



May 10, 2001

## Transcript of Conference Call Presentation

# Engaging Labor Unions in School-To-Work for All Students

presented by:

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**Dennis Schavey**, AFL-CIO Community Service Liaison  
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**Ms. Leach:** I would like to welcome you to “Engaging Labor Unions in School-to-Work for All Students,” a national NTA teleconference that will last approximately an hour. I am Lynda Leach from the University of Illinois. I would like to introduce our presenters: Andrea Carmien, Transition Coordinator, Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District.

**Ms. Carmien:** Hi.

**Ms. Leach:** Hi, Andrea. Then Dennis Schavey, United Way.

**Mr. Schavey:** AFL-CIO Community Service Liaison.

**Ms. Leach:** Thank you. I think I will have Andrea get started and then pass it on to Denny. Denny, if any other labor people from your end would like to contribute, they are welcome to assist you.

**Mr. Schavey:** Great.

**Ms. Leach:** When you are both done presenting, I will open it up to questions. Okay?

**Mr. Schavey:** Great.

**Ms. Carmien:** Okay.

**Ms. Leach:** Okay, Andrea.

**Ms. Carmien:** Hello, everybody. I appreciate this opportunity to talk to you. I’ll give you a little background on myself. I have been in transition for about 15 years. I have done development for community-based work sites, non-paid and paid, and developed programs using job coaches on sites for about 12 years. We have had real successes and we certainly have had some challenges also. My background was in labor prior to coming to education, so I did have some contacts and that did help. I also had an understanding of unions and how unions worked. That certainly helped too, although I didn’t even realize it was an issue for the first few years when I was developing programs.

Well, first of all, I need to say that Michigan

is the only state in the United States that mandates special education services to age 26. We are unique in and of ourselves that way.

The other way I think we are unique is that the State of Michigan has really embraced transition. I was involved in a five-year Michigan Transition Initiative and had the pleasure of chairing the State Transition Interagency Council for three years. I received much of the information that I will share with you and some of the things that happened from across the state and from other people.

The State of Michigan has bought into and is invested in the whole federal and state law of transition. We are privileged to have the Michigan Department of Career Development and Rehabilitation Services oversee the transition project and the transition process in this state. Prior to the last two years there were 22 ISDs—Intermediate School Districts—of the 57 ISDs involved in the Michigan transition initiative. After that initiative went away, then the Department of Education chose to give out transition grants to all 57 ISDs.

Those grants were used in various ways, some to pay for transition coordinators and some to pay for programming, etc. It was really a wide use of the money. Next year I understand that we are going to be receiving money for the transition coordinator position, plus some money for programming. It’s very exciting to be in this state right now if you are in transition and special education because there is this huge investment.

I can’t say enough about Michigan Rehabilitation Services, that’s part of the Department of Career Development. They are wonderful in the vocational or the career pathway portion of transition planning.

I am assuming all of you know what transition planning is. It’s basically identifying where students

are going to live, work, integrate into the community, and what they are going to do for social/leisure. That's the bottom-line and simple way to explain the law—you can imagine all the complications if I was actually reading you the law.

In Northern Michigan, we do not have many factories. Denny will share with you the number of unions that we do have. We are not like Lansing, Flint, or Detroit that have all these huge unions and the automotive industry, etc. However, I think there are pros and cons. I think sometimes in the bigger unions you probably can get more support than we can in some smaller unions.

Back years ago when I was first developing vocational programs, we decided that with the student population we were serving that we needed to give them a minimum of nine work experiences in the community with an evaluation process linked to it. After the nine work experiences they were ready for competitive employment. We had an 80% placement rate at that time through this one program.

Well, in doing this, in developing jobs, what I would do—I had three job coaches and each of the job coaches were assigned to a business for the entire year, so we worked with three employers. As you guys have probably heard or done, many people go out to businesses and ask if they would please let some students with disabilities or special education students come in and do something within their business. The way we chose to approach this issue was we always went to employers and told them we were interviewing employers and we would choose three employers. Then we would move our sites around every year or every two years so we didn't saturate any one business in the area. The other benefit to that is building community education within the community on people with disabilities. I worked with quite a few placement agencies, including Manpower and those agencies. When we were done in a workplace, I would then let these people know that we were not going to come back the following year and they could very easily place people with disabilities in that business because the co-workers understood how to work with people with disabilities; they had been educated by the on-site job coach during that school year. That's how we were started.

My first encounter with the union at that time was with our community college. We wanted

to develop a site in the cafeteria area of our community college. When I talked to the manager of that department, he never mentioned there was a union involved. By the time we talked to them and they wanted to do the program and I brought the job coach in to do some job development, we very quickly found out that there was a union in place. There were a couple of the union people that were not real happy about it because they were afraid we would displace workers. At that point we backed off a little bit and the job coach and I were able to set up a meeting to present our program to the staff. From there we had to meet with the union business agent; and then from there ended up going to their union board and presenting the program. We finally received the okay to set up our non-paid work experience site.

I think that some of the benefits obviously are that our students became familiar with unions. The other thing we promised them was that within our school curriculum we would provide information about unions, what a union was, how they worked, what union dues were, why there were unions, etc. They felt that it was a way to educate the community on unions also.

Probably maximizing community resources, I think we were very well integrated in the community with community resources but not with any place that was union. What I found out in conversing with many of people that I worked with from other agencies is that they didn't think there was any hope in working with unions. We don't even want to deal with it because it's so much trouble, etc. What we found was developing a relationship with labor unions was really important.

**Ms. Sheldon:** This is Debbie Sheldon from the NTA. I am was curious if there are other people on the call who have also had some experience working with unions who would like to share some of their experiences?

**Ms. Burns:** In Pennsylvania we are working on registered apprenticeships. I work in education directly with labor and industry and the U.S. Department of Labor. We have opened up registered apprenticeships in the state to age 16 and above. We have been doing this since '98 and we are having tremendous success including labor unions in developing apprenticeships and adding front pieces that

are more specific to the 16- to 18-year-olds that are also part of the actual registered apprenticeship.

**Ms. Shelden:** Are they students with disabilities?

**Ms. Burns:** We are working very hard to promote opportunities. For example, one corporation is currently writing apprenticeships for their target population who are young people with disabilities. We are mostly promoting and working with transition coordinators. In fact, in some places the state is looking at registering apprenticeships to standardize the training for their paired professionals, such as job coaches, which requires everyone to have a nationally standardized set of skills and work process and would give them a credential at the end of that training. We think that will address many of the concerns with inequities and training of our paired professionals. We are doing some exciting things in Pennsylvania.

If you would like to contact me, Rebecca Burns, my direct line is (717) 772-0867. And my email is [rburns@state.pa.us](mailto:rburns@state.pa.us). I can try to get you linked up with various sponsors and some of the activities that are going on. I invite you all to visit us and I would love to be able to talk individually with you guys and see if I can't make some connections.

**Ms. Shelden:** Rebecca, this is Debbie Shelden again. I was wondering when you started the program up in '98, were there any particular barriers that you encountered that you have been able to overcome that you could share some strategies for?

**Ms. Burns:** There were many barriers. Most of the barriers were perceived rather than real. I think the beauty of working through the barriers is the labor and industry working with education. They know the universe of the union and union issues because labor and industry were able to work through any barriers under labor law issues, and under apprenticeship issues. I had experience with the educational community so together we have worked as problem-solvers, identifying inconsistencies in policy, even learning to speak each other's language and understand what it means. We have worked in concert and are continuing to do so as far as identifying issues and resolving those issues for the sponsors, the schools, the children, whomever. That's why it's working so well.

I won't tell you that it hasn't been tough, but we are all advocates and we are breaking down

barriers. We have been working hard jointly and I think that's the key to what we have done—is that we each are basically experts in our own area. Therefore, we are working together to say, you know, this really isn't something that's in our way. For example, under child labor law if you are part of a registered apprenticeship then you receive release from some of the prohibited activities. Those types of things we have worked through together that address concerns of industry and unions, as far as their workers' comp were to go up. We are finding that it's going down when the young people are entering through such situations.

Many of the things that have been historic concerns, issues, and fears are going away as we work through the processes. It's ongoing, we are always problem solving and we are always trying to brainstorm.

**Ms. Leach:** Is there anyone else who would like to share what they have encountered, any successes or barriers or lessons learned?

**Ms. Nagrod:** This is Janine Nagrod from the Washington, DC Central Labor Council. Our program has been working through these school-to-career initiatives in our city. And we are specifically charged with being the labor intermediary to involve the union in the school-to-careers program.

It's a little different. We have a well-established apprenticeship program in this area which we promote, but that's not necessarily the boundary of what we do. I think our members want to go into the schools earlier and start giving the kids options early, not just get them into work situations. They do a number of career exploration activities, such as job shadowing, and they come in and speak to the students, stuff like that. We hold an annual union fair to highlight all the different unionized jobs in the city and promote labor management cooperation with all of those kinds of activities.

Now, our program is fairly new and we are looking for ways to sustain it. We have received many different options for the future but one of the things I am interested in hearing is what's going on in other parts of the country and what works well and know how to do that for the future.

**Ms. Leach:** Okay. Great. Thank you. I think it would be nice if anyone else has contact information or Web sites to share about what is going on, so

that people can then later refer to those; that would be great. Janine, could I get your email address?

**Ms. Nagrod:** Sure. It's [jnagrod@dclabor.org](mailto:jnagrod@dclabor.org).

**Ms. Leach:** Thank you very much for that presentation.

**Mr. Schavey:** I'm the AFL-CIO Community Service Liaison and I work here at the United Way of Northwest Michigan. I have worked here for about 11 years. You have to understand that there are about 230 to 250 labor liaisons like myself throughout the United States who work with United Ways. The importance of that information is that this becomes a good resource for you if you were to contact your United Way and find out if they have a labor liaison. If they do, now you have a connection to where you can find out who the unions are, how you can meet with them, how you can go to their meetings, how you can get your program implemented in your area.

If you don't have one of those labor liaisons, then you have to understand the national AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrialized Organizations. It has a three-tier structure:

1. There are 67 international unions who are affiliated at the national level. Those are unions, such as communication workers, steel workers, and mineworkers. Then in addition to those 67, there are seven trade unions—IBW, pipefitters, and sheet metal workers, those types of unions. Now, you can always make contact at the national level to find out what's available or whom you would contact in your local area.
2. Then the second tier of the three tiers is that every state has a state federation. That state federation will have affiliates within the state of the affiliated unions or international unions that exist within that state.
3. Then there is one final tier, the central labor councils and UAW CAP (Community Action Program) councils. Those are the local ones that would be near your city or near your community, usually a central labor council and UAW CAP council will have a jurisdiction of one to nine, maybe more counties. They cover quite an area. That's how you would try to find out and make connections and contacts if you don't

have a labor contact. To start, look in the yellow pages; for example, under labor organizations, to find out what central labor council is within your area. It is through that central labor council that you will have an opportunity to go to their meeting. Then they have delegates who come in to represent the different international unions within that central labor council. Those will be your local union people.

Let me go briefly through the role and function of my job with the United Way and labor unions as a labor liaison. We provide community service programs to local union members and the community at large. We provide access to information about services and the different programs, human service programs, in our local areas. We give information on how to access them, how to qualify for them. Are there projects people can do for that organization? Is there any way someone can volunteer? Is there any way that people can serve on their boards? We get our union people involved that way.

As I have heard, talking to Andrea and listening today, what you need to do if you have a labor liaison, contact that labor liaison within your United Way. If not, then look in your yellow pages and you're going to find the central labor council. What we need to have happen is that you educate the local unions and their membership about this program. When we start talking about bringing people into the workplace, the unions and the members look at the organization. For example, the organization Manpower, they have temporary people that come in and the next thing you know workers are displaced or laid off because they have found temporary help that will come in and do the same job that they were doing. The union members have that fear or that concern right from the beginning so it's important that you have the opportunity to meet with the union and educate them about what you're trying to accomplish as far as special education students coming into the workplace and getting work experience.

You educate those people on what that's all about and then you have to reassure and work with the union before you go to the company. Insist on drawing up a contract or memo of understanding to reassure the union that the program is not going to replace or lay off any existing workers. If we can get that fear subsided, you should have no

problems with the union. The members that are in that workplace should support your cause because this is what unions have been about for over 50 years with United Ways. We are here to help people improve their quality of life. One of the ways to do that, particularly with special education students, is to give them an opportunity to know what this job is all about—is it something that they can do, something that they can make their own careers out of and then become a union member. The unions aren't going to shy away from getting more union members, and it doesn't matter if they are special education or anyone else.

**Ms. Carmien:** One of the challenges that we can come up against is if you find a union in a company and the union and company are not getting along well because of personalities or are having other conflicts. Many times you don't know what those reasons are. There have been times that we have really backed off and literally waited until that position changed to be able to see if we could work with that person better.

We were also in a situation once that we were used as a pawn between the business and the union. It was our big medical center. We chose to back right out of that because we didn't want to cause any more problems.

The other piece to this is you have to ask yourself what are they going to get out of this. It's not just what is the business going to get out of this but what is the union going to get out of this. Denny alluded to that a little bit. Part of that is public relations. Many times unions do not get a good rap, at least up here in our Republican conservative town. What we do when we set up work sites is I invite the newspaper and the television people to go with me on a site visit. I make sure that the union reps are there on site when we get there so we can introduce them, etc. We push that to make sure it's included in the article or included on the news. Once that happens, there aren't many union people that aren't just thrilled to have received good PR. I think that's important.

I understand that all states don't have Intermediate School Districts and I just want to make a point of saying that our district covers five counties and 15 local school districts and about 2,200 square miles geographically. We have a very large area. As you probably know, it's laid out around the great

lakes, around the bay. Geographically it's difficult to cover that much distance. We do the best we can.

Sometimes the labor liaison that is in the position that Denny is in, that person might be difficult to get on your side. What you have to do is let them know what they could get out of it and let them be the lead person that would get credit for getting this established.

The number one piece of advice I would give would be to find out somehow what the relationship is between labor and that employer. The community service liaison, many times, will be real honest with you and say, stay away from here, but you might get in there, and give you some of the demographics of the people on who you can get along with better and who would be more open to looking at something like that. We find in work sites that there are employees that are very open to working with students with disabilities and there are people who don't want anything to do with them.

The other issue that we do a little bit more in unionized places is we really respect mentorships. Many times the job coach will work with a co-worker to educate them on how they can support and help the person with disabilities. Then they can take the lead and help them when the job coach does step back a little bit and so on. That really enriches the whole experience.

The other thing is, you can get in the labor newsletter. That really goes out of the central labor council. I presented at Denny's community service classes. That way you can get a real conception of union people. By and large, the bottom line is, "Don't take our jobs."

**Ms. Leach:** Right. Well, it sounds like it really pays to find out who the local labor liaison is in your community.

**Mr. Schavey:** It's very important. If it's available to you, it's a key to start with. They know and already have a relationship with all the local unions.

**Ms. Carmien:** It's amazing how few transition coordinators even think about unions. I know that there are agencies like rehabilitation service or a voc-rehab place or whatever; many times they will talk about unions. School systems are usually the path of least resistance.

**Ms. Leach:** Right. Before I open it up to questions, Andrea, would you please give us your con-

tact information for those on the line who would like to, at some later point, maybe email you or call you and Denny?

**Ms. Carmien:** Sure. My email is *acarmien@tbaisd.k12.mi.us*. My phone number is (231) 922-6374.

**Mr. Schavey:** Our Web site is *www.tbacalc.org*.

**Ms. Carmien:** I'm curious what questions there might be or if there is something you didn't understand or you would like us to elaborate on.

**Ms. Leach:** Any questions from those who are out there for Denny and Andrea?

**Ms. Steigerwald:** This is Marcia Steigerwald in Indiana. It's not a question. I just want to offer up a piece of information that is related to this topic. There is wonderful videotape available through the PACER Center on Natural Supports in a Union Workplace. Now, this is an actual job placement that was carved in a union shop for an individual with a disability. It shows the process that the group went through in terms of developing the relationship with the union, developing the actual job site. I don't have that information with me where I am right now. Lynda, maybe you can provide some contact information at your fingertips. I have found it very helpful when we have been talking with people on job development for people with disabilities in union workplaces. It was shown a couple of years ago at the National Systems Change Project and Transition National Directors Meeting. PACER previewed it there and I think it's available for a nominal fee. [Editor's Note: See <http://www.pacer.org/publications/transition.htm> for more information.]

**Ms. Leach:** Great. Thanks. Anyone else?

**Ms. Nagrod:** This is Janine Nagrod. I wanted to mention that there are select central labor councils across the nation that have both had school-to-work grants and done some programs or have them now or have continued some programs. It may not be a totally foreign concept for the central labor councils. That is where, you know, you can look up in your yellow pages and find that central labor council. I think Denny was right before when he said that's where you should start.

**Ms. Steigerwald:** This is Marcia in Indiana again. You'll find central labor council representation on many of the local partnerships. I know in this area the local partnership is represented on the

school-to-work labor council.

**Ms. Carmien:** I'm curious, have the programs been successful with unions and school systems? Were they non-paid or paid?

**Ms. Steigerwald:** I think each program has varied in what it has concentrated on and what it has provided. There is a program running up in New England that is a paid summer internship program with a single employer. There is a mentor program that was running in Iowa. A different summer program was in Seattle. Here we are in a fairly unique role as we are written into a school-to-career initiative grant as an intermediary to labor. And our program is much more varied because of that.

Each place has had varying degrees of success and some have continued and some have been given money to duplicate themselves in other places. For instance, the one up in New England is like that. I'm not sure that I can speak to their successes or failures, but there are many different models out there.

**Ms. Carmien:** I really believe that everybody has to get something out of it. If you can identify that for the school program and for the union and for the employer, it's threefold.

**Ms. Steigerwald:** I think the other important thing to note is, in any kind of coalition, that you do identify up front for everybody what everybody's interest in it is and what they hope to get out of it so that it's clear. When things start getting rough, no one says, "Well, we didn't know that you're looking for union members to get out of this so you want them to be organized in the future." As long as everyone lays it out on the table at first, then it's nice and clear and there are no problems down the road.

**Ms. Carmien:** I think one place that Michigan has problems is in the factories that are like production lines. Many students with disabilities can't keep up with production. If they can, and schools have placed them in a non-paid situation on occasion, then the unions certainly have the right to get really upset because they could displace somebody. The unions we have up here and the ones I have dealt with have not been factory production line type environments.

**Mr. Schavey:** We're not highly industrialized in Northern Michigan.

**Ms. Sword:** This is Carrie Sword at the University of Minnesota. One of the speakers earlier

mentioned that you found that policy was more of an issue than laws. I'm wondering what kind of policy issues with the employers have you found that at first seemed difficult or impossible?

**Ms. Carmien:** Were we talking about an agreement between the school program and the employer?

**Ms. Sword:** I think you were talking about agreements between the school program and the employer.

**Ms. Carmien:** Well, I know we have written agreements with the employers. If there is a union involved we write that into the agreement and have the union representative sign that agreement.

**Mr. Fleeter:** This is Al Fleeter calling from Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I have served for the past five years as a regional school-to-work coordinator in our seven-county area. It is an intermediate school district situation and, as somebody was wondering, I understand that approximately half the states have intermediate school districts. A community college person and I have been serving as co-chairs of a substate regional partnership that includes about 6,500 students. We have, I feel, been blessed and enriched with union participation in that partnership. Our purpose is to support and build capacity in school-to-work among our local 33 school districts and their communities.

Now, some of this may be quite familiar to you, but one of the things that we have had in our state is a person, Jan Smith, who distributed a guidebook. It's from 1997, but I would guess that there is current information in it, involving unions and school-to-work initiatives. Is that familiar to you?

**Ms. Carmien:** Not to me, no.

**Mr. Fleeter:** It's an AFL-CIO publication. I assume it is published by the Human Resources Development Institute of AFL-CIO.

**Ms. Carmien:** That is now called Working for America. They have changed their name. I am not sure if they are publishing it anymore. They did that when they had a school-to-work grant, which has expired. You can call the AFL and ask for Working for America Institute.

**Mr. Fleeter:** Okay. That has been useful. The expiring of school-to-work or the sunseting of the School-To-Work Opportunities Act might be something that we can bring into the conversation, too. I'm not pretending to speak for the whole state, but

there are a couple of things that have been useful. Probably the main one recently has been our labor council has worked to bring in collective bargaining negotiations and conflict resolution training for students. That has, I think, had multiple application besides collective bargaining, good common-sense problem solving, and conflict resolution, which, you know, we see as employability skills. That's been something that our labor council has supported disseminating.

**Mr. Schavey:** This is Denny. I have one more contact for you. I heard the gentleman that was talking about Working for America with the AFL-CIO? I have a phone number and the contact and their Web site, if you would like that. It's AFL-CIO Working for America Institute, Bruce Herman, Executive Director, (202) 638-3912. The Web site is [www.workingforamerica.org](http://www.workingforamerica.org).

**Ms. Leach:** Thanks, Denny. Andrea and Denny, I do appreciate all the time you spent getting ready for this call. It sounds like Northern Michigan has developed a number of good relationships with unions and had many good outcomes for students.

**Ms. Carmien:** I would like to mention one last thing, Lynda, and that is that in our state somebody mentioned school-to-work initiative sunseting. I just want to say that in Michigan we have taken on the initiative of career preparation that has taken over the school-to-work initiative. The structure in the state is set up and conducive to that system, so there is a really big buy-in into career preparation right now in the state.

**Mr. Fleeter:** Right. I wanted to reinforce that I think that's definitely a model, from the states that I am familiar with in the Midwest. I attended a presentation by some people from Michigan at the Madison, WI career conference. I felt it really was excellent. Especially getting it down into the middle school levels with career preparation.

**Ms. Carmien:** Thank you.

**Mr. Schavey:** Lynda, this is Denny. I would like to thank you and all of you who tuned in, for giving us this opportunity.

**Ms. Leach:** It was our pleasure, Denny. I hope someday we get to meet in person.

**Mr. Schavey:** Yes. I'm sure we will.

**Ms. Leach:** Thanks again, everyone. Have a good day.

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