

# Inclusive Employment and Career for Boston Youth With Disabilities

## Pathways to the Talent Pipeline

OCTOBER 2015

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY BY

The Workforce Development Task Force  
of the Boston Special Education  
Transition (B-SET) Project

[www.massadvocates.org/b-set](http://www.massadvocates.org/b-set)



## ABOUT B-SET

The Boston Special Education Transition (B-SET) Project is an initiative of Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC). B-SET's goal is to *increase employment, career, and independent living opportunities for Boston's youth with disabilities*. The objectives of the project are three-fold:

1. Increase community awareness and knowledge – among youth, parents and community organizations – of transition rights and strategies for students under the special education law and of ways to empower parents and youth to participate in the transition process.
2. Improve transition planning and services for Boston students with disabilities age 14-22 so they will stay in school and exit special education prepared for further education, employment, and independent living.
3. Provide opportunities for Boston students with disabilities to more fully integrate into the mainstream of career and workforce development opportunities.

## ABOUT THE WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TASK FORCE

The work of this Task Force resides in the third B-SET objective, for to the extent that the first two objectives of B-SET achieve results – greater community awareness and improved school-based transition services – there will need to be more community-based placements available for those transition age youth still in school and for those who are exiting, either by graduating or by turning 22.

While there have been and are models of integrating small numbers of youth with disabilities into mainstream workforce development, employment, and post-secondary education, there had been no systemic response among multiple sectors to collaborate and identify the resources required for the thousands of Boston youth with disabilities. **This Task Force was convened by MAC and The Boston Foundation for that purpose.** Currently nearly 70 organizations are represented on the Task Force.

The goal of the Task Force is to *increase inclusive workforce and post-secondary education placements*

*and opportunities for Boston youth with disabilities, for all types and severities, while enrolled in school and after exiting.*

The Task Force has four objectives:

1. Develop a resource guide identifying strengths and gaps in resources to provide to Boston youth and young adults with disabilities inclusive employment, college, supported work, and independent living opportunities.
2. Identify best and promising practices and programs from local and national models.
3. Develop an implementation plan to meet the project's goals by more effectively utilizing existing resources and seeking new external resources.
4. Create collaborations and partnerships among members to more effectively use existing and seek new resources.

## ABOUT MASSACHUSETTS ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN (MAC)

MAC was founded in 1969 by Hubie Jones to address the social problem of children excluded from school and educational opportunity. Its investigative report in 1970 led to the first bilingual law (1971) and the first special education law (1972) in the nation, dramatically expanding access to school for thousands of children across the state.

MAC's mission is to be an independent and effective voice for children who face significant barriers to equal educational and life opportunities, particularly those who have disabilities, are low income and/or are racially, culturally or linguistically diverse. MAC works to overcome these barriers by changing conditions for many children, while also helping one at a time.

Today, MAC is a leader in statewide special education advocacy (with a focus on transition), the autism community, school discipline reform and education reform in the Boston schools. MAC is an integral part of the statewide network of civil legal aid organizations and has pioneered an innovative approach to education reform statewide and nationally through its policy analysis and advocacy to help traumatized children learn.

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### WRITTEN FOR THE TASK FORCE BY:

Jerry Mogul, Executive Director,  
Massachusetts Advocates for Children  
Isidore Penn, Psy.D., Project Consultant

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## Task Force Organizational Members

Action for Boston Community Development  
Asperger/Autism Network (AANE)  
Autism Speaks  
Bay Cove Academy  
Benjamin Franklin Institute of Technology  
Best Buddies  
BEST Corp. Hospitality Training Center  
Boston Asian: Youth Essential Service  
Boston Center for Independent Living, Inc.  
Boston Metropolitan District Building Trades Council  
Boston Private Industry Council  
Boston Public Schools- Re-Engagement Center  
Boston Public Schools- Special Education  
Boston Public Schools Special Education  
Parent Advisory Council  
Boston Youth Services Network (BYSN)  
Boys and Girls Club of Dorchester  
Boys and Girls Club of Greater Boston  
Bridge Over Troubled Waters  
Butler Foundation  
Bunker Hill Community College  
City on a Hill Charter Public Schools  
Commonwealth Corporation  
Crittenton Women's Union  
CVS Health  
Disability Task Force  
East Boston Neighborhood Health Center  
Easter Seals  
EDCO Youth Alternative High School Program  
El Centro de Cardenal - HiSET Program  
Federation for Children with Special Needs  
Freedom House  
Goodwill Industries, Inc.  
Greater Boston Employment Collaborative  
Health Resources in Action  
Hull Lifesaving Museum/Maritime Apprenticeship Program  
J.E. & Z.B. Butler Foundation  
Jewish Family & Children's Service  
Jewish Vocational Service  
Justice Resource Institute  
Massachusetts Advocates for Children  
Massachusetts Community Action Network  
Massachusetts Department of Career Services  
Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services  
Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Massachusetts Department of Mental Health  
Massachusetts Department of Public Health  
Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services  
Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission  
Mayor's Office of Workforce Development  
MGH Aspire  
MIRA Coalition/New American Integration Institute  
More Than Words Bookstore  
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Massachusetts  
NESCA (Neuropsychology Education Services for Children and Adolescents)  
Notre Dame Education Center  
Partners for Youth with Disabilities  
Roxbury Community College  
SkillWorks  
Spaulding Rehabilitation Network/Partners HealthCare  
State Street Corporation  
The Boston Foundation  
TJX Companies  
Triangle, Inc.  
UMass Boston Institute for Community Inclusion  
United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley  
Work Inc.  
Work Without Limits  
Year Up  
Youth Options Unlimited  
Youth Violence Prevention Funders Learning Collaborative  
YouthBuild

# Executive Summary

There are over 4,300 Boston youth age 14-22 attending public K-12 schools who have disabilities. Like all young people, they are capable and talented, and have dreams and hopes for their future. And like all youth, they will need support from family, school and the community to become independent successful adults. With the right employment supports, young people with disabilities can not only avoid a life of poverty and dependence but can also achieve the satisfaction of feeling valued in their work while bringing value to their place of work.

Some of the 4,300 students with disabilities will graduate and go on to post-secondary education or work. Others will stay in school and transition to the state adult service system, depending on the type and severity of their disability. But based on current trends, the vast majority of them, about 60%, will follow a third pathway: they will either drop out, not transition to adult services or will graduate but then become disconnected from post-secondary school or career pathways. Many of them will be on a dead end road to poverty, where only one in three Massachusetts adults with disabilities are employed and where the poverty rate for people with disabilities is three times than for those without. Some will even travel the “school to jail” pipeline rather than the school to career talent pipeline.

It is incumbent upon the Boston community to come together and reverse those trends, to better prepare young people with disabilities and to connect them to the career pathways and talent pipelines for employment in the private, non-profit and public sectors. To do so will require overcoming significant system barriers: the various education, disability and workforce/employment sectors that impact this population are generally overlapping and uncoordinated with different funding streams, eligibility requirements, missions,

policies and procedures that can be at cross-purposes and are extremely difficult for youth, their families and agency staff to navigate. Further, stakeholders in different sectors don’t have a common framework, language or understanding of disability issues, special education rights, employment pipeline models or the myriad pathways from school to successful employment. Schools are just beginning to provide required transition assessments and services for all students with disabilities. In addition, federal and state funding for disability and for workforce development programs has eroded over the last decade. Partly as a result, there is the issue of scale, as schools, businesses, state agencies, intermediaries and others have only been able to successfully engage and support a relatively small proportion of the population.

And yet, these are hopeful times. New federal and state laws have been enacted and policies adopted that have the potential to result in sweeping change. The Boston Public Schools have prioritized transition services and is implementing a strategic plan. An increasing number of youth-serving agencies are raising awareness about inclusion and building it into their program design. An infrastructure of services and supports is being strengthened to re-connect disconnected “opportunity youth” with education and career pathways. The interest and enthusiasm of so many diverse stakeholders in this Task Force indicates a readiness and momentum for significant change. The very richness of resources in the Boston area - intermediaries, disability experts, youth development infrastructure, employer networks, etc. – serves as a platform for the collaboration, knowledge dissemination and innovation called for in this Action Plan to improve workforce outcomes for Boston youth with disabilities.

This Action Plan contains a “dashboard” with the following **goal areas**:

1. **Continue to improve transition services** and supports in the Boston Public Schools and charter schools for students with disabilities.
2. **Strengthen family and community supports** for transition-age youth with disabilities.
3. **Ensure that students with disabilities in public and private colleges and other post-secondary pathways** have access to accommodations and to career services.
4. **Increase capacity and improve service coordination** among state adult service, workforce development, transitional assistance and youth service agencies.
5. **Re-connect “Opportunity Youth”** to school and career pathways by supporting youth-serving agencies to better meet the needs of older youth who have hidden or undiagnosed disabilities.
6. **Increase capacity of employers** in the private, non-profit and public sectors to hire and retain youth/young adults with disabilities.
7. **Strengthen the infrastructure** to raise awareness and resources, improve system navigation, and promote collaboration to support the transition to employment and career for Boston youth with disabilities.

Each goal area includes many of these key **cross-cutting strategies** in the dashboard:

1. **Promote youth voice, self-advocacy and self-determination skills** for Boston’s young people throughout all components of the system designed to support them.
2. **Ensure that youth with disabilities have necessary assessments, accommodations, supports and wraparound services** (health care, housing, social services, legal, e.g.) that will enable them to be successful and stay in their school or job.

3. **Increase knowledge base** through training and professional development among educators, families, youth service providers, job developers and intermediaries, and supervisors on the job.
4. **Improve school, job training, higher education and workplace organizational cultures** to promote diversity and be more inclusive of young people with disabilities, putting them in a position to succeed.
5. **Increase opportunities for coordination, collaboration and partnerships** among schools, employers, agencies and programs within and across multiple systems.
6. **Integrate work-based learning experiences** at all levels that are particularly effective in building competencies for youth with disabilities.
7. **Improve the system navigation** capacity of youth, families and professionals through regularly updated web-based resource directories and other means.
8. **Increase funding and capacity** within each sector so that schools, state agencies, job developers and intermediaries, youth serving agencies and employers can reach more young people.
9. **Improve data collection and metrics** so as to more effectively plan and monitor progress toward successful goal outcomes.

These are the key **action steps** in the dashboard that the community is already taking or needs to take to prepare, connect and employ Boston youth with disabilities:

1. **Ensure that all transition-age students** in Boston Public Schools (including those who have dropped out and are returning) and charter schools receive self-advocacy training and support, assessments to help them identify their strengths and interests, seamless transition to adult services in state agencies, when appropriate, and meaningful pre-employment or work-based learning opportunities while still in school.



# CHART 1 – PATHWAYS OF TRANSITION AGE STUDENTS IN BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS, 2013-2014

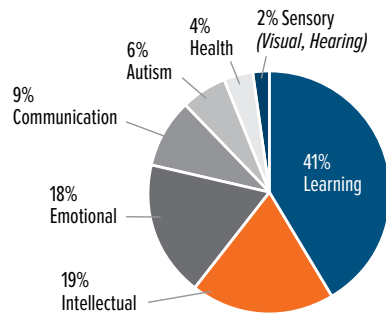


All Transition-age Students with Disabilities in BPS and Charter Schools =

**4,350**

Data source: DESE; 2013-14 for all transition age students; dropout data 2012-13

## TYPE OF DISABILITY



## BOSTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS SERVICES

- Special Education Transition Services
- College and Career Readiness–Guidance
- Career and Vocational Technical Education (Madison Park and other school-based programs)

## STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT (DESE)

Technical assistance, professional development, and monitoring for those BPS and charter school services



**List of Acronyms:** BPS (Boston Public Schools), BYSN (Boston Youth Services Network (Alternative Education)), DMH (Department of Mental Health), DYS (Department of Youth Services), ICI (Institute for Community Inclusion), JVS (Jewish Vocational Service), MCB (Massachusetts Commission for the Blind), MCDHH (Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing), MRC (Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission), PIC (Boston Private Industry Council), YOU (Youth Options Unlimited), YVPFLC (Youth Violence Prevention Funders Learning Collaborative)

## Executive Summary // continued

2. **Increase the percentage** of Boston Public School transition-age students with disabilities who are in inclusive classrooms with the appropriate supports.
  3. **Provide training and information to youth and their families** about the importance of self-advocacy, transition rights and services for which they are eligible, and access to higher education and career opportunities.
  4. **Provide training and information to community-based staff, job developers, educators, coaches, mentors** and others about how to identify and support youth and young adults with hidden or undiagnosed disabilities to be successful in post-secondary inclusive higher education or workforce settings.
  5. **Improve the capacity of public colleges** in the Boston area to provide appropriate supports through their disability and career service offices to better retain students with disabilities and provide them with access to career pathways.
  6. **Increase the number of businesses** able to successfully hire and retain young adults with disabilities by creating inclusive workplaces that reduce stigma, use the principles of universal design to expand access, and institutionalize culture change through such mechanisms as supervisor training and internal affinity groups of employees with disabilities and their family members.
  7. **Create a system navigation capacity** to assist youth, family members and providers to ensure that they can access the right services at the right time from the right organization(s).
  8. **Increase the number of young adults with more severe disabilities** to: a) receive services through the state Department of Developmental Services to obtain competitive or integrated employment by implementing the Employment First Blueprint; and b) participate in college through the Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment Initiative.
  9. **Ensure that the provisions of the new federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)** regarding additional pre-employment resources and other transition assistance services are provided to Boston youth and young adults with disabilities or who are disconnected .
  10. **Establish interagency coordination and accountability agreements across state agencies** at the cabinet as well as individual agency levels to ensure more efficient and effective employment and training services for consumers and their families.
- The Action Plan also calls for the creation of a new coordinating vehicle to keep the many stakeholders from multiple sectors together to implement the action steps, continue to build collaborations and synergies among members, and raise awareness and resources.

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Massachusetts Advocates for Children  
25 Kingston Street, 2nd Floor  
Boston, MA 02111

☎ 617.357.8431  
✉ [info@massadvocates.org](mailto:info@massadvocates.org)  
🌐 [www.massadvocates.org](http://www.massadvocates.org)  
🐦 @massadvocates  
📘 [facebook.com/massadvocates](https://facebook.com/massadvocates)

