**Working with Schools: Improving Employment Outcomes for Youth**

*Presenter:*

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TERESA GROSSI: I’m going to just share a little bit. I’m ending - we're in a no-cost extension of a NIDLRR, the National Institute on Disability, Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research grant, what they know as the DRRPs, and this is a no-cost extension. I want to share a little bit about our learnings and I really would like to have a conversation. It leads very nicely after the conversation, if you were here right before lunch, it sort of builds upon a lot of the issues that people were bringing up.

So, I'll share a little bit of the data and a little bit of the model but I want to get into what we continue to define at the local level and the implications for that. It's the Indiana School to Work model and there's reasons why we called it that. Today is pretty much what I've said.

There's a couple of things I’d like you all to remember. When we started this, this was pre-WIOA. That had not started yet, that happened in the middle of this. We'll have lots of conversations about intended and unintended consequences of policy changes and procedural changes. I will be bringing that up quite a bit. That's what I would like to talk about, and also some of the local solutions and challenges that came forward. I have to give credit to NIDLRR. This is what the title of our research project was. But as you can imagine working with high school students, you don’t want to say, hey, do you want to be part of the effects of embedding the employment resource center or whatever, project? Hence, the Indiana School to Work Collaborative.

Before I really get to a little bit of the ins and outs of it, I want to tell you how it started. We like to think about this approach as a collective impact approach. There was an urgency for change. Right before we started, Indiana has always had a really nice relationship with VRs and schools with providers and collaboration, and things just sort of fell apart. Not surprised, some chairs changed at the state level, some initiatives were falling apart, things just weren't happening. Schools were talking about some issues. One was, there was a group of kids who they were struggling with holding on to, they were either going to drop out, they didn't know what else to do with them and they were really needing some help with that.

They also had some complaints about some of the providers and I can go on and on with some of those complaints. The providers were saying that the relationships with schools were falling apart. That from both sides of it, if a school found someone a job, it was so part time that that fell apart by the middle of summer when the student left, you guys are nodding, you guys can relate to this. So the providers, they were complaining about that. The school said the providers weren't doing a good job with providing the ongoing support. There were some issues with VR getting into the schools early enough and/or kids were already gone and we lost a lot of students leaving high school and not connecting to VR or the other adult agencies.

So, throughout this, we brought everybody together. And what we're calling the authentic student or stakeholder engagement, this model, I would love to take credit for it all, but it really was these people who did it. They designed it. I wrote the grant, but they designed it, this is what they wanted to do and they thought would work. We have a statewide transition policy group that oversees a lot of things, but they were overseeing this project to give us input, but really to talk about policy issues or procedural issues that needed to change. And from the very beginning, we talked about whatever we designed, we needed to think about sustainability. So, the ultimate goal when we started talking and bringing people together to make the design was, how will we sustain this? Voc Rehab was at the table at the very onset of it. I really, really am fortunate in Indiana, we have a fabulous VRS director, I've known her for years. And she was really, really involved with saying show me the data, she was at the table when we were having our ongoing bimonthly meetings with all of the locals.

So, this is the framework. We used it as our logic model. We knew we needed to look at these areas, policies, what are the guidelines, what are the barriers of the impact of everyoner working together, what were the procedures that were hindering kids getting out and connected to VR? And/or providers to find the job? Were the locals using evidence-based practices? We know good transition practices, we know good employment practices. We've got a lot of research, are they being used at that local level? And do we have the right people at the table? And are those stakeholders coming together to make things happen?

Again, I really want to get to the outcomes of what we learned, but this is what we're calling the intervention package. We have five control sites, five intervention sites, and here was what was unique. We had the providers coming together to work as a collaborative. One of the issues that surfaced, and I'll mention it again, was that schools were complaining, especially in our larger cities like Indianapolis or in the southern part of our state, Evansville, who have a lot of high schools where too many of the providers were coming to the schools wanting teachers' time. And, one, teachers can't do that. They're in a classroom or the department chair had meetings or IEP meetings and they were asking for too much time. The other piece was to ensure some quality.

So, the providers came together to work as a collaborative. They actually wrote an MOU together. That surprised me. I was saying is this what you really want? So any provider coming to the table who is going to work on behalf of working with these schools had to sign the MOU. And it was really about the quality of the staff they were going to bring in. Some of the rules, they were going to talk about with each other. So, that was something that they brought up. Now for all of the VR folks, you know you have to give informed choice. But part of what this agreement was that if you were going to work with these schools, you had to agree with this. I will tell you we had providers who said they didn’t want to, they didn't want to be part of the collaborative because they wanted to ensure that all the people were well trained in employment specialist training, that they understood how to work with schools and identify the culture of that school.

So that collaborative provider is working, if you think of Indianapolis, you may know it's a bigger city, including mental health centers, there’s around 26 employment service providers. Can you imagine even if half of them were working on one side of the city, you know, you could have ten of them working in one school district. They really wanted to make sure that they were being respectful with schools. At that local collaborative piece of it, that's how the providers worked. One of those providers was the fiscal agent and they hired what was the career coach. The career coach was the single point of contact, representing all the providers around the table, and they were embedded in the school. And I'll talk a little bit more about them.

The discovery process that you all are aware of it, we started this at the beginning and I'm happy to say that our VR took it over to have a requirement across the state. We knew that paid work is a predictor of post-school outcomes, so everyone had to participate in the work-based learning and/or some internships. We had the schools working in conducting self-determination training. We knew of three evidence-based curriculums. We used it as a framework for the teachers to use and they did it at varying times. So, I know some of you will be thinking about what's happening with your pre-ETS. The culminating activity for some of the schools was that kids would lead their own IEP meetings, or the kids would be more active. Some other things emerge from it, but the schools took lead on that and the career coach helped with it.

Benefits counseling. We have a benefits information network in Indiana where VR pays for a benefits counselor, a benefits plan prior to going to CWIC. So even before going on to the work, a benefits plan is conducted for an individual. And then we did a lot of family training and our parents center had a representative at each of the local collaboratives. A local collaborative would be made up of our VR staff, our providers, our schools, parent representative, and any other agency that was involved in the employment process. It could be independent living, it could be DD. Following me? Everyone is all right?

So, just the two unique aspects of the collaborative. The one was the career coach. And the career coach, and one of the reasons this was designed as this approach, was embedded in the school because our past experiences were that providers were going into school and not understanding the culture of schools. You can't take a kid out of a class to go do job exploration when they need the English credit. There's a lot of a culture -- and each school has a different culture, so really, that was a big piece of it. The other piece of it was to get to know the teachers, to get to know the kids, to get access to the kids, and to have more of that overlap of services.

I always like to talk about my ‘Barbie dream world,’ so that I could see where the school has started doing some nice things, the provider and VR, meaning the adult providers take over. The schools are backing off and the providers are taking over. The reality is that most families are not going to trust anybody but schools because that's who they've been with for the last 12 or 15 years. The agencies come in and families want to know who are you? Why are you at this meeting with my child? So that was really the purpose, that career coach can navigate the systems for the families and the students.

The coalition, again, of providers was to reduce the number of people going into the schools, to reduce the confusion for schools to say who are you? Weren't you here last week? No, that was a different agency. And also to look at reducing the duplication of services, which we knew there was some duplication between sometimes schools and adult providers. Everyone's going out, looking for work experiences, so how many people are going to hit the target at the same time? Again, for employers, they were saying this is getting confusing as well.

There were the two primary groups of kids that we were going after, to think about. We had a large group of kids that schools were struggling with, that were going down this diploma route and for whatever reason, was coming off. Schools were struggling with keeping them engaged, keeping them in the schools. There were a lot of other issues happening around them that they needed help with. They knew because they weren't fulfilling some of the credit obligations, they weren't getting access to the career tech programs and some other programs.

There was another group of kids who were getting their diploma, had no intention of going on to higher ed, but because they were spending all of their time in the credit courses, weren't getting good work experiences to really explore those career options. So we had to make sure – and had an uncertain future – even if they went on to higher ed, they had idea of where they were going, so that was another group of kids. Does that make sense?

There were a couple of research questions I want to go through because I want to have the conversation with you about some of the implications and some of the learnings. We wanted to know if we embedded that career coach, the employment resources in the schools, would kids more likely leave with a job and would that job have higher wages and those outcomes? We were all concerned prior to this where there were a lot of students who left school without any connections to VR, and obviously, the employment providers. In Indiana, the employment providers do the majority of all the job development and the supported employment and other employment services. We have the business liaison, but it's these providers who do the most of it. We had a lot of concern when we found out there were a lot of students leaving school and they still weren't connected to VR. And then we wanted to see, were there any need of a policy or a procedure change? We guessed it, we weren't real sure until we got in there, what would happen.

So, I'm just going to share a little bit of data because I could be here for awhile with all of it, but I just want to highlight some things that we talk about the implications of policy and procedure changes. I know this is hard to see, but this is just the primary disability compared to our control sites, both of them were the same. Autism, people with emotional disabilities, learning disabilities, mild intellectual disabilities, and a percentage, a higher percentage of folks with other health impairment that could be the gamut of individuals. So those were our primary group of students. Those were the students that schools were feeling like they were losing because of some of the diploma requirements.

We had a number of internships and experiences. The length of internships was around four weeks, one day to 27 weeks. Through this, although the grant paid for it, VR also paid for internships with students last year, and that was part of the sustainability plan as well. The average student participated, their hours were nine hours in internships. Leaving school, we are still at a minimum wage, federal minimum wage in Indiana was $9.23. 91 students left school based on the internship or work experience they had during that time. And then 91, three months later, 85% were still working and three had a career advancement. We were pretty excited about that.

I didn't want to get into the research or a lot of it. Our five control sites, we really struggled with them because we told them that, we did a self-determination assessment every year, a pre- and a post-, and we collected data. We learned that, business as usual, nobody was following up on the kids. We couldn't even find out if kids were referred to VR. Some would say, yeah, we referred, but we don't know what happened. The other piece about the five sites that were the treatment sites or intervention sites, two were more urban, two were very rural. One was sort of a small town but had more resources, I think would be classified as more of that suburban kind of area.

I want you to look here. We did a lot of “ah-ha!” on just the two lines, these are hard. Look at the vocational rehabilitation engagement. The first year, 90% of the students were already connected with VR. The second year was 88%. Then the third year, it was 76. And the fourth year, our last year, full implementation, only 53% were engaged with VR. Providers have the same trend downward, you can't go through the provider unless you go through the VR door anyway. Our third year, a lot was happening and we were hitting the local levels a lot to try to figure out what was going on. So I want you all to keep that data in mind when we keep going here.

I wanted to shift for a little bit. So that is what we started learning. We asked families throughout all of this, tell us -- we did focus groups with the family representatives and also families that their children were involved in the project. They told us the schools were the predominant way they learned about transition services. That's not a surprise. It better have been that way or we would have been really worried if they weren't even learning about it. But it was the career coach who was the predominant way they learned about vocational rehabilitation services. I think most of all, the career coaches were helping the families and the students maneuver through the VR process, getting all the collateral information. So, it helped to move the process along the way a little quicker and I think there was a sense of security of now we have another new person coming in. This was nice, because I had someone to ask those questions. So, they were the central person for communication and keep things moving along. We found that parents tended to call the career coach and say what's up? What's going on?

They really appreciated one of the procedural changes we had with VR is we were opening the cases at the beginning of their junior year. And there were lots of reasons for that, with one being the main intention was that for those students who were still going to spend most of their day in credit bearing courses, that they needed the credits, we could start internships and work experiences the summer before the student's last year. And then if we could do anything after school, we did that. But that was really helpful, because as you all know, sometimes it can take three, four, five months to get things really moving. We realized that when we started that at that first semester, by summer, things were in place, the provider was picked, everybody knew what to do.

Families continue to, we're struggling with this, they continue to struggle with how to understand all of these people and all of the processes. You know, how does the IEP (individualized education program), the VR IPE, and if you've got any other goals or plans -- how do they all work together? And why do I have to keep doing all these plans? That's still really confusing for them. And we tried to simplify this in so many ways, in fact, one local district did a whole little chart for them. Everyone did pictures for them, but we know that we have to keep educating on that aspect of it.

I'll talk about this later, but families really expressed a lot of frustrations, a couple of areas, of starts and stops of programs or services, I should say. And the biggest frustration that came out was not only because of staff turnover, but the new staff didn't have all the documentation. Whether it be a VR counselor, a career coach, a job coach, families were so frustrated with the fact that the documentation wasn't there, so the questions were asked again. That's something that really emerged, that we’ve had conversations with, is how do we figure out this documentation at all levels? So, if I'm the job coach and I'm looking for work experience for you, or work-based learning, and I haven't documented where I've been and what's happened -- I leave, the next person comes in and guess what, we're starting again. So that was a real practice piece that we will continue to focus on.

So you get a feel for where we were, things were happening, people were connected. And it really worked from the level of that intervention piece of it, we have a lot of data on the self-determination. I'll talk about some of the other culminating activities. We really started to see things happening, but remember, that data about connecting to VR kept going down. We started to try to figure out what's going on with the policy or procedure changes that were causing the data to go down. A couple of things happened -- on self-determination, because we know it’s an evidence-based practice, it was starting to work. Our department of education funded state-wide training on it. That was a really good thing, I was excited about it, except it was going to mess up my control site data. As much as I would like to say to them, can't, if it's unethical for me to do that.

So, I was really happy for DOE to say, hey, here's some money, I want you to do this state-wide, and we did that. Our data from our control sites on our self-determination were not that different. We did these work dilemmas with them. But there was a little bit of difference with our treatment sites, our intervention sites, and part of that is because they also got technical assistance from us, from my team. We were in there helping to support along the way.

So year one, we're beginning to implement. 90% were connected to VR, things were going well, but in that year one, we moved to a new employment model. That really didn't change much for us. Our new employment model was more of a hybrid between hourly and outcome-based and it was very much, on paper at least, it's very much more consumer-oriented. And our VR is telling our providers, keep the cases open longer through that discovery process, get to know the individual, get to know them well. So we didn't see much of the changes, providers were okay. Financially, it was working.

But then, WIOA came in, pre-ETS came in, and order of selection came in. The pre-employment transition model, our VR, liked the collaborative approach: the local collaborative work where the providers came together on behalf of a district and one representative. And the collaborative, that's the career coach, that's the model we used for pre-employment transition services, so that we're not all bombarding schools at the same time. That seems to be working. So, I can be an agency of a physical agent, I can have all the other providers working, but we really have to organize this in a way that one person takes the lead in that district. It doesn't mean that I don't choose other providers, as a student, to provide my employment services.

So just like the local collaborative -- the school-to-work collaborative -- that career coach just coordinated the other agencies and we can have three or four in there providing services to students, because they made an informed choice about who they wanted to provide those services, but one person was that lead. So teachers had someone to go to, department chairs, directors, everybody had that one person they knew were representing. And then, VR changed the procedure of enrollment to earlier and that was powerful, that was really helpful to us. We were able to get a lot more students through.

Again, I want to just remind you, our first year was the new employment model. Then WIOA. Third year, pre-ETS. In the fourth year, order of selection. And this is what we learned that happened at the local level. In fact, some of our local levels became paralyzed. When I say paralyzed, everyone was so confused. Schools were confused about the pre-employment transition services. They say for some of them, we already do some of this. Part of that is the training piece with providers who say, you always supplement, you don't supplant. You supplement what schools are doing, you don't supplant it. That took some time to work through from our sites. A couple were fine, they were able to move along, but a couple of them didn't know what to do and became really paralyzed.

Here's some things that we learned spending a lot of time at the local level, trying to understand it and what that impact would be. Staff turnover, the earlier conversation that we were talking about that many of you are struggling with, well, I will tell you in the beginning, we thought it was all about VR. And, in fact, we started tracking from a referral to an actual authorization to a provider, and in one location specifically that struggled a whole lot with keeping staff, it took almost a year to get them to an application process, because the turnover was so great. Supervisors were coming in taking the applications. They were wonderful. But we thought it was just VR until we started to go into the data. And we said, everyone, quit pointing the fingers at VR. Quit pointing your fingers, because here it is: everybody was turning over a fair amount. We couldn't even keep track of the job coaches. At a local school, if I chose a different agency to provide my employment services, we didn't even keep track of the number of job coaches that turned over.

So this is where families were really talking about the starts and stops in services. And for a student, if you're going to tell them they're going to a school to work program, they're still in that school mindset, they expected to be in a program a couple of times a week. So when weeks were going on and they weren't seeing anybody, they just stopped. We lost some kids. You know, they dropped out of school, a couple went to corrections. But, you know, that was the reality of it. This is something that we didn't plan for and we all have been talking about it at our state level a bit, but what happens at the local level for the student or the client is a huge impact, and the families complained of it.

Here's what we have about the collaboratives, when the providers came together working with the VRs, the schools, the parent center, everyone really knew that area really well, so if someone left, other people stepped in. If a VR counselor left, while we're waiting for the other counselor or the career coach, the school would step in. If we lost a teacher, a teacher in the middle of the year and they got a classroom and they leave, the career coach stepped in and did some things.

So many of them started doing company tours. They would call the VR business liaison and say, help us. If not, they went on their own with some. Transportation, part of the culminating activity of the self-determination training was informed choice of the provider, so a couple of them did a speed dating with providers. They would have the providers come in and they worked on this. The teacher, the career coaches were working with them and the VR counselor came in many times, were working on how do you choose an employment provider? They taught those self-determination skills and advocacy skills, taught them how to ask the question of the providers. Then they were able to make that choice. Parents were invited but didn't always come.

There were a lot of huge lessons. I mean, these are high school kids. So we also realize that one of the providers always sent a young employment specialist. High school kid, young girl. Who do you think they were always choosing? That's something that came out of it. The kids had the process, you have to look at your data. That was fun. They did the mock interviews and assisting in job fairs and in one of our larger districts, they reached out to theie career tech program, the cosmetology, called some employer HR places and asked Goodwill if they could come over and get some clothes. They did a whole fashion show of what to wear and what not to wear on interviews, and kids had to critique it. What was nice, and it wasn't just the kids in the School to Work program, it was the gen-ed kids, so it was a larger group that did these fashion shows. They did them together and it was really informative.

Some things we learned about the work experiences. For a lot of the kids who had some really good and different experiences, some of them decided to go on to postsecondary ed, which was a huge success for us at that point that they entered, they just wanted to go into the workforce. That's really helpful. There's a lot of exploration that they would not have had otherwise.

But on the flip of that, we also learned that we saw a lot of lack of diversity of work experiences based on what the job coaches were finding. We had a lot of questions about how do we start expanding? What do we need to do that not all kids are going to go and do this like, almost like a rotation, but they all seemed to be the same type? And then how do we push the edge there and really start working with different employers? So that was something that we continue to struggle with, because we start seeing too many people in retail, and it's like not everyone could be interested in retail.

We also did a lot of work around the reflection of what that local market looked like. So that was something that we start working with them on, saying who's already in your community? How can you expand?

The other thing that took a little while was that as you all know, to do a true discovery process, you have to go a lot of different ways to think about it. We had several kids who came from a background that money was extremely important, they needed the money to help to support their families. It wasn't about, I want to go get this great experience. It's like, I need a job, I need a job now. I mean, we did have a very diverse group of school districts. Sometimes the career coach was helping the social workers go to the cars looking for them to see if we could find the student.

What was really nice, though, is, again, bringing that policy to the local level implementation or the procedure into the local level implementation. I'm not sure if this would have happened if we weren’t involved as that backbone organization in providing the TA. We had a couple of incidents where kids were in a part-time job because they needed the money and the VR counselor wanted to close their case and saying well, they are working. And, of course, I'm going no, no, no, no -- that's discovery. Fortunately, because I work so closely with our bureau director and I could pick up the phone saying we got an issue, we've got to get out to counselors. It was a great training for the VR counselors, but it was also something for us to learn to say, we don't want kids leaving jobs and letting the outcome for VR be a part-time job at a McDonald's. Or whatever it may be, that that is part of the discovery process and what can we learn about this student from there? Questions? Comments?

AUDIENCE QUESTION: The job coaches, were they contracted by the different employment providers? Or were they contracted directly through VR?

TERESA GROSSI: So, to make sure I'm clear with you on this. There was the local collaborative, and let's say in one district, a small district, and there may be like four providers that are part of that collaborative. One of them was the fiscal agent and served as the career coach, was embedded in that school, making sure that things happened in the liaison role. But the students got to pick the provider who they wanted to provide the work-based experiences and/or lead to the job. So those were job coaches who would do the work and they were employed by the employment provider. VR contracted with the employment as a purchase of service agreement with the provider, the employment provider, and those job coaches worked for those providers.

TERESA GROSSI (Audience question not audible): No, that's how it worked. We don’t have a direct job coach to go in. That's through an employment provider.

TERESA GROSSI (Audience question not audible): Can that happen? Yes. Does it happen? Not a lot. But the provider in our true sense, we wanted a match between a student and a job coach and the provider did do the best they could. They would try to match personalities. If it's a big guy, another guy just in case depending on the disability, especially if they have an emotional disability and you need someone who you don't know what's going to happen. They'll try to make that match. And it's also not that they never change job coaches either, if things aren't working, they'll bring in a new job coach to see if that would help as well. Does that help? Okay.

TERESA GROSSI (Audience question not audible): So, because we had money in this grant, remember, from the beginning, we looked at sustainability. So, the career coach was employed by one of the providers. They were the fiscal agent. But even though they worked for Easter Seals Crossoads as a provider, they represented in the school all the providers that were part of the collaborative. They had to buy into the collaborative, providers did, and agree that this is how this is going to work. Now, from the sustainability standpoint, pre-ETS, most were in the school district fairly full-time. But remember, they weren't there 40 hours. So they were bringing in some billable time for VR to help with the sustainability end. Does that work?

So fiscally, it worked. I mean, with the providers, that was something in the beginning we worked through. And then every year we were reducing the dollars so that they would have to look at sustainability. From the onset, VR had agreed because they had agreed. We have ten project search sites in the state and they were paying for work internships there. They use the same model and in the beginning, it was up to three internships in a year for a student. And they still pay for work experiences now, so that was all part of the sustainability plan. When we went to the new employment model, all the providers looked and said, we could sustain this in this way.

TERESA GROSSI (Audience question not audible): I’ve got to go around the state. In some places, providers have really good relationships with the businesses. Personally, I think it's easier to sell a school program to an employer because then they can tout that, hey, I'm working with my local school district and look what we're doing for kids, especially kids with disabilities. But I would say in general, most of them were -- the relationships with the providers were there. In the rural areas, we had more challenges just because of the diversity of those work experiences.

You were saying there, I was trying to think, I think like everywhere else, we got more calls from employers wanting to help, wanting to work with them, because they needed good employees. I'm thinking of Enterprise, literally, I don't know how they got my name, but they called me saying, we heard you do stuff around employment… we need employees. And we talk about it and we're like, well, they're not going to be, probably driving, you know, some will drive, some won't. And they're like, we can figure it out! Our larger areas have pretty good relationships. It is about all of the things we know about employer engagement and serving on the business councils and going to the economic development stuff and building those relationships. That was a lot of it and many of these providers have been doing that for a long time.

But I'm not sure they were all knocking on new doors and that was something else. But then again, I could tell you now, I mean, Toyota is dying for employees right now in Indiana and we can't get them to them. Transportation is another big barrier. So we are now talking about what are some creative ways, and that was a barrier for a lot of our students. You know? The transportation to some of those other sites. So they started working on that earlier on.

Some implications here for practice that we've been thinking about. It's not exhaustive. But, one of the things that I think was really powerful is we had authentic engagement by the individuals who were going to be implementing this. Of course, I did some tweaking along the way with it, but it was those local collaboratives, the local VR counselors, the local providers, who were really helping to design this to say, this is how it's going to work. This makes sense. That really was helpful. They were able to give us feedback.

We met in the beginning, the first year or two years, we were meeting minimally quarterly, we brought everybody together. The VR director, the bureau director was there. The staff were all there and they're saying, give us the feedback, what's working, what's not? What do we have to change? And it was a good give and take, providers saying when we looked at the sustainability, what was it going to take to be able to do that? And when we start thinking down the road with the pre-ETS, how that was going to work, we kept coming back to some of that feedback here.

We did plan for turnover. And had no idea it was going to be anything like it was. And it caused, one, because we knew that we had to always do the training and professional development activities. We thought that, we did it once with the new job coach and we realized every year we were doing a lot of different trainings. We also did a lot of training with the career coaches. A couple of things popped up, when the new staff came, they were little things we had to make sure they knew, such as, think about working with high school youth. What do you know about high school youth? About how you work with them?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: They're on their phones all the time.

TERESA GROSSI: They are on their phones all the time. One of the things we really learned was the best way to communicate with them was to text them, right? But we tell kids all the time, don't go with strangers, but yet a job coach pulls up and says, hey, let's go out and do some job development and the family doesn't know who the job coach is very well yet, so we had a couple of those issues. And we realized that when we were onboarding new staff, there were protocols that we had to make sure that they understood because you can't go get a kid from the high school, one, take them out of a credit course and/or go and start looking for jobs or doing discovery without really building the relationship with the family and doing the communication with the family.

We also learned, from a training standpoint, even though they're 18, about to be 18, and they're adults, we know all that, families are still involved. We know the research is clear that when families are involved, individuals are going to be more successful. They're the ones supporting them. The reality of making sure we build those relationships with the families and the individuals is so critical. Involving them in the way that's most appropriate is also. I say that because one of the things, even when the VR counselors have done a great job, many of them that we worked with, is making sure that the families were at the table too. Yes, I'm going to talk to you as a student. But, you know, if you're going to be successful, mom's still going to be behind you helping, depending on that level of support that you're going to need. So, we really learned that.

The piece about planning for turnover that the families were clear about, that we're now having the conversations about, is the documentation. You know, who's keeping the documentation? I had a new career coach come in and say, I haven't seen any of the IEPs. What do you mean you haven’t seen any of the transition IEPs? We had a big caseload of 15 kids this year and we know you have them all. We had to work with the providers as well to say, who's documenting what, so we don't start all over again.

That's a bit of the start and stop that the families talked about. Their idea was they need the electronic form. Like you know, our healthcare now is all that, you can get your appointments and that. That's what we need in the field so that when that VR counselor leaves or the provider/job coach leaves, I can still access this information. Just how we get that done is a different story. So that's part of that empowering the students and families with that information. The more we can make sure they do have the information and they understand it and the road map of it is really clear.

The ongoing professional development, as I mentioned before, that became almost overwhelming with us. My project coordinator, Faith, she met with career coaches almost monthly coming up with ideas, brainstorming. But then, she would have to onboard the new career coaches. And then we ran as a state, we ran employment specialist training three or four times a year. We had to make sure that folks were involved with that as well.

But I think the way we are living now with our turnovers, we have to think about this ongoing professional development all the time. How many times we have to talk about transition 101, the basics, that's the reality of it. Not only do we have new students coming in, and new families, that we're going to have new staff all the time, and who's not going to have that background. So, although we have a lot of evidence-based practices out there, how do we continue building upon them from an advanced to basic level is going to be really important.

Last, this hold the new policies and changes. We talked about that in the conversations earlier. It was that, if we had to do it over again, although the new employment model, I was the one person who kept saying, can we do this as a pilot? Can we do this as a pilot first, to allow providers time to figure out the finances, and for the VR counselors to figure out how that paperwork was going to work? The good news was, we met as a large state-wide group very regularly so VR counselors could say what's working for them. Providers could say what's working for them or not working for them. And I keep saying it, but really, we have the best bureau rehab service director in the world. She's like, we're going to make this work for individuals, so we continue to tweak that.

But, then when a federal policy comes in that's implementing the state policy and then we move to the order of selection, it is hard, it's really hard. That lesson learned, when we talk at the state level, we have to change and be more thoughtful about how we implement. Even if it's a new procedure, of how we do it very systematically and slowly because I think, personally, all the changes, that's what caused a lot of the turnover in some of the VR systems. I think it was way too much, people were saying I didn't come in to this field to do all of this at once.

We had other issues happening within our VR system as far as staffing. It was the management plan that we first thought about the order of selection. But we changed our education requirements, we changed some things, but certain areas of the state had the highest turnover, so we had to do a lot of analysis of what's happening there that we can't get people.

That was the big lesson we learned, that we said, too much, too fast and we lose people. And we lost people to the Veterans' Administration. I could be a VR counselor and make a lot of money there. That was really the main thing there. So questions, comments?

So many of the models that's happening now is happening in our pre-employment transition services, the self-determination training, self-advocacy training that schools are starting, the career coaches. They're continuing a lot of that plus all of the other requirements.

TERESA GROSSI (Audience question not audible): Yes, one of our rural areas was probably a star in this data. They were doing the self-determination training in a gen-ed class together. Took out the disability stuff and they co-taught it a the English class and the disability specific information was done in a resource room or in a study skills time. They actually got a couple of kids some jobs, that the career coach quit, because they were making more than she was. No, she didn't, she stayed, but they had some really good jobs. But they were also in a special education cooperative that the director knew that it was going to be very flexible and was going to make this thing work.

Our urban settings, we had two. I think the challenge there was for some of the kids, not all, for some of the kids, I wish we could have intervened a little earlier. The self-determination curriculum, I don't have that data, but actually, it was those urban settings that said we're pushing this down and starting it at freshman and sophomore year. We started that, a lot of them started at the sophomore year trying to get kids to become more aware about themselves. Who they are, their preferences, starting to learn more about the problem solving, choice making skills. Our challenges were different just because of being in that setting.

I mean, I think our first year, not even out of the gate and we had a kid do an armed robbery, ended up in the Department of Corrections. It wasn't the transition I had planned, but, you know, we had a lot more of, probably, the department chair was really involved, one district really involved and the social worker. We tended to wrap around our mental health agencies, to do some employment services, were also at the table with us. It was like, okay, what's happening here, what do we need? That's the culture piece of a job coach or a career coach going into school. You have to understand the culture of that building. You have to have an understanding of the culture of that community. If you're not ready for understanding that, and being culturally responsive, there's going to be struggles. In general, the providers were really good because they provided services in that area anyway, they made sure that that match was good for those people. It was something we all thought about right away. Any other questions? Thank you all. Appreciate it. [ Applause ]