



Transcript of Conference Call Presentation

The School-to-Work Intermediary Project

presented by

Steve Trippe, Director, New Ways Workers National

Vinny Spera, Senior Program Manager, National Alliance of Business

September 29, 1999

Mary Mack: My name is Mary Mack and I'm with the National Transition Alliance (NTA). We are very happy today to sponsor a conference call on the School-to-Work Intermediary Project (STWIP) with Steve Trippe from New Ways Workers and Vinny Spera from the National Alliance of Business (NAB). Both organizations are partners in this initiative along with Jobs for the Future.

The presenters will give some background on the Intermediary Project and how it is serving all students. Following their presentation, there will be an opportunity for questions and answers.

With that, I'm going to turn it over to Steve.

Steve Trippe: Thank you. This is Steve Trippe and I am the Executive Director of New Ways to Work and National Director for New Ways Worker National, our project that focuses on youth activity in the area of career development, school-to-work, youth employment, etc.

I am going to do a brief overview of the School-to-Work Intermediary Project and the functions framework that we have established for intermediaries that are serving school-to-work partnerships around the country. Then, Vinny Spera from NAB is going to talk about some specific examples of intermediaries that are serving the needs of all students.

The Intermediary Project is funded by the National School-to-Work office. We are in about

our ninth month of an eighteen-month effort to strengthen and advance the sustainability of school-to-work systems by heightening the visibility of and strengthening local intermediaries that are serving school-to-work partnerships. There are a lot of partners in the project. Lead partners are Jobs for the Future and New Ways Workers, and additional partners include the Bay Area School-to-Career Action Network, which is a regional school-to-work serving organization in the greater San Francisco Bay Area; the Boston Private Industry Council, which is a local intermediary in the Boston area; the Corporation for Business, Work, and Learning, which is the technical assistance and training organization in the State of Massachusetts; the National Alliance of Business; the United States Chamber of Commerce; and the Working for America Institute out of the AFL-CIO.

These partners have come together to focus on five general aspects through the work plan. The area of research on best practices is the first aspect. Through the research, we have done extensive surveying and interviewing with ten intermediary organizations around the country that are connecting to and serving school-to-work partnerships and have developed case studies about those ten sites. We have also developed an activity list — shorter snapshots if you will — of fifty additional organizations and partnerships that are conducting specific

activities that address specific issues of intermediary work.

The second aspect is the development of tools and a design framework for communities and organizations interested in developing intermediaries. This has been a primary focus for the first six or seven months of the project. This effort builds on best practices around the country and the experiences of the partner organizations and others to develop tools, assessment materials, work plans, strategic planning tools, supporting tools, and documentation to help communities go through the process of thinking about and developing intermediary organizations and intermediary structures in their communities.

The third aspect is to provide direct technical assistance to twenty-five sites around the country. We selected the twenty-five sites in January or February of this year. Over 150-200 different organizations responded to our initial survey. We then asked for some follow-up information from a number of them and selected twenty-five sites. Since we began the project, every time we do a presentation, more and more organizations or collaborations of organizations that are performing intermediary functions are surfacing. Technical assistance is taking the form of the application of the tools, processes, and methodologies. Each site has a coordinator that is working with it and the sites are coming together in a variety of different ways to learn about the project, to work with each other, to develop a peer-to-peer learning network, and to work specifically in teams on strategic planning and development activities to implement or improve practice at the local level. We brought representatives together from all the teams back in May. There have been periodic ad hoc meetings

with representatives, the most recent being the day before yesterday at a NAB conference. A number of the sites were there to just share information and ideas. In addition, we have a large team-planning institute scheduled in Kansas City in October where teams of anywhere from five to twelve folks from each of the different select communities are coming together to share and receive information and develop strategic plans for the next phase of work.

The fourth aspect of the work plan is to ensure that there are materials and a strategy for the inclusion of all students in the work of intermediaries as they move forward. Vinny will talk more specifically about how we are doing that in a few minutes. One of the things that I want to emphasize is that we are seeing a great deal of success in the area of entities or programs that are serving special populations — whether they be out-of-school youth, special needs youth, folks in academies and programs, gifted and talented, etc. Rather than operating as discrete programmatic entities, they are folding into a larger all-students agenda where you have a combination of resources, effort, and maintenance of effort and high standards for all students in a true all-students methodology. But again, these programs are ensuring that there are pieces of the work that address the special needs of the populations that need to be served within the context of the overall agenda.

The fifth and last piece of the work plan is to do national forums and conduct dissemination activities. The way we are doing that is through national conferences, calls like this, and a variety of other means, both paper and electronically based. We are building a web site to distribute the materials, tools, thinking, information about the case

studies and snapshots, etc. When that web site is up and running — they are targeting mid-November for completion — all of the folks who are on the NTA's mailing list will receive a postcard announcing the launching of that site.

The work plan is well under way. We are driving toward some very specific outcomes to strengthen and accelerate the efforts of institutions that are linking schools and community partners in those twenty-five communities. We want to see real growth in those communities. They are focusing on different aspects of intermediary activity while improving the climate for and the capacity of local partnerships to create and strengthen sustainable intermediaries. Our belief is that the intermediary function at the local, regional, and state level is the function that needs to be maintained by future resource support, whether that comes from a combination of local funds, state funds, or potentially even federal funds. One of our goals in this project is to really demonstrate how effective intermediaries are in bringing together different resources at the local level to serve students, teachers, schools, and systems. To increase the legitimacy of and just provide a higher visibility of the importance of the intermediary activities and entities at the local level is another outcome objective.

So, we have identified a number of different organizations. We have created the tools, case studies, and activity snapshots. We are working with the sites. We are pushing towards an institute coming up here in October. And we are in the process of forming an electronic national network of intermediary organizations. With the launch of the web site, there will be a way for intermediary organizations across the country to become part of this network. The purpose of the network will be to

share lessons, to provide a peer learning network across the country of folks who are pursuing this strategy for school-to-career, to potentially share lessons learned on sustainability strategies, and to begin to build on a national basis a call for continued support for and maintenance of intermediary activities and intermediary organizations around the country.

As we have gone through and looked at all of the work of the organizations we have identified and the experience of the partners, we have gotten down to really thinking about the functions that an intermediary performs rather than activities that are conducted by an organization. The thinking is that there are four broad functions that a school-to-work intermediary performs in any community. The first is to convene the local leadership to ensure that the right players are at the table and are nurtured, brought along, and really driving the effort at the local level. The convening function is bringing together the right parties — education, labor, employers, community, government, parents, students, etc. — so that the leadership capacity is there and there is a solid base for strategic planning and development at the local level.

Secondly, the intermediary needs to encourage policies and practices that really promote and sustain effective school-to-career practices at the local level by looking at ways in which local, state, and federal policy can allow for the continuation of effective school-to-career pedagogy over the next millennium. The convening body and the intermediary need to look at policy, practice, and promoting activities — whether they be legislative, regulatory, or collaborative — that can be vested in the local intermediary.

Thirdly, intermediaries need to be setting

measurable goals and objectives, measuring the effectiveness of their strategies, and using program data to modify program procedure to ensure the quality and impact of local efforts. It is really a systems-wide effort. What are the things we are going to look at? How do we know that we're succeeding? What do we need to do in order to address the issues that we see in a better fashion? The issue of evaluation and quality is in the forefront of the work of the intermediary.

The fourth area of brokering and providing services really breaks up into eight different areas. There is a service set. This does not necessarily have to be performed by the entity or the strategic intermediary entity, but it needs to be performed in a way that is collaborative and consistent with the messages that are being sent by the intermediary. We refer to them as third-party broker functions.

The first area is to create employer and workplace demand, to do the marketing, outreach, and education that needs to happen in the workplace community to convince them that they need to be involved, to continue to bring them to the table, to coordinate and consolidate their marketing efforts, etc.

The second is to provide services that address employer needs; to make sure that we are providing training and support to work-site supervisors and that we are matching the programs in a local area with the economic development activity that's going on in that area. We need to really make a discrete effort to address the things that it takes to get employers to participate. Some places are doing employer-of-record services, some are doing employer-to-employer outreach programs. Others are building resource centers on liability issues, child labor law, etc., to support employers in the

process.

The third area is to improve the quality of workplace experiences for all youth, whatever that entails. When we are putting young people into the workplace for workplace-based learning activity, career awareness, and career exposure activities, a core function of the brokers in those communities is to, in a consistent way, do the things that you need to do to improve the quality of that experience. Whether it's getting and providing additional support, getting information back to the classroom, or helping to design the supports that go on in the classroom to provide skills-specific training, those kinds of things need to happen. Youth need to be connected to appropriate experiences, wherever they are. We aren't looking at just one discrete activity at one point in time. The role of the broker is to look at sequencing work-based learning activities, training, and academic enrichment activities over time. Assisting young people in the connection to appropriate experiences, whether it be to go to community college, four-year college, into the workplace, or other training opportunities, is critical.

The fourth and fifth areas are two activities focused on the education and training community. The first is to build awareness and buy-in among educators and community partners as to why the school-to-career pedagogy is the right way to go. This entails building awareness and support and looking into different frames on the education side, whether it be small, discrete learning communities; contextual learning activities; staff development activities; etc. The second activity is to provide the training and services to the educational and training institutions, whether that be providing placements for teachers and others in the workplace, specific

staff development activities, etc. Regardless, there is a discrete set of services that are targeted to educational and training institutions.

The sixth and seventh areas are two systems activities. The first involves being the communications link among all the different programs and places that are working with young people — whether it be folks at the work site, folks in a particular program, the classroom teacher, the parent, or the student. The second involves the communication and data management of what goes on over time, a critical and important ingredient of an intermediary's activity.

The eighth and final area involves creating a system focused on quality, evaluation, and improvement. Data needs to be collected, set up, and evaluated against measurable goals for the specific purpose of improving the program, not just to satisfy an external evaluator or provide the reporting that you need to get your funding, but to measure and improve performance over time and create new strategies.

In each of those different areas, we have very discrete sets of additional activities that make sense. We are really framing the project around two things: first, there are a set of strategic and brokered service functions that any intermediary in any community in this country needs to focus on. They need to provide balanced work in all those areas, whether it's single entity or multiple entity. And, frankly, most of the places we are seeing are accomplishing that full suite of functions through collaborative efforts with others.

The second is to focus on states of development and not to try to go from a disconnected planning or discovery phase where you are really finding out what's going on to full scale in one big giant step.

Intermediaries really need to look at an incremental approach to moving through stages of development from discovery, through planning, into start-up and implementation activities, to systems improvement activities. At that point, they can bring more partners on board and continue the process of planning, improving the program, piloting new activities, etc. Finally, over time, you get to a place where you are approaching scale in some communities.

A full range of different kinds of organizations that exist in communities are performing the role of lead entity in the intermediary structure at the local level. There are independent non-profits and they probably make up the largest segment of whom we have identified. In addition, there are Private Industry Councils Workforce Development Boards; Chambers of Commerce; some local school-to-career partnerships, though not many (although each of these entities works closely with the school-to-career partnership); labor organizations; industry trade associations; and, in some cases, schools and school districts (but we are finding that the schools and school districts that are performing these functions are beginning to look at the option, if they haven't already, of forming a separate independent nonprofit to discretely handle the brokering activities). In most cases, collaborative entities are doing this work where it's a partnership between an independent nonprofit, a set of schools, a school-to-career partnership, a chamber of commerce, and a workforce board. All of them bring to the table what they do well and then divide up the work.

There are two customer sets: the schools, community-based organizations, and the students on one side; and the lawyers and workforce partners

on the other. However, there still needs to be a common language, common tools, common expectations, etc.

So, that is the project in a nutshell. There is written material we can disseminate that fully describes some of these areas. Essentially what we are doing is a combination of research, demonstration, and technical assistance. We are finding incredible enthusiasm among the twenty-five sites we are working with and others around the country, primarily for connecting with each other and learning about the work that they are conducting in order to improve local practice and also to be able to provide a sustainable infrastructure that really sustains this connecting component of school-to-career.

At this point, I'll pass you off to Vinny.

Vinny Spera: Thanks, Steve. As Mary said before, I'm Vinny Spera from the National Alliance of Business. Before I tell you a little bit about the role we have played in the project in bringing folks together around the all-students piece of the project, I just wanted to mention the material Steve went through. He went through it very quickly, but there is a lot of richness in the detail and the thought put behind that work. Rather than just have it done as an overview, Steve, can you tell folks where they might be able to get more information on it and have a chance to look at it a bit more thoroughly?

Steve Trippe: The easiest way to get information would be to pull it off the web site at <http://www.studio180.com/stwip>.

Vinny Spera: I would really encourage folks at the very least to wait until the web site comes up and pull that material down. Steve had mentioned that there was enormous enthusiasm across the

country in the twenty-five sites we are working with directly. We as partners, and other partners in the project, have continued to share the insights and resources that we have had access to, and they have proven to be a very useful and valuable series of tools as "process outline" for individuals and communities across the country. I didn't want that to be lost because I know we are now going to turn to really focus on the all-students piece.

The purpose of me going second was to really emphasize that the all-students piece needs to be part of the broader framework of not just the project but also any examination of the role of intermediaries in school-to-work and school-to-careers, rather than set aside as a national or local effort.

I would like to offer some background on the National Alliance of Business for those of you who aren't familiar with us. We are a partner in the School-to-Work Intermediary Project as one of a range of our activities around school-to-careers. NAB itself is a business organization focused on the employer role across the "knowledge supply chain," being how different individuals at different ages and levels of development obtain the skills and knowledge they require to succeed both in life and in work, progressing from primary education on into college and then into careers and continuing education. We see school-to-careers at the center of that change as it provides the bridge from education on into continued learning and employment.

We are also a partner in the National Transition Alliance. For those of you who don't know, we worked with NTA to develop a resource guide, the *Employer Toolkit*, for employers and service providers in serving youth with disabilities and school-to-careers. At the very least, I encourage

those of you who are interested to take a look at that resource. (A print version can be downloaded from NTA's web site at <http://www.dssc.org/nta/html/publicat.htm> or a hard copy can be ordered from the Academy for Educational Development, 202.884.8182, nta@aed.org).

For the Intermediary Project, we are full partners, meaning that we were part of the process of developing the background and tools and material, although I would certainly recognize that most of the primary thinking, resources, and work behind that effort was led by New Ways and Steve's team. As part of the effort, we are also providing direct assistance to two of the twenty-five sites.

We also are the lead on the serving all students aspect of the project. This aspect has two main activities. First, we have developed a virtual advisory network of leaders from across the country who are informed on and knowledgeable of serving all students through school-to-careers. Rather than trying to convene that group, we have connected them electronically through e-mail and an on-line community on the National Employer Leadership Council web site, through which we have had continuing discussions about how the project can best serve all students through school-to-career. We shared with them the extensive tools and materials that the project has developed in addition to the information on the functions and stages that Steve has mentioned. Underneath that information is a series of self-assessment and planning tools that we are coaching the twenty-five sites through. We have shared these tools with members of this network to examine how we can best ensure that the tools help intermediaries address and serve all students.

I want to invite any of you to participate in the advisory network. If you have any interest, please

give me a call or send me an e-mail. My e-mail is sperav@nab.com, and my phone is 202.289.2849. I am sure most of you know quite a bit about this issue and we would certainly welcome your input and participation in that network.

Right now, we are engaged in a discussion on how to most effectively share information on what resources are available to intermediaries and communities to help them along in their efforts to serve all students. That has been a very challenging conversation because there are so many different approaches. I'll get to that in a second.

The second piece of the all-students part of the project has to do with the research aspect of the project which Steve mentioned briefly. Part of the research aspect is pulling together fifty "activity snapshots," identifying discrete activities of intermediaries as they perform the different functions that Steve outlined earlier. We have prepared four snapshots focusing on intermediaries that are serving all students in their efforts. I'll mention one of those in a moment.

That's a bit of a background on who we are and our role in the all-students piece. What we have found, particularly in this compiling of resources aspect of our work, is a continuing challenge to find a balance between serving and addressing the needs of all students universally and ensuring that students from different special populations are included versus specific emphasis on a special population. We think our job is to find a common thread across serving all populations while possibly highlighting how specific populations are served, using the functions that Steve outlined as a framework. I think in this case that the brokering functions Steve outlined are almost more relevant than the four broad strategic functions. The operational functions

— where you serve employers, young people, educators and trainers, and support the system — are really where you have the contact with the individuals who are served by and benefit from school-to-careers opportunities.

What we are seeing in the field is that while activities do look very different on the surface, if you look closely at what services they are actually providing, they really are structured within the functions of intermediary organizations. What I'll now do is give an example of what an organization is doing looking through the lens of a specific activity, then reversing that focus and looking at it through the lens of the functions Steve outlined.

The activity snapshot that we pulled together focusing on youth with disability specifically is the Onadaga, Courtland, and Madison County Board of Cooperative Education Services (OCM BOCES). There are forty BOCES in New York State. They are linked to school districts, but provide specific services to individuals and organizations within those communities. The one we highlighted is in the Onadaga, Courtland, and Madison County region. The activity we highlighted is their use of job coaches to provide one-on-one guidance to help students succeed in the workplace. Job coaches go out and connect directly with employers to create demand to hire these students. Once they place the students at the job, they serve as coaches to the students and work directly with the employer to make sure that everyone is benefiting from that relationship. Before the student is even placed, they go through a capability or skills assessment. Rather than focus on all functions that might be required on all jobs, they highlight and emphasize two or three specific tasks at a time so that students are able to make incre-

mental progress. As they make progress, they are able to go on and succeed in the jobs in which they have been placed. They meet regularly as a team with the student and the employer to work through any difficult issues. Both the employer and the job coach perform regular evaluations of the student. Most importantly, expectations and student abilities are all identified prior to the job placement, leading to fantastic results.

This past school year, 95% of the 150 students that had job coaches through BOCES are now in college or working. Most of the employers in the program have been participants for twelve or more years. Clearly, it's an excellent example of an intermediary taking stock of the needs of their young people and their employers and providing needed services.

With respect to the intermediary project, what we would then do is take this example and look at it through the lens of the "function." So, rather than start by saying OCM BOCES has job coaches, we could say OCM BOCES serves as an intermediary by connecting youth to appropriate experiences and improving the quality of those efforts over time through the use of job coaches. Similarly, rather than saying OCM BOCES job coaches work with employers to smooth over trouble spots, you can look at it through the "function" lens by saying OCM BOCES is working to create demand in the employer community by conducting marketing and outreach to employers, then providing direct services to employers to meet that demand by facilitating the relationships between the employer and the young person.

It seems like a small distinction, but it is a very important one to really ensure that the all-students piece is part of the broader agenda. Starting from

the focus on functions, rather than the focus on activity, helps communities address needs and provide services systemically rather than as random acts of improvement.

A similar example comes from the Shelby City Schools in North Carolina. They have a project called TASSEL which stands for Teaching All Students Skills for Employment in Life. It is a very impressive school-to-careers model where students with disabilities have mainstream academic classes coupled with occupational training as well as work-based experience. The vocational training is not only industry-skill specific but also focuses on the broad workplace behavior and “responsibility” skills that we know the students can develop through school-to-careers.

Again, if you look at it through the “functions” of an intermediary, it really shows that the focus of that initiative is to serve youth by connecting them to appropriate experiences and working to improve the quality of that experience.

Our challenge, and what I’d really like to move to in this discussion, is how to capture that emphasis on functions rather than specific activities serving specific populations through the work of the project. Again, we are engaged in a fairly extensive process in which we are pulling together lists and lists of resources available for helping to serve all students. We have print documents, videos, guidebooks, and web sites, and are really struggling to figure out how to structure that list. Do we structure it by population served? Do we structure it by function? Do we make the entire list available? How do we conduct any sort of quality check to make sure the information we are listing or compiling is of a high quality and useful to the sites we are serving? More importantly, how do we share that

information broadly? We know we have an obvious network in the twenty-five sites that are participating in the project, but that’s only a very small percentage of the individuals and organizations working on these kinds of issues throughout the country.

So, I would propose we move to a bit of a discussion. First of all, let’s see if we have any questions either on the project or on the all-students piece that I just outlined. I would really appreciate any thoughts you might have on the questions I have just posed. Of course, I again invite all of you to participate in that virtual advisory network as we continue to move those efforts forward. Thank you.

Svetlana (California): Hi. This is Svetlana from East Bay Learns in California. My only comment at this point really would be to strike that balance between special needs populations and all students in general. I would think that a useful way to do that would be to take that function concept in terms of looking at lowest common denominator concepts. What we are really talking about is meeting individual student needs. High achieving kids often have all kinds of special needs of their own. We could say that all kids are special needs kids on some level.

In other words, we are talking about meeting unusual students’ needs, no matter what their unique barriers or strengths are. If we could take the conversation toward the concept of more individualized learning, which is just an extension of the student-centered learning that we’re all talking about in the mainstream educational community, then it becomes a de-politicized issue. In fact, it then allows us to bring in all of the intermediary organizations in a way that they become

service providers to all kinds of kids. The gifted programs for kids in Berkeley also becomes an intermediary for providing extended services for kids and so forth.

In fact, we just did a day-long, statewide PathFinder workshop yesterday. We are going to be customizing PathFinder to reflect all kinds of student affiliations with different kinds of intermediary and brokering organizations to reflect the very fact that schools will be the primary source of instruction and education for kids, but that there are going to be numerous other organizations that are going to be enhancing what the school can offer, including the entire employer community.

When we start to talk about unique individual student needs, irrespective of whether they are at risk or whatever, then the conversation can be less political and more authentic.

Vinny Spera: I think that's a good point. I don't know if I would have a direct response other than some thoughts to what you pose.

One of the issues that the project struggled with, and Steve might want to follow up and give some more information on this because he was a part of those discussions, is how to de-politicize the issue and talk about the unique needs of all students. There also comes a point where you have to take stock and assess whether all students in your system are truly being served and recognized.

I know a distinct decision was made not to make lists of special populations, which I think gets to the point that you need to look at all students generally. The question remains, however, as to what sort of resources and structures need to be in place to ensure that all students are included as part of that agenda rather than focusing on the students who are more likely to succeed and moving away

from the harder to serve students. Part of the all-students piece of the project is not just the youth with disabilities aspect, but other work with at-risk, out-of-school, and disadvantaged youth who are often left out of that equation if you move it up to too high of a level. That's where the struggle continues to occur.

Steve, do you have anything to add?

Steve Trippe: You've outlined the challenge in a good way. There are lists and lists of constituencies in every one of the service sectors — employers and workplaces, schools, community-based organizations, training institutions, as well as different types of young people that one might want to include if you were to make a list. In an effort to be inclusive, we made the strategic decision not to frame it in any other way than using the word "all."

That being said, in the goals, priorities, and language of how an intermediary talks about itself and what it does, it needs to have specific and discrete targets and goals around both the types of institutions and types of young people that it serves to make sure that its strategies are effective in serving all of those young people. The difference between a singular program and an intermediary is that the first is a set of services that are discretely focused only on young people from a specific academy, for example, and the second is a full-blown intermediary that is serving students in academies, vocational educational programs, senior class projects and is also a coordinating activity for the WorkAbility project, the Transition Partnership Program (CA Special Ed), the Regional Occupational Program (CA voc ed), Voc Ed programs, and Job Training Partnership Act programs. The intermediary really is the place where all the programmatic and categorical activities, as well as the set of

programs at the school site or community site level, come together. The intermediary makes those connections on behalf of all of the programs and projects. So, you go from a situation where you have got the direct delivery of service to a young person being delivered by the program and moving it forward to the connection piece being served by this third party entity. The challenge again is the balance. How do you make sure that you don't lose focus on "all" when you say "all" and ensure that the needs of special populations of young people and all students are really being served? You do that through your measurement and evaluation systems. Are you measuring what you are doing and do you have strategies embedded within your outreach that talk about how those young people can be served?

Mary Mack: Steve, I think that part of what you are saying is that the issue of all students, including youth with disabilities, has to be addressed in the conceptual model from the beginning, not as an add-on. So, each constituent, each group, has got to be there from the beginning and part of the core constituency so that you're not saying, "We'll do this population now and that population later." Unless each population is part of the core constituency and you look at the special considerations that need to go with various populations, including kids with disabilities, you're going to have problems. You will not be serving all youth within your system, specifically those with disabilities or severe disabilities. There is a prevailing myth that kids with disabilities have their own programs and systems and we do not need to think about them.

Steve Trippe: The focus really is on infrastructure development first.

Mary Mack: Correct.

Steve Trippe: Remember those four functions of convening, policy, evaluation, and brokered services. In those broad areas, the evaluation methodologies need to ensure that we are really bringing together all of the different constituencies on all different sides of the equation. It is difficult for people to suddenly go from zero to being all things to all people. The encouragement in the phases and stages of development is to work with the core and ready partners. In many communities, it includes folks that represent the special needs populations. But in some communities, it may include students with disabilities but not include focus on out-of-school youth.

As your evaluation matrices are set up, you say, "Okay, these are the people that we need to bring on and involve in this conversation." In the best of all worlds, would you bring everybody to the table first and design and develop a system? Absolutely. Functionally, that's not how it's shaking out. Folks are working together with sets of core and ready partners and then working to bring others into the system as they develop its efficacy over time.

Bill Leavell (Michigan): My name is Bill Leavell and I'm in Michigan and work for the Michigan Rehab Agency. One of our challenges here, in terms of data, is trying to get some consistency across disciplines. It's just a headache. Everybody has got their own system and they are not compatible in any way. What is your idea about strategies for developing consistent, compatible data elements? Who is in charge? Who is responsible for the overall collection and use of data? It's just a nightmare here.

Vinny Spera: I think that builds directly on the response of Steve and Mary together on that last point. Yes, you would like everybody from every

community and every organization at the table at the very beginning to map out your goals, objectives, and data collection process, but it's never too late to bring in another partner and another organization within the community to be a part of that process. If we had the stages assessment tool, you'd see that as part of that process you are continually looping back to earlier stages of development as new partners become involved.

At the same time, I think the point is that, at a base, no given community should have a system for youth with disabilities or out-of-school youth or any other population. You should have a system of education and training or school-to-careers or whatever you are calling it locally, then as organizations who focus on those specific populations become part of that system, you loop back to an earlier part in the process and reexamine your goals and process. At that point, together you can come up with common data points.

That also builds directly onto the functions piece of the project. If you have that central group, be it a single entity or a consortium of entities who work together and are responsible for identifying and spelling out exactly what those data points are, that consortium or lead intermediary then figures out how each of the operational functions will be provided. So, the idea of the operational functions — the direct services to employers, young people, educators and trainers, and the system — is not designed to be provided by any one entity, but to be provided by any number of entities coordinated through a central structure. The key is really finding out who is already taking the lead in the community, then linking up with that lead. Once you make that link, you can loop back to a stage where you can reexamine and start building your goals

from stage one.

Steve Trippe: The only way to get there is if folks, program by program, at the local, regional, or state level, realize that the only way to sustain this activity and provide broader connections for more young people in more meaningful ways is by working together rather than working separately. By getting to that awareness piece in a discovery phase — that we're not doing a good job with the employer community, we aren't doing a good job connecting school-to-school, community-to-school, and we're not doing a good job for students who go from program to program of linking those program activities toward one set of common goals — you can begin to identify the issues that you are talking about and have some impact. Some of those data element decisions are driven by local decision only and you can take care of them. Others are driven by categorical requirements and what you need to do is build an advocacy base to be able to go to the funding sources and say, "Look, we have got this agreement that we are trying to do this at the local level. Here is what we are suggesting as common data elements. We need you, as a categorical funder, to consider options in terms of how you receive information." It's a huge barrier, but we are seeing some success, particularly between school-to-career, academies, voc ed, and JTPA. We have programs in terms of getting agreement on combined data elements. It will only be driven if the practitioners at the local level are saying we need to do this.

Svetlana (California): Can I chime in for a second? For those communities that are using a single database for the placement process, at least with regard to the placement functions, with technology like PathFinder, what I was saying earlier about creating multiple affiliations with

students is that it means that not only will a student be affiliated with a school but they also can be affiliated directly, for example, with the WorkAbility program, the JTPA, the One-Stop, or any number of organizations that are meeting their special needs. All of that will be collectible within the reporting function of PathFinder. So, whether it's PathFinder or any other system, if you are using any kind of internet-based system to broker the placements, I recommend when you put out your bid to those companies that they in fact have fields that can capture the multiple affiliations and needs of all of those students.

I am going to be working on putting together a subcommittee evaluation that will in fact be looking at the reporting needs of the partnerships and intermediaries and beefing up the evaluation capability of the system in order to address these kinds of issues. Those multiple fields actually do exist, at least in some form, or will be in place very shortly within systems like PathFinder, and they should exist in any system that you would purchase or begin using.

Stacy Holland (Philadelphia): If I may chime in, this is Stacy Holland from Philadelphia. We actually, in the process of building our intermediary, have made those connections. We are using a common database to track our school-to-career and Workforce Investment Act (WIA) kids, and are then linking it with other initiatives that are going on within the school district. The common data elements actually will be developed out of our youth council where all the partners across the city have been convened or are in the process of convening. They are seeking to identify what their specific requirements are, whether they be regulatory or for their own research initiative, so that we are creating

a common database that is tracking a child and their experiences across partners and across experiences.

Bill Leavell (Michigan): Is that happening at the local and state level or is that just the local level?

Stacy Holland (Philadelphia): Right now it's happening at the local level. The state is fully aware that this is what we are trying to build, more specifically in relation to our WIA initiatives. That way, we are meeting our regulatory requirements. We are also trying to move towards being on the cutting edge and not just collecting data as WIA dictates, but collecting data that expands WIA.

Our intermediary then takes on a different twist of it in a city-wide initiative that crosses several sectors. We are a little ambitious in that we are attempting to build a true youth development system across the city. The state is aware. We have not begun working with them hand-in-hand because we are still at the point of developing what the data sets and the database will look like. However, we did run a pilot this summer through our summer program through JTPA or WIA and were very successful. The state really endorsed the system and will continue to work with us as we develop what the whole thing looks like after we start making those connections.

Mary Mack: I believe, Bill, that part of your question was regarding some of the alignment even within the disability system of VR versus other agencies and the nomenclature that's used for various organizations. Is that correct?

Bill Leavell (Michigan): Yes, that's correct.

Mary Mack: If you want to give me a call, I can talk to you a little bit more and give you some state examples. My number is 612.624.7579. Minnesota is one of the states that's working on it, as is Ver-

mont.

Bill Leavell (Michigan): Thank you.

Mary Mack: I think we're coming up to the end, but I'd like you to talk a little bit more about and ask people's input on the database and resource materials that you are putting together on the students and youth with disabilities. I think that you might want some input.

Vinny Spera: Sure. Our first step in that process was to try to find as many different resources and formats as possible. As you can probably guess, we got piles and piles of information. We didn't get to all the sites directly, but wanted to see what was out there. The answer was that there is a lot out there. As we can all see in this field, there are things going on in different communities that are very similar to other communities and we'd like to be a central resource to try to avoid that duplication and share those materials. The hard part of that process is figuring out how to compile resources to help organizations focus on broad "functions." I see two potential approaches, and maybe there are more. I'd like to hear if you have any thoughts.

One is the same old way of breaking it down by special population served, which doesn't really seem to be in line with our thinking and where we're trying to move the agenda.

The other way is to do it through these functions and to somehow link the resources available to the functions of intermediaries. This would help communities, once they decide to move forward on a specific strategy, for example, to create employer demand to hire and work directly with students and teachers, by providing them with resources and tools on promoting the all-students agenda through that strategy.

So, those are the two structures. One, again, by

population and the other one by function. I would like any feedback on your thoughts on those or if you have any other suggestions. Or again, I'd invite you to join us in continuing that discussion over the coming months. I certainly would also invite you to continue to send us resources that you have in your own organizations or others that you have used that you found to be successful and helpful in your work.

Svetlana (California): Just a quick thought: I would love it to be by function. I think that's the direction we should be going in. But we could maybe do some kind of cross referencing system where you could then also pull up special populations.

Vinny Spera: Right.

Mary Mack: I think there is a way of putting together a relational database that can enable you to do both. That would be ideal.

Vinny Spera: Of course, the harder question in this discussion is how to put in a quality control for this information. We're discussing the same issue in the general project as New Ways is collecting all tools available for intermediaries, and that really starts to be quite comprehensive in terms of the sheer volume of information out there. What sort of quality control do we need? Do we have a filter where some central organization looks at all the tools? Do we assume that if a tool is presented by a respected partner or any partner or some organization, then it's a quality tool that should be included in the database? How do we establish criteria for that? The next step for us is to map out some criteria for inclusion of these resources in that resource guide or that database.

Mary Mack: We've done it both ways. We have offered opportunities for people to send in materials

and it's been very clear that these were simply things that people had sent in. Alternatively, we have also developed some criteria around resources.

I think that my preference is the second option. There is still going to be a pretty broad base of quality even when you go to an in-depth level.

Svetlana (California): I think the key would be to have a contact number for further information.

Vinny Spera: We are compiling it with contact information as well as steps on how to pick it up, whether it's on the web or some other format.

Svetlana (California): Right.

Mary Mack: Well, I think that we're out of time.

Unidentified: Can we have a contact name and number in Philadelphia for the folks that are focusing on WIA and their city-wide database initiatives?

Stacy Holland (Philadelphia): Sure. Stacy Holland. My number is 215.875.3562.

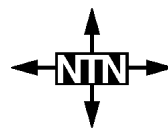
Mary Mack: And this is Mary Mack. I want to thank our presenters for giving this great information.

Attachment

School-to-Work Intermediary Functions, adapted by The School-to-Work Intermediary Project partners from copyrighted materials developed by New Ways Workers National, revised May 1999.

National Transition Alliance audio teleconferences are coordinated by the National Transition Network.

This transcript is copyright free. Please duplicate and share with others. For a copy of this or other transcripts, contact us at:



**National Transition Network
Institute on Community Integration
110 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE
Minneapolis MN 55455
(612) 624-2079 (*phone*)
(612) 624-9344 (*fax*)
ntn@icimail.coled.umn.edu (*email*)
ici2.umn.edu/ntn**

For more information on the National Transition Alliance:



**National Transition Alliance
Transition Research Institute at Illinois
University of Illinois
113 Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, IL 61820
(217) 333-2325 (*phone*)
(217)244-0851 (*fax*)
www.dssc.org/nta**