

## 2024 KT Online Conference

### Lawrence Partnership for Transition to Employment

*Presenters:*

Rowan DeAza, Allison Taylor

Sponsored by AIR's Center on Knowledge Translation  
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<https://ktdrr.org/conference2024/index.html>

Transcript for audio/video file on YouTube:  
[https://youtu.be/LSuKih36\\_Uo](https://youtu.be/LSuKih36_Uo)

Rowan DeAza: My name is Rowan DeAza. I am from the Arc of Greater Haverhill Newburyport in Massachusetts. My pronouns are she/her. I am a person of color with glasses and black hair, and I am wearing a white jacket with black stripes. Alison, would you like to introduce yourself?

Allison Taylor: Sure. Hi, I'm Allison Taylor. I'm a researcher at the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, or UMass. I'm a middle-aged white woman with brown hair. I'm wearing a brown top and black cardigan, and there's a multicolored weaving behind me in my room.

Rowan DeAza: Thank you so much, Alison. Thank you. So a little bit about the LPTE. The Lawrence Partnership for Transition to Employment was established in 2021 under a five-year grant from the Administration for Community Living as a national center of excellence on community collaborations for employment. The project aims to improve the transition process for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Next slide, please. Thank you so much. Located about 30 miles north of Boston, Lawrence, Massachusetts has a population of around 90,000 people. The city has a diverse community and its rich history includes a large immigrant population. By the 2000 census, Lawrence was the first Latino majority city in New England. 81% of Lawrence residents identify as Latino or Hispanic, and 78% speak a language other than English in their home. In Lawrence, public schools alone, 93% of students identify as Latino. 20% are in special education. 69% had a language, first language, excuse me, other than English. And 41% were classified as English language learners. Latinos were responsible for reversing the city's population decline for filling its abandoned homes and buildings for bringing life to its streets, churches, restaurants, and parts. And for anchoring its tax base, there can be no doubt that Latino migration was good for the city of Lawrence. Next slide please.

Rowan DeAza: Some of the goals of the LPTE, some of the identified goals, excuse me, are to improve collaboration among local partners leading to improved transition processes and experiences for youth and families, as well as improved transition to work outcomes for youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Next slide please. I believe Allison is going to take over.

Allison Taylor: Yeah. So a little bit about the structure. This is a community partnership, and we take that really seriously. When we talk about knowledge translation, this is a project where the knowledge is being generated by the community, interpreted by the community, and shared by and with the community. And the core of the project is the consortium. The consortium is made up of about 90 members, more than 40 are really active in the consortium. It does says meets monthly, but we actually meet quarterly. Sorry about that. And the consortium, as I said, really guides the overall work of the project, and it is implementing the project activities. Then within that is the steering committee, which is a smaller group that is made up of some key community members and professionals, and it provides more consultation and decision making on the project as we go forward. And then within that is the core team of, there's four of us, so Rowan and myself, and then two other researchers from the Institute for Community Inclusion. Next slide please.

So this slide shows the range of stakeholders from various sectors that are part of the consortium. At the local level, we have self-advocates and parents and family members. We have strong representation from the mayor's office. The ADA coordinator is an active member of the consortium. We have several individuals from the public schools, from the community college, family advocacy groups, employment collaboratives, the local independent living center, and then other local nonprofits. And then as well, we have folks from the state and regional levels, the Workforce Center, Social Security Department of Developmental Services, the state's VR agency. We also have the Regional Transportation Authority and Children's Advocacy group. Next slide please.

So underpinning this entire project are the six principles of collaborating for equity and justice. If you haven't read that article, there is a link on the slide. I really recommend it. These principles are used as a touchstone for this project. On this slide, it lists on the left, each principle a summary of each principle, and then on the right, how it's being applied by the LPTE. At the beginning of each consortia meeting, this table is presented and then we highlight one of the principles and devote some time to discussing it. And specifically we read it in Spanish and then English. We also have the entire meeting interpreted with live interpretation into Spanish. But we center again these principles in providing access to the community and being bilingual is really important for that. So then we ask the group what is something important that this principle brings to mind, and what is one action we should do to uphold this principle? And what's something we shouldn't do that might violate this principle? Okay. So I'm going to pass it back to Rowan to discuss the community landscape analysis process and the findings from that process.

Rowan DeAza: Thank you, Alison. So in preparing to apply for the grant funding for this project, the team held discussions with Lawrence youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their family members to identify some of the barriers. Some of the barriers that were identified by the families were cultural language barriers, low participation and disability and advocacy, and a lack of awareness of service options in limited to no transition services. This is really a result of a lack of trust in services provided by the community, simply because Latinos rarely really question authority, especially if it's someone that newly immigrated into the United States. They're very nervous of legal repercussions. So there's a lot of work to be done in building trust with

the community, so that community understands that we are here to help fill the gaps for the students that are in transition. One of the things that really helped us get individuals to attend these conversations was letting them know that this project is something that we don't want to come up with something based on our assumptions.

We want to know what the community needs. So we literally asked the community members, what do you need, including high school students? What do you want? And what we found was that what the professionals wanted for the students, the students wanted for themselves. And it was quite lovely to see. But there is disparities and services for marginalized students have led to low expectations and low employment outcomes for these students. And a major theme among family and student voices was the importance of gaining trust within the Hispanic community, including through use of culture brokers from the community. For example, I am the bilingual liaison for this project, and it has been really eye-opening for me as a Latina, but also I've reconnected with the community in a way that it is different and quite beautiful, honestly. Next slide please.

So in those community conversations, we hosted them in various locations to discuss the community needs regarding transition planning. One of the things we noticed immediately was the lack of trust in families that they had for the system and organizations. We had a lot of feedback from service provider professionals but had minimal family and student participation due to this. We revised our strategy and went into the schools and brought the conversation to the students as well as the Lawrence families that called or visited the Arc of Greater Haverhill Newburyport. Once we collected the data we needed, the CLA was developed. This helped us identify strategic priorities and the development of the work groups. The consortium guided the process and contributed to every decision made. So the consortium is such an important piece of what we're doing because nothing that we do gets done without their input and their feedback. And the work that we're doing now, they're going to be, we, myself included, are going to be the ones that are going to carry on that work. So it's really important that all those decisions are made by the people that we have at the table. Next slide please.

So at these community conversations, we ask four specific questions. What outcomes do you think are important for youth with families in Lawrence when they leave school? What are one or two things that would help youth with disabilities find employment when they leave school? What are one or two strengths within the Lawrence community that could help youth with disabilities find employment? And in four years, what services, supports, and opportunities for work would you like to see for youth with disabilities in the community? We really used this information and have applied it through our work as time has continued. Next slide, please.

So in March, 2023, we presented our findings on these three themes to the full consortium and facilitated a discussion to get feedback and input into what's missing, what areas to prioritize, and ideas on strategies. So the three major themes are: what are the most important outcomes for youth with disabilities in Lawrence, the strengths of the community that can be an asset of transitioning youth, and then recommended strategies for the LPTE. Next slide, please. With the support of the consortium members

and the information gathered from the community conversations, the following outcomes were identified to be the most important for youth in Lawrence, identifying and working towards their own goals. Oftentimes things are planned for students by their team. Through our conversations with transition age students, students express that they want to be heard, and they want input on their future plans. They want to be at the table. Competitive, integrated employment. Enough said, right?

Excuse me. Community engagement and relationships. Students want to be a part of their community. They want to learn how to build healthy relationships, whether it's friendships or romantic relationships. They want these experiences. They want to continue learning and gaining skills once they leave high school. They want those ongoing supports, much like the team that they had in school, and then of course having a champion like they did in school as well. Just a mentor, anyone that can help guide them in their post high school life. Next slide, please. Excuse me. I'm so sorry. Okay. So some of the strengths of the community: Lawrence has a lot of opportunities. Lawrence is full of love and people that are really looking to just connect in any way that they can. There's a lot of community values and culture. There is a great amount of organizations that provide disability services to the community of Lawrence.

There's a lot of local businesses, which means potential employment for our students with disabilities. One of the things that we've constantly talked about with the LPTE is how to educate employers on disability and employment. The truth is that disability and employment rocks, right? We do really good work just given the chance. And then engaged parents and family members of course, and personal strengths of youth with disabilities. When I went into the Lawrence High School into the School for Exceptional Studies, the students were so clear about their goals and their needs and their wants and how they wanted these services delivered. It was amazing. Next slide, please, Margaret. I'm going to hand it over to Allison.

Allison Taylor: Okay. So the third theme that came out of the community landscape analysis were strategic priorities. So what should we do? And this on this slide is an inset of a slide that we shared at the consortium meeting where we were really discussing the strategic priorities. On this slide, it lists nine priorities. And so what we wanted to do was both discuss those and their implications and also kind of maybe narrow down to a set of priorities that this group could work on over the next, at that time, three years. So we presented on each of these priorities, had a slide. We discussed it. We discussed the recommendations that came out of the community landscape analysis. And then we facilitated as a discussion. And then we posted these around the room. This was an in-person meeting. And we gave members of the consortium dots to vote on each of their top five priorities, and also sticky notes, so they could put their name down and say, I am here. I'm ready to work on this issue. So they could put two to three, they could put their sticky notes on two to three priorities. And so we took all of that information, all of these sort of votes and volunteers. And through that we developed four strategic priorities. Some of those kind of combined, some of these. But on the next slide please, you'll see the four priorities that we came up with. And we developed work groups out of this. So one is to improve the handoff from schools to adult life and foster better cross agency connections, offer more work experiences to students while they're in school, prepare students for other aspects of adult life, like getting around their

community, accessing healthcare, that kind of stuff. And then also partnering with families. And that's going to be key throughout everything that we do. So each of these work groups over the last year worked on identifying some key strategies to work on. Each of the four of us facilitated one of these groups. And we've been meeting monthly and then reporting out at the consortium. Next slide please.

So a major output that we are going to be working on over the last two years of the grant is to develop a resource hub. And again, I'll say this was not something we came into the project saying, we're going to develop a website. No, we came in saying, what does the community need? Let's ask and let's find out. And so through the work group conversations and building on the information that we learned in the community landscape analysis, we identified a need for families and parents and students to better understand the transition process and have better access to the resources that are available to them. And from Rowan's experience guiding families through this process, she's sort of created a structure that's going to be intuitive for families and youth, with decision trees, starting with questions like, how old is your student? And then we'll be tapping into the consortium members and to parent and student groups that we have connections with to get input feedback, to do beta testing. So again, this is going to be continuing to be an iterative process. And we're also thinking about sustainability. So the ICI is establishing the website, but we're working with the ARC to transfer it to the ARC once the grant is over, so that this is something that can live in perpetuity and be continually developed and added to over time.

Next slide. So this is our last slide. This just has our contact information and the disclaimer about the grant.