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Capacity Building Institute

Electronic Mentoring

Building Relationships Between Employers and Youth Through Technology

March 15, 2002
Minneapolis, MN

Proceedings

Contents

Background	2
Agenda	3
Purpose, Discussion Questions, and Intended Outcomes	4
Summary	5
Speaker Biographies	10
<i>NCSET Capacity Building Institute, March 15, 2002</i>	1

Background

The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) hosted a Capacity Building Institute on *Electronic Mentoring: Building Relationships Between Employers and Youth Through Technology*, March 15, 2002 at the Radisson Metrodome in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Although research has shown that mentoring programs significantly improve the academic achievement and social enrichment of all students, there is very little information on the availability and impact of these programs for youth with disabilities.

NCSET's Connecting to Success (CTS) program is an electronic mentoring program for youth with disabilities. The mission of CTS is to significantly expand mentoring, career development, and academic achievement opportunities for youth with disabilities through technology.

This institute was an opportunity to introduce participants to a successful mentoring strategy which connects employers with youth with disabilities through e-mail and face-to-face meetings. It brought together stakeholders from education, community agencies, area businesses, and government in a forum that allowed for discussion and goal setting regarding increasing mentoring opportunities for transition-age youth with disabilities.

The institute featured presentations by Pamela Toole, a national expert on service learning and mentoring strategies and Co-Director of the Compass Institute, and other expert sessions and panels on youth development issues, e-mentoring strategies and guidelines, and the benefits of participation and lessons learned by the teachers, students, and businesses currently participating in CTS.

The purpose of the institute was not to train participants to start their own CTS mentoring program. Rather, participants were given the opportunity to strategize about ways to bring e-mentoring to their community, to learn more about the program, and to meet key players for future implementation of the program.

In the following proceedings you will find the institute agenda, an overview of the institute purpose, guiding questions, institute outcomes, and a summary of the institute. At the end of the summary you will find a list of the speakers and their biographical information. Due to a large snowfall, several of the speakers were unable to attend the conference. Substitutions are noted.

For more information on Connecting to Success or to learn more about implementing the program in your community, please contact Katharine Hill at 612-626-0393 or visit <http://ici.umn.edu/ementoring>.

Agenda

- 7:45-8:30 **Registration, Coffee and Continental Breakfast**
- 8:30-8:45 **Introduction and Welcome**
Mary Mack, *Associate Director, National Center on Secondary Education and Transition*
Gianna Bari-Lassiter, *Acting Executive Director, Minneapolis Youth Trust*
- 8:45-10:00 **Introduction to Connecting to Success**
Pamela Toole, *Co-Director, Compass Institute*
Katharine Hill, *Program Coordinator, Connecting to Success*
Barbara McClannahan, *Project Manager, Iowa PATHS Systems Change Grant, Iowa Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services*
Aretha Green-Rupert, *Program Director, Youth Trust*
- 10:15-11:00 **Making the Case: Youth Development**
Pamela Toole
- 11:00-12:00 **Benefits and Lessons Learned: Panel**
Moderator: Jessica Rogers, *Program Coordinator, Youth Trust*
John Staba and students, *Minneapolis South High School*
Joe Timmons and students, *Options North*
- 12:00-12:15 **Planning Time: Connect with your Community**
- 12:15-1:00 **Lunch**
- 1:00-1:45 **Benefits and Lessons Learned: Panel**
Moderator: Jessica Rogers
Mentors from participating businesses
- 1:45-2:45 **Legal Issues, Confidentiality, and Other Concerns**
Barbara McClannahan
Jessica Rogers
Pamela Toole
- 3:00-3:40 **Evaluating Mentoring Programs**
Rebecca Saito, *Research Scientist, Youth Development Consultant, and Author*
Robert Stensrud, *Director, Rehabilitation Institute, Drake University*
Barbara McClannahan
- 3:40-4:00 **Meet in Affinity Groups and Closing Activity**
- 4:00 **Close of Meeting**

Institute Purpose, Discussion Questions, and Intended Outcomes

Purpose

This institute introduced participants to a successful mentoring strategy which connects employers and youth with disabilities through e-mail and face-to-face meetings to promote improved academic achievement and completion of transition goals.

Discussion Questions

- How can mentoring programs be made more accessible to students with disabilities?
- How can mentoring programs be linked with IEPs and other academic and curricular goals, including transition goals?
- How do you see an e-mentoring project fitting with your work in your community?
- How can mentoring programs be evaluated unintrusively while gathering valid data?

Intended Outcomes

- Learn how to involve students with disabilities in E-mentoring
- Develop connections with other stakeholders in the community
- Learn to build dynamic relationships between schools and businesses
- Motivate students toward academic and career achievement

Institute Summary

Welcome

Mary Mack, Associate Director, National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, welcomed the Capacity Building Institute's participants and briefly discussed the Institute's goals—to introduce participants to the Connecting to Success mentoring strategy, which matches employers with youth with disabilities through e-mail and face-to-face meetings to promote improved academic achievement and completion of transition goals.

Ms. Mack also presented an overview of NCSET, a federally-funded partnership established to create opportunities for youth with disabilities to achieve successful futures. The Center provides technical assistance and disseminates information in four areas of national significance:

- Providing youth with disabilities access to general, standards-based education;
- Ensuring access to postsecondary education for youth with disabilities;
- Supporting youth leadership and family participation in postschool decision making and planning; and
- Improving system linkages at the national, state, and local levels.

The purpose of the Institute was to introduce participants to the concept of e-mentoring and to the Connecting to Success program. Participants were encouraged to connect with program staff and with each other, both throughout the day and after the conference, to begin discussions about starting a mentoring program in their own communities.

Introduction to Connecting to Success

Pamela Toole, co-Director of the Compass Institute, opened the Institute by sharing several definitions of "mentor." She then asked participants to share in small groups who had been mentors to them and what were some words they might use to describe them. Participants listed several words including:

Self-worth	Caring	Made you feel important
Acceptance	Focused	Guide
Consistent	Opportunity	Flexible
High Expectations	Encouraging	Provided Direction
Inspiration	Can-do attitude	

Aretha Green-Rupert, Program Director at Achieve!Minneapolis (formerly Youth Trust) provided an overview of electronic mentoring and a brief history of Achieve!Minneapolis. The goal of the organization is to connect youth with caring adults via a flexible process. The e-mentoring component of Youth Trust's work grew out of its New Workforce program. The first e-mentoring partnership was with Franklin Middle School in Minneapolis and Norstan Communications. It was implemented on a larger scale in 1996, in a partnership between Olson Middle School in Minneapolis and Cargill, Inc. The role of Youth Trust was to facilitate relationships between schools and businesses. Currently, 2,400 students in 23 schools are participating statewide in Minnesota.

The Youth Trust model is an adopt-a-classroom model, which matches volunteers from an employer with students in a specific classroom within the school. There is a one-to-one student-mentor match. The student and mentor exchange weekly e-mails, with the teacher providing specific directions for some of the communication. In addition to the weekly emails, there are two face-to-face

meetings. The business goes to the school environment for the first meeting; the students go to the business for the second. It is important that there is a celebration at the end of the year, to provide closure and a sense of accomplishment for all participants. Evaluations of the Youth Trust program have found that electronic mentoring can enhance curriculum and be incorporated into existing curriculum models.

There are two essential elements for a successful e-mentoring model: adequate technology and committed school-business partnerships. It is also very important to have good planning with all of the participating partners and to have an intermediary organization to provide support and troubleshooting. It is also important to have fun with the process!

Katharine Hill, Program Coordinator for Connecting to Success (CTS), provided an overview of the specifics of the Connecting to Success model. The program is a partnership with Achieve!Minneapolis; the Minnesota Department of Children, Families & Learning; NCSET; and the Iowa PATHS Systems Change Grant. The mission of CTS is to significantly expand mentoring, career development, and academic achievement opportunities for youth with disabilities through technology. The model provides a framework for communities, schools, and employers to establish partnerships and facilitate e-mentoring, training materials, suggestions for integrating existing or new curricula into the e-mentoring process, a youth development approach, information on how to support the participation of youth with disabilities, and technical assistance and support.

A local program coordinator, who is not employed by either the participating schools or the participating businesses, manages the program. This person is responsible for the day-to-day running of the program, providing troubleshooting and support, and for building relationships with both schools and businesses. At both the business and the school it is crucial that there is a contact person—the employer liaison and the school liaison. At the business, the employer liaison recruits mentors; at the school the school liaison (who could be a teacher, administrator, community outreach person, or someone else) recruits teachers. Teachers select students to participate and then the teacher, employer liaison, and local program coordinator work together to match students to mentors.

CTS builds upon the e-mentoring model created by Youth Trust, while providing additional support and flexibility to make it appropriate for work with youth with disabilities. For example, participants frequently have more than two face-to-face meetings per year. Also, the CTS training specifically addresses some of the needs of youth with disabilities. Additionally, there is ongoing training and technical assistance provided to participants by NCSET.

Barbara McClannahan of the Iowa PATHS Systems Change Grant spoke about the Iowa experience in piloting CTS. There are two sites in Iowa: Bettendorf and Oskaloosa. Before beginning the project, focus groups were conducted with employers, youth, and service providers. They found that consumers reported fear of moving into the world of work because they did not know what would be expected of them there. In implementing CTS, they found that it is important to have people who are excited about the project on the local level. The local coordinators helped connect the business and school and keep everyone on timelines. They also had an e-mail list for communicating with the teachers and the mentors. It is crucial to keep the lines of communication open between all participants. Teachers invited students who they felt would benefit from participating in the project to participate. Teachers also assisted in gathering evaluation data.

Making the Case: Youth Development

Pamela Toole presented an overview of youth development as support for the importance of mentoring opportunities for all youth. Key points of this discussion included:

- The concept of resiliency: “You can rebound despite the negative issues you face.” Developmental needs must be met. There must be a caring adult who encourages and supports dreams, has high expectations, provides opportunities to participate, teaches life skills, and provides clear and consistent boundaries.
- Youth Outcomes: social competencies, problem solving skills, bright futures.
- Asset areas (Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN). These are factors that are critical for positive development. “The more assets youth have, the less likely they are to struggle and the more likely they are to succeed.” The 40 developmental assets cover internal and external environments—commitment to learning, positive values, social competence, and positive identity. What is e-mentoring promoting in relationship to the assets? Intergenerational connectedness is one key factor.
- Factors which encourage self-esteem include: belonging/connectedness, positive role models, affirmation/knowledge of uniqueness, skills in influence in self.
- America’s Promise to Youth was debuted at the 1997 President’s Summit for America’s Future. The five promises to youth are: caring adult, safe places, a healthy start, marketable skills, and opportunities to give back.

Benefits and Lessons Learned: Teachers and Students Panel

A panel of two teachers and four students from South High School in Minneapolis and Options North School in New Hope, Minnesota spoke with participants about their experiences with Connecting to Success. Katharine Hill acted as moderator. Highlights from the panel included:

- Teachers felt that students’ writing skills had improved, as had their comfort and familiarity with technology. They also saw some social skill development and improvement in transition areas. They work to incorporate e-mentoring into transition goals and to individualize it for each student’s needs
- Students reported enjoying having a caring adult to communicate with, whether it was about career aspirations, academic issues, or other areas. They reported discussing postsecondary education, workplace expectations, academic assignments, and career goals with their mentors.
- Teachers felt that access to technology was the greatest challenge to participating in Connecting to Success. They also felt that it is very necessary to have enthusiastic partnerships on both sides and to work hard to maintain communication and enthusiasm for both mentors and mentees.
- Both the teachers and the students felt that the face-to-face meetings were very important to maintaining the mentoring relationship over the course of the year.
- Teachers found that giving weekly updates to mentors also helped the program operate more smoothly. Teachers also participated in the training that was provided to mentors and they felt that this helps the program run more smoothly.
- When asked how e-mentoring had helped in school, one student replied, “My attitude. Last year I wasn’t a good student. My mentor talked to me about how you can only mess up once. You need to have confidence in yourself and show others you can do it.”

Benefits and Lessons Learned: Employers Panel

Mentors from AT&T, ADC Telecommunications, and Achieve!Minneapolis spoke to participants about their experiences with e-mentoring. Aretha Green-Rupert acted as moderator. Key points included:

- The role of coordinator or employer liaison is very time-consuming but also very rewarding. The biggest challenge lies in keeping in touch with all of the participants. It's actually fairly easy to recruit mentors—people want to participate in the program. But mentors need to have regular, consistent communication and it can fall to the liaison to facilitate that.
- “You never know how much or how little you have impacted a student” so it's very important to keep at it.
- The face-to-face meetings are very important every year. Mentors and the liaisons work hard to create a fun atmosphere when the kids come to visit them at the work site, so that it is easy and interactive for everybody. It is important to have food available and to have some planned activities to break the ice.
- Mentors felt they learn a lot from participating in the program—about students and what school is like and about diverse communities and cultures. They may approach the program or the schools with some trepidation, but they tend to come away from the experience saying, “There are good things happening in education.”
- Communication is the most critical factor. Teachers that provide weekly updates are invaluable. Mentors need to communicate with the student if they are going to be out of town on business or miss an event or an email. Having a third party acting as the overall coordinator is also extremely useful and can help bring and keep everyone at the table.

Legal Issues, Confidentiality, and Other Concerns

Pamela Toole and Barbara McClannahan discussed some of the boundaries and parameters necessary to make Connecting to Success operate smoothly. Issues discussed included:

At the School

- Students only use school-issued email addresses
- Email monitoring system is in place
- No sharing of personal contact information
- No contact outside of email and face-to-face meetings
- Students must have signed permission slips
- Report any and all inappropriate emails

At the Business

- Mentors only use work email address
- Business coordinator and teacher decide on who mentors are to cc on all emails
- No sharing of personal contact information
- No contact outside of email and face-to-face meetings
- Mentors must sign a volunteer sign-off sheet
- Report any and all alarming or inappropriate emails

Overall

- Businesses need to think through liability issues, as do schools.
- Confidentiality: Participants both fill out application forms that include general interest inventories. Confidentiality issues must be discussed with all participants—teachers, employ-

ers, and students. Parents need to sign permission slips and be aware that their child is participating in this program.

- Monitoring—all emails should be screened. There are a number of ways that this can be accomplished, including cc'ing the teacher on each email or having the emails come through a single email account that the teacher monitors.
- Reporting—it should be made clear to students that anything they say to their mentor that indicates abuse or intent to harm themselves or others will be reported to the student's teacher, who is a mandated reporter.

Evaluation Panel

Due to weather related travel delays and illness, two of the evaluation panel participants were unable to attend. Barbara McClannahan spoke briefly about some of the issues surrounding evaluation of CTS. Thus far, data has been gathered through focus groups, structured interviews, and surveys. A future goal is to do some more long-term tracking of participants, perhaps through other systems such as Vocation Rehabilitation.

It is important to plan for evaluation at the beginning of the project, and not wait until it has started. Participants should be made aware of the importance of evaluation for program improvement and training and technical assistance. However, it is also important to create an evaluation plan that does not overwhelm the program participants or take too much of their time.

Rebecca Saito's manual on evaluating mentoring programs is available through the National Mentoring Partnership's Web site: <http://www.mentoring.org>.

Affinity Groups and Close of Conference

The institute closed with an opportunity for participants to ask questions and begin to strategize about ways to bring CTS to their community.

Mary Mack spoke briefly about potential funding opportunities for mentoring programs, including opportunities through the U.S. Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Justice, and Education.

Speaker Biographies

Gianna Bari-Lassiter became Interim Executive Director of Achieve!Minneapolis (formerly Youth Trust) in August 2001. She brings to the organization experience in supervision and administration, mentoring program design and implementation, event planning, and evaluation. She has held various positions at the University of Minnesota, including associate director of the President's Distinguished Faculty Mentor Program and director of the Alumni Association's mentoring program. She is also the founder of the CO!ACHIEVE Network. Ms. Bari-Lassiter has a master's degree in education from the University of Minnesota and a bachelor's degree from the University of St. Thomas.

Tim Christian is an AT&T employee who has worked with the Northeast Middle School E-mentoring program for 5 years, the last 2.5 as coordinator. Mr. Christian has 32 years' experience in education and training. He has been with AT&T 12 years and is currently in charge of process and training development at the company's audio teleconference center in downtown Minneapolis. In addition to his support of the mentoring program, Mr. Christian has extensive volunteer experience. A former teacher, he has volunteered as a coach, official, public address announcer, and master of ceremonies at various events. He provided career counseling to adult learners of all ages while an instructor at Grand View College. Mr. Christian's undergraduate degree is in mathematics from Northern Iowa. He has a graduate degree in Effective Teaching from Drake University.

Aretha Green-Rupert is Program Director of Achieve!Minneapolis (formerly Youth Trust). Mrs. Green-Rupert recently came to Achieve!Minneapolis from the Greater Twin Cities United Way where she served as a Campaign Division Director. Her previous experience includes a position as Assistant Outreach Director and Project Coordinator with Girls Incorporated of Central Alabama and Associate Director of Southside Family School. She has a M.S. in horticulture from Mississippi State University, and a B.S. in biology from Tougaloo College.

Katharine Hill is Project Coordinator for Connecting to Success at the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. She previously served as Program Director for Admission Possible, an AmeriCorps program that assists young, low-income, high school students to apply for college, and at the YWCA of Minneapolis, where she worked to engage youth in civic projects and the political process. Ms. Hill holds an M.S.W. from the University of Minnesota School of Social Work and an M.P.P. from the Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs.

Laura Jaeger is Community Relations Specialist at the ADC Foundation. In this position she is responsible for philanthropy and corporate volunteerism in the Twin Cities. Ms. Jaeger's background includes 20 years of work in the nonprofit sector, most recently as Executive Director of the Minnesota Literacy Council, a statewide nonprofit. She has been a frequent local and national speaker on a variety of topics. Her academic background includes an M.A. in public administration, and she has a keen interest in how the government, private, and nonprofit sectors interact with each other.

Mary Mack is Associate Director of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) at the Institute on Community Integration, University of Minnesota. In addition to her NCSET responsibilities, Ms. Mack currently oversees Connecting to Success, a national E-mentoring program; coordinates NCSET's role in the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability/Youth; and supervises a grant designed to improve transition practices in Minnesota. Ms. Mack has over 25 years of experience designing, operating, and implementing youth development

programs focused on supporting 14-21-year-old youth to improve academic achievement, successfully transition from secondary to postsecondary education, and achieve successful futures in work, family, and community life. Ms. Mack has a master's degree in public administration from Syracuse University, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs.

Barbara McClannahan has been employed by the Iowa Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (DVRS) as the project manager for the Iowa PATHS Systems Change Grant since 1999. She has been involved in coordinating and facilitating state partnerships for the purpose of expanding employment opportunities to individuals with disabilities. Ms. McClannahan has over 20 years of experience in the field of human services, including positions as Special Needs Coordinator and ADA Compliance Officer in a community college and Social Worker for the Iowa Department of Human Service. Ms. McClannahan received her bachelor's degree from Morningside College, Sioux City, IA, and is currently completing a master's degree in Rehabilitation Services at Drake University.

Jessica Rogers is Middle School Program Manager with Achieve!Minneapolis (formerly Youth Trust). Ms. Rogers came to Achieve!Minneapolis after seven years at American Express, where she was a mainframe computer programmer and a leader in community outreach with diversity and cultural affairs. She attended the University of Minnesota and received a certificate in computer programming from Brown Institute.

Rebecca Saito is a researcher, consultant, and author who centers her work on deepening our understanding of and strengthening our communal lives around positive youth development. As a research scientist, Ms. Saito uses qualitative and quantitative research methods to understand, develop, and improve programs and community efforts that support the healthy development of young people. In her role as consultant and author, she helps numerous community-based organizations, national intermediary organizations, and urban communities move toward action in ways that deepen relationships with young people. Ms. Saito has authored a number of articles and publications, including "The Scientific Foundations of Youth Development" in *Trends in Youth Development: Visions, Realities and Challenges*; *What's Working? Tools for Evaluating Your Mentoring Program*; and *The Possible Dream: What Families in Distressed Communities Need to Help Youth Thrive*. She has been quoted in numerous print publications and has made many appearances on radio, television, and video.

John Staba has been Life Skills Program teacher at Minneapolis South High School for the past two years. Previously, he taught elementary education for seven years in Fairfax County, VA, and was a Transition Support Specialist in Montgomery County, MD. He holds a B.A. in child psychology from Hamline University, a M.A. in education from the University of Minnesota, and a M.A. in transition/special education from George Washington University in Washington, DC. He has taught special education at Franklin Middle School for three years, including the CLASS Program.

Robert Stensrud, Ed.D., C.R.C., has taught rehabilitation classes at Drake University for over 13 years. Dr. Stensrud has worked as a rehabilitation counselor and as a manager in a community-based counseling center. He was on the faculty of St. Louis University's Hospital Administration program where he developed and managed the Executive Performance Lab, an executive assessment center, and an organizational consulting practice. As part of this consulting practice, he provided marketing and management consulting, management team development, and market-based planning. He also assumed managerial positions as part of a turnaround team that assumed control of ailing health care organizations. Dr. Stensrud has published over 40 articles in professional journals on rehabilitation counseling, management, and related topics. As the evaluator of the Iowa PATHS project, Dr.

Stensrud coordinates the design, administration, and interpretation of focus groups related to project goals, assessment of project success, and consumer placement outcomes.

Joe Timmons has been an instructor at Options North School for two years. He works with students in the areas of literature, technology, transition, and independent living. Previously, he worked with blind and visually impaired adults in Minnesota and Illinois for over 15 years. Mr. Timmons has also worked as a Community Liaison in a Minneapolis elementary school.

Pamela Toole, Ph.D., is currently Vice President of Compass Institute, a nonprofit organization. She is a lecturer at the University of Minnesota School of Social and Youth Studies, and has worked with students from upper elementary through graduate school. Her base of practice and experience come from coordinating and directing youth service programs in the California K-12 schools. Through that work she developed mentoring programs, peer education, and peer tutoring programs. Upon moving to Minnesota, Pamela directed the Professional Development Department at the National Youth Leadership Council (NYLC) for nine years, where she led service-learning workshops for educators in over 40 states and helped to develop a publication on the essential elements of service-learning practice for teachers and their districts. Pamela has a doctorate in educational psychology and is passionate about young people learning to value themselves, their cultures, and their capacities to make a difference in their schools and communities.

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