



Topical Audio Teleconference Transcript

Serving All Youth: Achieving Gender Equity in School to Work Systems

presented by

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Shauna McDonald: The topic for this call is *Serving All Youth: Strategies for Achieving Gender Equity in School-to-Work Systems*, with presenter Cindy Marano, who is the State Organizing Director with Wider Opportunities for Women.

Cindy Marano: Welcome everybody. Well, first of all, it's a speaker's challenge to do a presentation like this without being able to see your faces. My intention is to spend about 20 to 25 minutes talking about some of the lessons that Wider Opportunities for Women has learned in working to achieve gender equity in school-to-work and other educational programs. Then I'd like to talk a little bit about what some of the special issues are that we have seen in the school-to-work system, what can be done about some of them, and then give you some resources that we have made available and also some other groups that might help you really bring girls and equity into the school-to-work systems in your own states and communities.

The first thing that I want to say is, for those of you who don't know of Wider Opportunities for Women, we are a national women's education and employment organization headquartered in Washington, DC We've been trying to improve the delivery of services to women and girls in educational systems, particularly the vocational education and school-to-work systems, for a number of years. We have a very distinct philosophy in our work. And that is that we think that there are many creative and innovative strategies that have been developed – both within the school system and out in community-based organizations – that really point the way to achieving gender equity in school-to-work and other educational systems. Often there are very creative teachers, very creative administrators, and others in the community who really can help bring those strategies into system-wide use.

We have spent a number of years, probably twenty, trying to bring some of those strategies into systems, both nationally and in particular states, in the school-to-work process. We have particularly worked in our own District of Columbia and in the state of Maine, and we've done some work in Iowa and a couple of other states. I think what we have learned is that although the issues of gender

equity have some particular concerns, many of the issues relate to serving all students.

We have – as an organization – both provided technical assistance to states and done some research in monitoring the school-to-work system. Sometimes we act as an analyst, coming in and helping a state or a community look at their particular system and try to find the barriers and solutions along the way. We've done a lot of linking with others, such as the gender equity coordinators in the states, the National Transition Network, the National Transition Alliance for Youth with Disabilities, Jobs for the Future, the National Counsel of La Rasa (phonetic), the Center for Law and Education, and other organizations. I think many of us have begun to understand that the strategies that make a system really work for all students have a lot in common with making that system work for young women.

I will talk about some of the things we've learned that connect serving young women and serving other special needs populations, and then talk specifically about the lessons we've learned in focusing on gender equity. Firstly, I think that whether we are talking about students with disabilities or students of specific ethnicities or young women, we've learned that outreach and recruitment needs to be targeted, it needs to be welcoming, and it needs to be visual. And really in part that means we have to know that students will see themselves in the materials about the school-to-work system. For instance, that there are posters and materials that make it clear that the school-to-work system in that particular community is not just a system that is focusing on young boys or on only white students or only students without physical disabilities. And so this is true with girls as well.

The second point that I think serving all students has in common with serving girls is that there really has to be a commitment to integrating all students into quality programs. What we've seen around the country often is that girls have tended to be segregated in only a few of the occupational programs, which are often lesser in quality and have lesser outcomes in terms of wages and futures. So, this commitment to integrating all students into the

quality and top-notch programs is one of the things that we have learned is critical.

Another issue is that we believe that planning for the success of each student is a critical part of making the system work. That means developing some individual plans – helping a student look at what her future is going to be – and keeping those plans with the student, wherever he or she goes through their education. This is a key part of the process; wherever she is or wherever the student of any sort is, that plan goes with them.

I think another thing that is very critical is that the system itself look at whether or not the students of any kind of special need are achieving success. Often, we have gone in to work with a particular school district and nobody can really tell us much about how the young women are doing. Is there any difference between the outcomes for them and the outcomes for male students? Are they only graduating in a certain number of occupational areas? One of the reasons that people have a hard time answering that question is that they haven't looked at it in that way. So, being conscious that there is a process for assessing how that particular group of students are doing.

Any of the student groups that make up the all-student arena really need to have appropriate supportive services. For young women, this may be some particular career counseling so that they have a broad spectrum of awareness about what some of their opportunities might be. We have teen parents in the system and they may need some particular kinds of supportive services. And part of that planning that I was talking about before, the developing of an individualized plan, needs to include what the kind of support services might be that that student would need.

A number of other issues again transcend the boundaries. Whether we are talking about gender equity or students with disabilities or students who have special needs with language or whatever, there needs to be a check-in with the students themselves. There needs to be a chance for students and their parents to comment on how the system is responding to them, and a willingness to hear from the voices of community experts or advocates about how the system is doing for that particular group of students.

Finally, I think that we've learned that teachers and administrators in general really want to do a good job at reaching all students, but often they need some kind of ongoing technical assistance and more regular support to really meet the challenge of serving all students.

Now, what are some of the particular issues that we've seen in the school-to-work systems in the states that we've worked in? I've mentioned already that we have seen a great deal of segregation of girls in the system into very

traditionally female courses. **Sex segregation** in the school-to-work system – which we kind of think of as looking most closely at the highest wage occupations in a community and getting students to move from school to work in the modern workforce of the moment – is in some ways more dramatic than we would have expected. Even in the traditional course work that young women may get into – career areas like office technology, cosmetology, some of the food service areas or even some of the health care fields – what we've seen is a kind of focus in those areas on the sort of less challenging jobs within those fields. An example of this is in observing some health-related, school-to-work programs in a couple of states. We have seen a real focus on the most traditional and least challenging of health fields in communities where there was a growing health technology area or biotech. It's been fascinating that there has been very little consideration of the newer fields that young women could enter, even in the traditional arenas, and particularly the ones that have the higher wages. So, focusing on this desegregation process, and in the traditionally female areas focusing on the higher wage ends of the spectrum, I think is something that we think is really a priority.

To get that kind of integration, requires a focus on providing career information early, making that career information very clear in terms of providing a way for young women to see themselves in the fields we are talking about. That means the use of role models, it means the use of lots of exploration. We have seen very good examples of programs in the school-to-work system where there were career exploration activities that took young women out into the field or that had role models, who were women and men in the occupations that tended to be traditional for the other sex, in talking about their work, getting young women and men out into the workplace where they could see a more sex integrated workplace than perhaps their schools were. All of that exposure, we think, is extremely important.

Another thing that we have seen is that teachers and administrators themselves often have fairly sex segregated notions of what the fields are. That, in fact, often the workplace is less sex segregated than the teacher and administrators themselves have seen, and so getting teachers and administrators out into the workplace in the areas where sex integration is important has been a strategy and a way to make sure that they have a chance to really do a better job of educating the students themselves.

Clearly, another issue that is a gender issue in the school-to-work system is dealing with **sexual harassment**, whether we are talking about sexual harassment of students by teachers or staff or by other students. An impor-

tant part of the school-to-work system is making sure that the school-to-work programs are free of sexual harassment and preventing that to the extent possible.

Then the final thing is the reality that we have many teen parents who are students, but particularly **teen moms**, and making sure that they have access to school-to-work programs and then the appropriate supportive services to be able to stay in those programs.

Now, what can we do about some of the things that I've just described? I think one of the things that we've learned that's so critical in this process is to do an analysis of how a particular school district or school program is doing. Doing an analysis of how the program is, in fact, serving young women is a key part of the process. We recommend that a school district or a state should use either an outsider – and I don't mean by that necessarily some national expert, but someone who can help bring fresh eyes into the process of looking at how the system is operating – or if not an outsider, because of resource issues, than an inside team of people who represent the system with some expertise on the issue of gender equity. Perhaps that team could be put together by the state's gender equity coordinator or that person might serve on the team.

In any case, taking a look at how a particular district or a school-to-work program is functioning and what the barriers are in making a program receptive and open to young women is the first step. We think it's very useful for that kind of analysis to come up with a formal report, and that the report really talks about the barriers that have been identified. The report could include the responses of students, parents, teachers and administrators, but I think that creating a formal report on the subject really helps build accountability for making change.

We have found that once that kind of a report is put in place, it's possible then to generate some action items to identify some of the barriers that were found and to move carefully through, barrier by barrier, making the difference one at a time. One of the things that we've discovered as we've done this work around the country is that often when we are trying to work in a particular district, people in the school-to-work program will say, "We really can't do anything about this because we find that the schools that are sending people into the school-to-work program aren't really providing the right kind of counseling for the students," or "We can't really do anything about this because we don't have parent support." Well, the truth of the matter is that in fixing the problem of gender equity, you can start anywhere. You can start with working with the parents, working with the schools that are sending students, or with making the program itself more acceptable and receptive to girls themselves. Any one of those

barriers is one that you could take on and solve.

We think that it's really important to understand that this isn't one of those things that you solve by having a one-day workshop and think that it's taken care of. It has to be the kind of process in which the district, or administrator of a district, continues to assess how you are doing, whether integration of girls into what has been nontraditional programs is progressing or going backwards, whether the students seem to be succeeding. All of these things have to be done on an ongoing basis.

Now, that sort of leads me to resources, because I think one of the things that we've found as we've gone around the country is that there are lots of resources in the area of gender equity and that teachers and administrators frequently don't know how to access them.

We at **Wider Opportunities for Women** are one point of resource. We are available and have a trained team of consultants to do analyses of school districts or states, to help people look at how they are doing. We also are available to do things like teacher trainings and in-service work with a community or with a state. We also have a number of documents that can be of some help. We've developed in collaboration with the National Transition Network some benchmarks that can be used for finding out how a particular school district or state is doing with regard to gender, race, ethnicity, and working with youth with disabilities. We have a lot of videos and guides that are available to help present nontraditional occupations to young women and men, and we think that that is often a way to help young people picture themselves working in other kinds of fields. We've also developed some assessment tools to help young women consider nontraditional occupations, and I think what I'd like to do is give you a contact person at WOW and her address, telephone number and fax number and then give you some other resources as well. The person at WOW that you would contact to find out more about the services that we have available is Mary Sandy (phonetic), she's the Deputy Director for National Programs at (202) 638-3143, and her fax number is (202) 638-4885.

Another resource is **Girls Count**, an organization in Denver, Colorado. The program coordinator there is Jonlyn Wissen (phonetic) and they have been developing a wonderful guide called "Making Girls Count in School-to-Work Programs," which will be published in March. They have also developed some curriculum guides for teachers and educators to use with working with young girls in assessing their futures and making career plans. That document is called "Focus On Your Future."

Another resource is the **National Women's Law Center** and the contact person there is Verna Williams (pho-

netic). They have also developed some materials for school-to-work programs and have done both speaking and analysis work on girls in school-to-work programs. They are at 11 DuPont Circle in Washington, DC at (202) 588-5180.

And finally, the **Institute for Women in Trades, Technology and Science**, which is at 3010 Wisconsin Avenue Northwest in Washington, DC, 20016. The contact person there is Donna Milgram (phonetic) and her phone number is (202) 686-7275.

All of these organizations are available to do some consulting in school-to-work programs. Many of them, in addition to WOW, have materials that can be of use and I think can really be of great help. But most accessible to every one of you are the sex equity or gender equity coordinators in the vocational education systems in your states. Often they have put together resource libraries that can be of help and have done both teacher training and worked in the school-to-work systems themselves. I think they can often be of great help to a system trying to increase gender equity.

We are frequently asked by programs which are trying hard to recruit young women and already have a set of primarily male teachers and the students at the moment are primarily male, "How do they begin to make young women think that this is a place for them?" There are a couple of things that we particularly recommend.

One is that in a program like that it is really important to **identify role models** – women who are working in the field – and to bring those role models into the career days or career information sessions that are done with young women and their parents about the school-to-work programs so that it's very clear that there are women who are succeeding in the fields that we are talking about.

Another thing that we've found to be very useful is to then set up some kind of **mentoring** for young women who are considering entering that field or going into that program so that they have a chance while they are trying to make the decision to have somebody to talk to who is female about the kinds of work that they might go into if they followed into that school-to-work program.

Finally, another issue that has come up a lot is... I've had a number of school-to-work folks tell me that when they went to try to create workplace settings for some of the women who are in their programs that the employers have tended to put those young women into more sex stereotypical placements. That has really been a problem for them. I think we've worked with a number of programs to help them present to employers the kinds of placements that they are really looking for their young women and to try to **help the employers make the placement** work better. We had a very interesting thing happen in a particular

area of Maine where a school-to-work employer coordinator said that he was in a nontraditional field, and when he had trained to work in his field, he had had about a third women in his class. When he went to seek students from the school-to-work program to work in his worksite, he was absolutely surprised that there were no girls in the program. He specifically said that he had volunteered to try to talk to young women in that particular school about moving into that field and why it was such a good one for young women. So, I think it's really important to realize that employers can help take the lead in this process, and need to be persuaded.

Shauna McDonald: Does anybody have any comment to that or questions or any experiences with regard to school-to-work and gender equity issues?

Participant: Cindy, this is Barb Schuler (phonetic) from Wisconsin. I was going to ask about one of the points you brought up earlier. You mentioned that you are finding a great many young women are in the lower paying end of very traditional fields for them. Do you have any idea or specifics on what's causing that? I'm guessing, as you mentioned, it might be that the staff is aware of other options, but once you get down to the workplace something else is happening, because they are not becoming aware of those at that point. So, do you have some thoughts on what we might do to address that?

Cindy Marano: Well, one of the things that I realized pretty quickly as I began to interview teachers in the more traditional fields was that lots of times they structured their curriculum around the occupations that they knew best. So, yes, I think it is really critical to invest in teachers really getting out and having some experiences in the newer fields that are a part of their own particular occupational area.

The other thing that teachers have told me is that they have been working and doing field placements or worksite placements in their fields for, in some cases, quite a long time. They have a whole set of people that they have worked with in the past that they know, and it's easiest for them to continue to make their placements in those same fields.

So, I think another thing that we have to realize is that creating worksite experiences takes time, and that we need to make sure that teachers are continuing to develop new kinds of placements and not just using the same ones on a regular basis. It was interesting because I am particularly thinking of some teachers in the health area. They continued to place students in the same departments of hospitals on an ongoing basis rather than looking at some of the other departments within that hospital that might be possible. As an administrator or as somebody on a team who is looking at the way in which a school-to-work sys-

tem was serving young women, I would want to look at the types of worksite placements and whether, in fact, they represent where the growth occupations are in that community or not.

Participant (Barb Schuler - Wisconsin): Thank you.

Cindy Marano: Sure. Do we have some other questions? Anybody have a problem or a struggle that they've had in the past that they would like to have some feedback or ideas on?

Participant: Hi. This is Dan Fletcher (phonetic) in Washington. One of my biggest stumbling blocks is raising the self-esteem of these girls to get them to apply for these type of jobs. Are there any resources, videos, things like that, that I can use out there and where can I find those?

Cindy Marano: Sure. The first thing is if you are talking about videos that are about women and girls in more nontraditional occupations, Wider Opportunities for Women has a whole set of materials that you can order, as well as some videos themselves. We have a video that's called "Getting the Job Done" that introduces women and girls to seven nontraditional occupational areas. We also have a video that looks at nontraditional occupations in a more rural area, that's called "Consider a Non-Traditional Job." Both of these videos, by the way, have guides that can be used by teachers with ideas for how to create discussion in classes and how to work with young women.

Another thing that might be of some interest to you is that we've developed a kind of assessment tool that asks both girls and women about things that they've commonly done that can be translated into nontraditional occupations. I think one of things that often happens is that girls think that they just don't have what it takes to succeed in a nontraditional job, so this assessment tool is one that rather than screen people out, tends to screen people in. It's really focused on your interests and transferable things that you might have done in the past, from hobbies or interests that you might have. And, actually, that assessment tool is readily available through WOW. I think we've done a version that even makes it accessible to people who have reading and math skills below the sixth grade level.

You raised the issue of self-esteem. I think that trying to provide supports, whether those are support groups or whether they are mentors, is a really critical part of building self-esteem and helping a young woman make a more nontraditional choice. So, there are a number of sex equity coordinators or gender equity coordinators in the country who have developed lists of women who work in nontraditional fields who can be contacted by teachers who want to use role models or by students themselves. I know that many gender equity coordinators have done that kind

of work and you might find that kind of similar list in your state.

Shauna McDonald: I have a question, Cindy. It was something that I had observed in doing state visits is the peer pressure among students as to acceptable jobs. I remember specifically talking with an instructor of auto mechanics, and he said that he did have one girl, but she got teased so much that she finally dropped out of the class.

Cindy Marano: I think that's a pretty common problem, and I think that one of the things that needs to happen is that the teachers in school-to-work programs who find themselves with a single girl student really need to have some support in the kinds of things that they can do to help that young woman stay. Providing role models is really key, but I think the teacher needs to take a lead role in making sure that young women don't get harassed out of a program like that one. I know that that particular teacher and many other teachers who are in the same boat around the country really feel like they don't have the resources that they need to help that young woman. Then what they're teaching includes stories of successful women, really modeling with the young woman student that she can succeed, and making sure that the young men get the message is a key part of really making that work more successfully.

Shauna McDonald: One of the points that you brought up was in terms of visibility. That makes me think the materials that we use to promote school-to-work, as well as all different kinds of things within schools. We need to be conscious of representing women in nontraditional roles, as well as folks with disabilities, things that incorporate all different types of images.

Cindy Marano: I think that's really right, and again, many of the states which have developed pictures and posters are using gender equity dollars that are readily available to teachers and administrators. So you see that classrooms have pictures of girls doing nontraditional work, and the school itself has pictures of both boy and girl students in their program fliers.

I remember working in a particular school district that was really working hard at trying to introduce girls to nontraditional occupations, and they had prepared a really wonderful summer school orientation for both boys and girls to a wide variety of jobs. And the flier that they sent out had only boys' pictures and nobody even noticed it. It was such a usual process, that here they were, getting ready to publish that flier with the best intentions in the world and nobody saw that there were just boys' pictures.

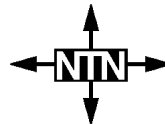
In conclusion, I think we have seen wonderful examples of school-to-work programs that are integrating girls broadly throughout the occupational spectrum. We've

seen teachers doing incredibly creative and interesting things to make sure that all their students, boys and girls, are looking at the highest wage and best jobs. We know that it's really possible to do this well. We know that there are resources out there, both material resources and people who can help. If you are in a school system where you feel like the process just isn't working very well for young women, call one of the resources and get some of the materials, because it really can make a big difference.

Shauna McDonald: Great. Well, I want to thank you very much, Cindy, for taking the time to do this with us. I also want to thank the participants for being on this call. If you'd like more information, you can give me a call at (612) 626-8155. Thank you.

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