

B-SET for Career Network

Prepare – Connect – Employ

The Goal

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 Need

People with disabilities have the highest poverty rates and the lowest workforce participation rates of any other demographic group in the nation. In 2015 the poverty rate for people with disabilities in the US was 27% and 28.1% in Massachusetts. For those without disabilities it was 11.6% nationally and 8.6% in Mass. The employment rate was 35.2% for those with disabilities in the US and 34.7% in Massachusetts. For those without disabilities it was 73.7% in the US and 77.2% in Massachusetts.

These high poverty and low rates of employment for adults with disabilities are the ultimate measures of the failure to adequately prepare young people with disabilities for the labor market and economic self-sufficiency.

While there have been 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.

Where we've come from

Massachusetts Advocates for Children (MAC) received a Boston Foundation grant in 2013 to address the need and design a systemic response through its Boston Special Education Transition (B-SET) project. MAC and the foundation then convened a Planning Group - including Boston Public Schools, Boston Private Industry Council, Commonwealth Corporation, UMass Boston/Institute for Community Inclusion, the Mayor's Office of Workforce Development (MOWD), and SkillWorks – to create a broad-based, multi-sectoral task force that would identify resources and gaps to create a comprehensive action plan for the Boston community to respond to the need. The task force grew to 70 member organizations representing secondary and post-secondary schools, disability service agencies at state and local levels, youth service organizations, the business community, state agencies, organized labor, workforce training and intermediary organizations, disability advocates and city government.

The Action Plan

In October 2015, the task force released ***Inclusive Employment & Career for Boston Youth with Disabilities: Pathways to the Talent Pipeline*** (www.b-setforcareer.org). The report and action plan presented findings about the major barriers and conditions for change to connecting youth with disabilities to education and career pathways and pipelines. It delineated the following goals:

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.

The report contains 88 steps that includes what stakeholders are already planning or doing, as well as new recommendations. Taken together, these comprise the Action Plan that is being implemented by 6 working groups and a coordinating committee.

Where We Are Today

With funding from the State Street Foundation and the JE & ZB Butler Foundation, in February 2016 MAC launched the implementation phase of the B-SET project as the “B-SET for Career Network.” Organizations are working in Operational Groups, each chaired by a “lead” organization:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. Public and Charter Schools | Boston Public Schools |
| 2. Family/Community | Boston Special Education Parent Advisory Council |
| 3. Post-secondary Pathways | Institute for Community Inclusion |
| 4. State Agencies | Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission |
| 5. Opportunity Youth | Boston Private Industry Council |
| 6. Employer Engagement | Work Without Limits |

The project is overseen by a Coordinating Committee with representatives from key sectors, including businesses, state agencies, workforce development and youth services.

Among the current projects in planning or implementation are:

- Training and “community of practice” Initiative for “Supporting Youth with Hidden Disabilities” in alternative education and youth development; pilot training delivered June-November 2016; common accessibility assessment form developed and initiated in the Boston Youth Services Network (BYSN); expansion of training cohort and development of online/live hybrid training and convening model underway
- Increasing inclusion in afterschool programs; conference held December 2016; training fall 2017
- Developing information to better inform high school students, families, teachers and staffs about disability resources and inclusive practices at Massachusetts public colleges and universities; “environmental scan” underway
- Improving the “688” referral and service delivery process for Boston Public Schools
- Partnership with Sheet Metal Workers local 17, New England Regional Council of Carpenters and Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) to pilot development of career exploration and train the trainer tools/methods that incorporate Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in apprenticeship training
- Piloted Boston Institute for Careers and Networking (Boston ICAN) with 7 employers and BPS Special Education, a career exploration and employment pipeline project February-May 2017; planning for 2017-2018 underway

September 2017