing basis. MPTE is also using funding from the Developmental Disabilities Council to update the content of the Making a Contribution Workbook to guide self-advocates in their job search by making it more specialized and in-depth.

Self-Advocacy Engagement

During the March to August 2019 reporting period, MPTE engaged youth with I/DD and promoted self-

advocacy. The consortium included self-advocates at its June 2019 full consortium meeting, during which the self-advocates presented findings from the previous reporting period's self-advocacy and employment survey. MPTE staff also continued to support self-advocacy workshops with students in schools via the Explore, Prepare, Act curriculum. Staff presented, on average, 15 workshops per year to 150 students.

During the September 2019 to February 2020 reporting period, MPTE staff continued to promote self-advocacy through the work group. The work group is developing short videos related to the same theme and a plain language version of the state's Employment First Policy for self-advocates.

Self-Advocate Survey

The MPTE Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination Work Group developed and disseminated a survey between November 2018 and January 2019 to youth and young adults with I/DD regarding self-advocacy and employment. The survey was sent to self-advocates through consortium members, self-advocacy networks, and work group contacts. The survey received 76 responses from 30 towns across the state. The survey results allowed the work group to identify three key issues: students are not able to obtain jobs in field of interest, parents and administrators can be barriers to pursuing career interests, and self-advocacy training can be inconsistent. The work group identified four solutions to the issues that were highlighted by survey respondents: the Self-Advocacy Leadership Series, Self-Advocacy Groups, Self-Advocacy Curriculums, and smoother transitions from school to work. In the September 2019 to February 2020 reporting period, members of the work group presented to regional interagency groups on the findings from their survey.

Stakeholder, Parent and Family, and Employer Engagement

MPTE staff regularly engage with families through trainings, webinars, and work group initiatives. Staff also supported Bellwether interviews and facilitated the consortium's Facebook page for families. In the September 2019 to February 2020 reporting period, MPTE staff supported the ongoing webinar series from the Arc, which serves as a forum for parent and family

engagement. The Family Work Group is also developing a comprehensive training series for families in conjunction with the YES! Center.

Bellwether Interviews

MPTE conducted a series of Bellwether interviews with key informants between September 2017 and February 2018. Researchers generally use Bellwether interviews to determine influential peoples' stances on policy issues. MPTE used the Bellwether interviews to learn about strategies, tools, and resources that would be useful to the PIE project.

During the March to August 2018 reporting period, MPTE created a summary document outlining key findings that will inform the development of future PIE initiatives. MPTE identified that collaboration between agencies is essential to establishing effective transition supports, and that family expectations are influenced by an education system without alternative options. MPTE also identified improvement areas and implementation gaps to determine future PIE plans. Improvement areas included greater collaboration both locally and systems wide, movement from ideas to implementation, and increased inclusion. Improvement recommendations included developing local interagency teams, increasing communication between the service systems and people with I/DD, involving all parties (families, agency representatives, service providers) when creating transition plans, and creating interagency strategic plans between state and local agencies.

Family Facebook Group

MPTE launched a Facebook group for families in September 2018. Since the launch, the Facebook group has experienced significant growth and a high level of activity. As of February 2020, the group had over 1,300 members, with over 300 new members since the previous reporting period. The Steering Committee shares administrative roles on the page, but families are mostly answering each other's questions. MPTE also partnered with a major family advocacy association from the start of the grant, so the association has been promoting the Facebook page to their members.

Employer Engagement

In the March to August 2019 reporting period, MPTE explored how to integrate employment efforts for youth with I/DD within the overall efforts of the state workforce system's business outreach initiative, BizWorks. The Work Experience Work Group received a presentation on BizWorks and is working on recommendations to be presented to the Department of Workforce Development, a PIE project partner.

In the September 2019 to February 2020 reporting period, MPTE staff continued to support regional Employment Collaboratives to serve as consortiums for job developers and outreach to businesses. The Collaboratives held an employer recognition event in October 2019. A broad spectrum of employers, service providers, individuals with disabilities, and public officials attended. A new Employment Collaborative is in the process of being developed in the Metro West region.

Data Systems and Employment Tools

Databases

MPTE created a database to store promising practices. MPTE's four work groups continued to identify a list of best practices from the local, state, and national levels for this. MPTE also created a [data dashboard](#), which, as of February 2020, has been released to the public. The dashboard includes a summary document of various data points that shows the progress of employment of youth with I/DD in Massachusetts and is designed to be a user-friendly graphic display of data.

Employment Fact Sheets

MPTE conducted a survey of families to understand their views on and roles in employment, and began to analyze results between September 2017 and February 2018. The MPTE work group focusing on family engagement created a fact sheet for families on employment facts titled "Get the Facts". The first fact sheet focused on the definition of employment and was released in February 2019. In the March to August 2019 reporting period, MPTE developed another fact sheet to be posted in October 2019. The document, "Community Transportation Options," is on the MPTE webpage to highlight transportation options for youth with I/DD.

Basecamp

Basecamp is an online project management and collaboration platform. The MPTE consortium utilizes Basecamp to share materials and collaborate with each other outside of the formal consortium meetings. Meeting materials are organized and archived on the platform and consortium partners communicate and share resources through the interface.

Other Documentation Highlights

In the March to August 2019 reporting period, MPTE's work was featured in the Office of Special Education Planning and Policy Development's June 2019 newsletter. MPTE's progress was also highlighted in an article from the DESE newsletter, which was distributed to all superintendents and administrators. In efforts to engage at a higher level, MPTE identified best practices for various inter-agency groups, and developed a web page that shows the locations of the groups throughout the state. The webpage serves to both encourage participation in these groups and determine where there are geographic gaps.

Sustainability Efforts

Sustainability Beyond the PIE Grant

MPTE Work Plan

During the September 2018 to February 2019 reporting period, MPTE updated the work plan to detail efforts for the final half of the PIE project activities. A major emphasis of the work plan revision was long-term sustainability after grant funding ends. The efforts detailed in the work plan included raising identified issues to the state commissioner/secretariat level, supporting and expanding inter-agency teams at the local and regional level, moving forward on the development of an Occupational Certificate for students, and developing policy and policy guidance documents. These goals remain relevant in the most recent reporting period as of August 2019.

MPTE staff are also working to coordinate and facilitate interagency collaboration to ensure sustainability of programming post-PIE funding. The MPTE webpage now includes a [database](#) of interagency transition teams in the state, an effort to create greater awareness of these teams. The database also encourages the development of additional teams in areas where they do not currently exist.

Considerations

This document was created by The Lewin Group under Contract HHSP233201500088I, Task Order HHSP23337003T from the Administration on Disabilities. The content of this document is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the official views of the Administration on Disabilities. The content in this document is based on self-reported qualitative data from the Massachusetts PIE project. For more information on The Lewin Group Partnerships in Employment Evaluation, contact PIE-EVAL@Lewin.com.