



June 27, 2001

Transcript of Conference Call Presentation

Work Experiences and Employment Through Strategic Linkages with Employers

presented by:

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Dr. Luecking: Hello, everybody. I would like to welcome you to today's national teleconference entitled, "Work Experiences and Employment Through Strategic Linkages with Employers." Thank you for joining us. This topical teleconference is one in a series that is coordinated collaboratively through the National Transition Alliance and the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.

My name is Richard Luecking. I'm with TransCen, Inc., which is a non-profit organization based in Rockville, MD, that specializes in career and workforce development for people with disabilities.

I am joined on today's conference call by Steve Trippe, who is the executive director of New Ways to Work based in San Francisco, CA. We were to also be joined by Gary Selvy, who is senior vice president of MBNA America Bank. Gary called to tell me that his travel plans today were waylaid by some flight delays and is unable to join us for this call. He did talk with me about some of his perspectives and I will be able to share those with you. He apologizes that he can't join us.

Gary, a little background on him, he and his company have been involved in a number of initiatives across the nation that address youth employment and disability in the workplace. Steve and his organization have been involved in several cutting edge activities to promote work-based learning opportunities for youth. Like Gary, he has a national perspective on these issues. I'm happy that we are able to share those perspectives with you today.

Before we start the session, a couple of procedural details. Steve's and my portion of the presentation will last for about 30 minutes or so, after which we will entertain questions and encourage response from the listeners. However, it looks like we have a relatively small group and we can interact pretty

freely throughout the hour. If you let us first present some of our ideas, we will spend some time interacting with one another and answering your questions. I'll invite your questions when we are ready.

There are three goals for the session today:

1. One is to learn employer perspectives on recruitment and retention, and on partnering with school-to-work transition and employment programs.
2. The second is to identify ways to improve business education and workforce development linkages that meet both the human resource needs of employers and provide career opportunities for youth job seekers, regardless of a categorical label.
3. The third goal is to learn of the strategic advantages of linking employers with education and workforce development programs through intermediary organizations, which will be Steve Trippe's primary topic. He also will share with you some of his perspectives about employers that he has spoken with around the country.

Let me start by providing some context for our topic today. I think there would be little disagreement in our field that there is immense value in real work experiences for youth with disabilities. I think there is also little question that work is a desired postsecondary outcome for youth in transition. I think more importantly than either of those, however, is that this is a realistic outcome for all youth, regardless of any categorical label they may have acquired, regardless of whether or not they have a disability, regardless of whether or not that disability is of any particular primary designation. If work, a job, and a career are key desired outcomes, then it behooves educators and employment service providers to place a high priority on learning about

connecting with those who provide the jobs—that is, the employers. As I said, Steve and I will share some of these perspectives.

I want to start off with some relevant findings from research and practice that give you an idea of how important this is from the employer perspective.

1. One study in the mid-'90s found that nearly all employers who provided a work-based experience to youth found the experience positive. More importantly, they expressed an improved perception of youth and their potential. In other words, what they found from the perspective of employers is that once they tried it they liked it. In fact, these findings were so striking that in this respect one wonders why employers have not pursued these opportunities more aggressively. Why they haven't will be something that Steve and I will share with you later.
2. Another look at employer interest in and experience with youth in the workplace shows that employers achieved a return on investment which is another reason for employers to get involved.
3. Finally, relevant to today's topic, in a study of over 3,000 youth with disabilities in selected locations around the country who participated in a standardized high school internship program, over 75% of the youth who completed these internships were offered ongoing employment upon completion of that internship. These youth represented a cross-section of disability and demographic categories. Significantly, this positive outcome was achieved by all of the youth who participated, regardless of primary disability, severity of disability, race, gender, and so forth. What this demonstrates is that employers are both willing and able to regard youth with any disability as a positive contributor to their enterprise once employers have direct experience employing and accommodating them.

This is especially encouraging as the recruitment and retention of good employees looms as a continuing challenge in almost every industry, even with the current economic slowdown. One of the key points Gary Selvy made to me in our conversation before this call is that in spite of the economic slowdown there are all kinds of opportunities that employers are continuing to identify. They are will-

ing and in fact need to partner with various education programs. That's the good news. The bad news is that it's not always so easy for employers to link with educators and employment service providers and vice versa. Continuing comments from Gary and other employers continue to reflect frustration with finding schools and agencies with whom to partner. In addition, one of the main problems that employers experience is confusion over the array of categorical programs that serve different populations in seemingly different ways. All of these categorical programs are competing for employer attention.

Gary's points basically are these: his company, a financial and credit service company operating around the country, is looking to find skilled workers and especially looking for workers who have skills in communication and information technology. He and his company have engaged in a number of concerted efforts to partner with communities and organizations so that youth who are in transition and job seekers with disabilities are connected with his company. His comments are that these experiences have been both good and bad. Essentially, the good experiences occur when they team with partners who tune into the business need.

His main point was that even though his company and others are interested in corporate good citizenship, the bottom line to him and his company is still that those partners who tune into his company's needs are more likely to have success in partnering with his company. I think that's intuitive but I think — as Steve might also reiterate and reinforce — this isn't always what we first think of in education about working with employers. When educators dialogue about business needs with businesses, partnerships go well.

Gary mentioned that he would advise those people who are involved in beginning partnerships with employers to stay away from confusing categorical distinctions of the people that they represent and make it convenient. Make it easy for the employers to access the educators and the people they represent.

His last point is that it's important that we have Steve Trippe with us who can talk about an emerging practice that springs from precisely this issue—to establish a way to broker the connection between employers and educators and other community partners. Steve, can you begin with some of

the information on what this practice is and how it is rolling out in various communities?

Mr. Trippe: Sure. Let me quickly reinforce some things. A gentleman by the name of Jack Kaiser is called the guru of the Los Angeles economy. He is an economic advisor in the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation. He spoke on Monday at California's annual school-to-career academy. He reinforced many of the things that Rich just referred to, in that the private sector and workplace partners in general have a difficult time connecting to the right systems and programs in their communities because of the confusing array of categories, the lack of focus on the private sector partner as customer, the inconsistencies in terms of expectations, and systems.

His advice for individuals, programs, and systems that are attempting to work with and engage those people in the workforce are pretty simple:

1. One, make it short. Say what you've got to say in a very short period of time and speak the language and participate in the culture of the private sector, which is brief, performance-driven, outcome-driven, and value-driven.
2. Two, make it simple to participate.
3. Three, target the needs and interests of that community when talking to them. They don't need to necessarily know about the value and benefit of participation to the young people, although that's a great thing to talk about.

In our work, which has spanned the last three decades here at New Ways to Work, working with private sector firms around schedule accommodations and bringing young people into the workplace, providing scheduling options for all different kinds of people to be able to balance work with the rest of their lives, the same lessons ring true. You need to approach workplace change, workplace involvement, from the point of view of productivity, from the point of view of employee morale, from the point of view of value and benefit to the firm. At the same time, it's balancing that benefit against the needs of the population that you are seeking to serve.

There are three levels at which you operate as individuals in seeking to develop opportunities in the workplace and outcome placements in the workplace for the young people that you serve:

1. The first is as an individual.

2. The second is within your program and organization.
3. The third is as part of a local system.

I won't talk a lot about the first two levels except to say that as an individual you have the challenge of balancing a supply-demand equation in which you look at the workplace as a customer. You define a set of values and benefits and services to that customer. At the same time, it's looking to benefit the needs of young people that you're seeking to serve. That's not an easy thing to do; it's a hard thing for an individual to do.

At the organizational level, many organizations are separating the function of engaging the workplace partners. We use the language "workplace partner" to embrace employers, labor, nonprofit organizations, government. That term is used for anyone who is outside the schoolhouse or the community organization classroom that you are seeking to partner with to provide developmental opportunities for young people. When we say "employer" you often only think of the CEO of the large firm or the person that runs the business, when in reality who you are interacting with in the main organization are department head managers and the line workers that are actually working with the young people. So, we use that language—"workplace partner."

At the organizational level, there are five principles of organizational practice that make you effective in engaging workplace partners. The first is to prioritize and identify the workplace partner as a customer. You need to look organizationally and culturally at that set of organizations and individuals as customers. The second is that you have a sales and service orientation, in terms of your approach, and that you are comfortable with and utilize state-of-the-art marketing and sales techniques and strategies in terms of working with those people.

One of the things Mr. Kaiser said is they had recently conducted a survey of employers about the community colleges in Los Angeles and if they use the outplacement services of those community colleges. The answer was "no" and the reason was when they called, they never talked to a live person and had to leave a message. Many reported that they did not receive a call back. Their comments give you an idea about the business perspective on the utility of a system that has been set up to pro-

vide them with some of their future workers. They don't make the phone call because they are not being treated in a customer service orientation.

The other areas are that the organizations target resources specifically at the engagement effort. They engage in continuous improvement activities and they have a set of principles around organizational excellence that include working from a defined plan with clear goals and objectives, and connecting to a broader system. That is really what I have been asked to talk about today.

Our work over the last ten years with workforce development, workforce preparation programs and systems, the school-to-work movement nationally, and School-To-Career in California, have taught us a number of things about the role and value of an intermediary entity in the community that can broker and provide the connections for a range of categorically-based programs, all of which are seeking to provide connections between the classroom and the workplace for young people.

I'm going to try an experiment here. Does everybody have a piece of 8.5" by 11" paper in front of them? Okay. Let's see if we can do this virtually. At the top of the piece of paper, draw a bunch of triangles right in the top inch or two. At the bottom, draw a bunch of circles. You have this broad space, maybe eight inches in the middle of the paper.

The triangles at the top of the paper represent the workplace partner community. They are the employers that exist within your community: labor organizations, the city or county government, non-profit organizations, hospitals, the strip mall—all the different places that you might be able to provide opportunities for young people to participate in work-based learning or you might be able to recruit someone to participate in the work that you do by being a speaker in the classroom or something.

At the bottom, your program or your organization is one of those circles. What I want you to do is think about, in all of those different circles, all of the people in your community that are seeking to go out and make connections and engage workplace partners in their work. Start drawing the connections. Take your circle and pick out who you are and start drawing your connections up to the top with some of the different workplace partners with whom you work. Then go to the circle next door

and think about the school-to-work coordinators at the high schools that are attempting to do the same things and start drawing those connections. Draw the lines up to the workplace partners. Now think about others in the community from the workforce investment system—the youth providers in the community—again, seeking to engage those workplace partners either with placements for youth, developmental placements for youth, or outcome placements for youth. Think about the vocational educators that are seeking to make those connections. Think about the mentoring program coordinators that are seeking to make those connections.

What you should see is a mess of lines. There are probably any number of different individuals and programs that are out seeking to try and connect with the same workplace partners. If you look at what you have come up with, at the bottom there is probably not a lot of connectivity between the different programs. At the top there is probably not a lot of connectivity between the different employer partners. That really is the system that has evolved in this country through the school-based programs, community-based programs, workforce development-based programs, and others around the country. Many people are performance-driven, they have to make their numbers, and they are out there stumping solely on behalf of the young people in their program.

The role and value of an intermediary—if you sort of take and draw a spiral starting in the middle of that mess of connected lines and try and pull it together as a lasso. Think about taking all of those lines and bringing them together in a way that provides a system at the local level that serves to make sense out of those connections. If we think about who the customers are of the work that we do, the employers and postsecondary partners and government and labor and others on the demand side and the young people themselves on the supply side, the way in which we attempt to engage these partners is not really paying attention to their needs. It's paying attention to what our organizational needs are or my individual programmatic needs are in terms of developing X number of placements for X number of young people or getting X number of advisors into my program in the next couple of weeks. There is not a lot of connectivity experience for the young

people. We aren't leveraging the work that's going on in the schools and community organizations. It is tremendously confusing to the employers.

What happens is they stop viewing us as a resource to make that happen. Around the country what we see evolving are what we call intermediaries. These intermediaries we have learned a great deal about in the last two years as part of something called the School-To-Work Intermediary Project where New Ways to Work with its primary partner, Jobs for the Future, have looked at and worked with 50 organizations around the country that are school-based, community-based, workforce board-based, chambers of commerce, independent 501(c)(3)s; all of whom provide and conduct the same kind of services in their communities.

First and foremost, there are four sort of broad strategic functional areas that they fill:

1. They convene local leadership. They bring together the local leaders in the community to advise and drive the priorities and activities of the work that they do. They bring together the right people. They nurture them. They staff and support that function of convening local leadership.
2. Second, they broker and provide services. They make sure that balanced sets of coordinated services are provided to a range of customers. I'll talk in a minute about how those services are organized.
3. Third, they measure effectiveness and use quality and continuous improvement strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of what they do and to improve program practice. There is a large quality component and that has to do with goal setting, reviewing progress, it has to do with both internal and external evaluation and organizational development activity and improvement.
4. Fourth, they promote effective policies that can sustain good practice. The promotion of policy is an intentional part of intermediary work to be able to continue the work at the local level. Those policies can be cross-categorical policies, local policies, or legislative policies.

The functions of intermediary are to convene, connect, measure, and promote policy. In the brokering and providing services area there are four customer sets in a sense. The first are employers and workplace partners. And the role of the intermedi-

ary is 1) to create demand, and 2) to provide services that meet an employer and workplace partner need. The creating demand piece is about collective marketing. It's about turning the equation around so that those workplace partners look to the youth provider community broadly defined as a place for meeting both current and future workforce needs.

The provision of services relates to defining the workplace as customer. And those services may include a range of activities that are based not on what we think that community needs but what they tell us they need. They need coordination. They need an easy and efficient system to work with. They need certain kinds of support for their staff, their employees, their work site supervisors in the case of work-based learning, etc., etc.

The next customers are the young people themselves. The role of the intermediary in working with young people is to 1) connect them to appropriate and sequenced work-based learning experiences. These experiences don't happen in isolation. Work itself is used as a developmental tool. Young people over a period of time—and it could be as long as, you know, from a classroom experience and Junior Achievement experience in the elementary grades through job shadowing, informational interviews, internships, project-based learning-rich work experiences, apprenticeships, co-ops—that those experiences are intentionally linked and sequenced over time.

The second set is to improve the quality of those experiences by focusing on the quality elements of work-based learning, which is another sort of set of things that need to be thought about. One of the big roles there for intermediaries is to begin to look at common definitional aspects across programs and communities—common expectations and common supports for the workplace partners and the execution of these work-based learning activities.

The third set of customer-focused activities is focused on the schools and organizations that the intermediary serves. The first set of areas is to build broad-based awareness and support for the notion of partnering with the workplace partner community and others in providing developmental opportunities for young people. I'm sure that you could quickly rattle off a number of your colleagues, particularly inside the comprehensive high schools, that question the value of partnering with,

in particular, the private sector and partnering with people around a career-contextual education and learning how to promote this within the system so that everyone understands that providing context for learning and quality experiences outside the classroom is an important thing for every student.

The second set is to provide services that support the participation of schools and community organizations, whether that is providing professional development activities for teachers and others, teacher externships, experiences for teachers in the workplace, curriculum support, etc.

Then the final set is the system itself. It's to be the communications link, be able to effectively communicate with all of the different parties that are involved in the young person's life. The second set is to have a set of quality measures and continuous improvement measures so that you are using data to measure performance and to improve program practice.

All of these things that I have been talking about are contained in a document called the Intermediary Guidebook. And, Rich, I don't know if people were sent the URL for the intermediary network but it's downloadable from our Web site, *www.intermediarynetwork.org*. On that Web site you will find something called the Intermediary Guidebook, which has tools, materials, and a set of case study snapshots around effective intermediary organizations and how to build them in your community.

Dr. Luecking: Steve, you actually answered one of the questions I was going to ask you and that is to refer us to publications about this concept. There are a couple of others. Isn't there one about local intermediaries and national industry associations? Is that on the same Web site?

Mr. Trippe: There is a connection between the national employer organizations—like National Association of Manufacturers, the utility folks, the IT folks, and others—and that connection to locals. There is a piece on school-to-work partnerships and youth councils on that Web site. There are a number of different products that have been produced out of the school-to-work intermediary project, all of which are available on that Web site for download.

Dr. Luecking: I would encourage all of the listeners to seek that out. We'll give that Web site address once again before we sign off.

Steve, I have a couple of other questions that I think might help illustrate the point. Can you give some examples of communities where this concept of intermediary connections has worked particularly well for both employers and education initiatives?

Mr. Trippe: Sure. Let's take Charleston, SC. The intermediary in Charleston is the Educational Foundation that is run by the local chamber of commerce. The Charleston Chamber, through the Educational Foundation, has coordinated bringing resources in like smaller learning communities, after school programs, building a connection system for work-based learning by providing common definitional aspects and connectivity for all the different schools, whether school-to-work is involved or vocational education is involved, to make the connections. What they have been able to do is leverage and bring together through their connection to the chamber a large number of workplace partners to the effort that the schools and programs individually and on their own would never have been able to access.

Dr. Luecking: If I am a teacher in a school and I want my students to experience some positive work-based learning opportunities, they might be contacting that particular intermediary—in that case, the chamber of commerce—who then will put them in touch with some of these workplace partners?

Mr. Trippe: That's correct.

Dr. Luecking: And vice versa, I assume.

Mr. Trippe: Let me give you some other examples of places that it works effectively. The Boston Private Industry Council has a set of industry employer liaisons that are responsible for particular industry sectors and represent the career academies and the Workforce Investment Act programs in that particular area to the employer community. Their responsibility is to organize and develop opportunities and placements for young people from those different programs with that one industry sector.

Similarly, Lead Sacramento, which is an economic development and educational improvement organization that also happens to be the local school-to-work partnership, it existed pre-partnership, uses an industry sectorial organizing strategy where if I am launching a new career academy in my community, in my high school, anywhere in the greater Sacramento area, I don't have to form my own advisory board. There is one in place and they

will adopt me. It's facilitated, functioned, and supported by Lead Sacramento.

Dr. Luecking: These are very strategic ways to conveniently link employers with school-based programs. What advice might you have for people—special educators especially—for getting involved in these kinds of non-categorical and unified approaches to employer engagement?

Mr. Trippe: To think about what you are bringing to the table when you go, rather than to think about what you get. What I mean by that is that in particular, the special education community has many systems, tools, and materials to contribute to a broader system. So, really think about how the expertise and experience of the special education community can contribute to the greater whole, but also be cognizant of the fact that the resource level in some of the other programs isn't as great. In other words, in non-special education programs the idea of being able to provide a job coach for young people is just economically not there. To go in and get excited about and understanding how building a system in your community can be an exciting and powerful challenge that will ultimately lead to more and better opportunities for the young people that you seek to serve, rather than thinking about those other folks that are in the circles at the bottom as being your competition; they are not. They are your colleagues. Your competition in gaining the attention and garnering the resource of employers and others, your competition is Xerox, IBM, the U.S. Postal Service, Smart and Final, and every new IPO that comes out, every new internet company. They are all looking for the resources and the attention of those people to convince them to work with them. Understanding that all of us that are working with young people no matter what population we are working with are on the same team; and figuring out how to leverage our work and cooperate and effectively collaborate in the community is an important thing.

A number of places have begun this activity by simply co-locating folks from special education programs with school-to-work programs with workforce prep programs who have the responsibility of engaging these workplace partners.

Dr. Luecking: Okay. Steve, I am hearing two principles in that notion. One is that when special educators and employment programs that represent

people with disabilities go to any partner, the idea is, don't go there and say, "What can you give me?" but "How can I help your effort?"

The second principle is, how can we take what we know about how to make accommodations in the workplace and make workplaces work more efficiently to accommodate workers of different kinds of learning styles—to offer that kind of expertise to a larger effort. In return, what they can expect is cooperation and linking them to employers that they never would have contacted before and making it easier so that all youth have access to those kinds of opportunities.

Mr. Trippe: Absolutely. By way of example, the Workforce Investment Act youth title requires that all youth enrolled in WIA programs, in the WIA formula programs have something called an individual service plan. Sound familiar? Where do you think that notion came from?

Dr. Luecking: That's exactly what I'm talking about.

Mr. Trippe: Communities are struggling with what that looks like. The special education community has decades of experience in the development and support of IEPs. Yet one of the things that happens—they don't go to the table saying what about my employers and what about my kids; instead they go to the table saying how is what I know and what I have going to help us create a system in our community that will better serve all of our young people. It's a different mindset.

Dr. Luecking: I think this would be a good place to solicit some questions, comments, and responses from the listeners. If you have a question, please identify yourself and where you are calling from.

Ms. Villa Libby: This is Marian Villa Libby in New Jersey. What I'm wondering is if there has been any research in how the education community, you know, could employ their own kids. A student I know had such a wonderful education that she wanted to contribute back to education and be a teaching assistant. That fell on deaf ears, like they didn't want to muddy up their profession with someone who had a profile that they didn't think had an equal status. I'm wondering if you have worked with the school system as an employer in that way.

Mr. Trippe: Absolutely. The current and pro-

jected teacher shortages in this country are mind-boggling. The number of teachers that we have teaching outside of subject area and outside of grade qualification is huge, particularly in our inner-city areas. There is nationally, and significantly in California, a movement to use the career academies approach around promotion of teaching and learning careers. Within that, you have teaching assistant internship kinds of opportunities being provided for young people while they are still in high school to explore and learn about the profession. I would assume that in every state of this country there are significant efforts underway to interest and engage young people in the broad areas of teaching and working with young people as a career opportunity. Again, it's from the point of view of education as an industry that has workforce needs. That's the approach to take when you are talking to the people who don't perceive the need as intensively.

Ms. Villa Libby: They could never imagine that they could be working on a continuum that didn't have a high role valorization, as Wulfensberger would say.

Mr. Trippe: Your question is a good one. I think it also addresses the question any employer might have: "You don't fit our job description." The key in our experience has been how can you identify a need that can be filled by working with you and that particular youth who's job seeking. We need to do more work in convincing people of what their need might be. We have had lots of experience working with many different employers who don't even have job openings who have hired people because we have been able to help them identify ways in which services of our organization and the students we represent make things more efficient.

Ms. Villa Libby: How do you go about doing that?

Mr. Trippe: Well, a big part of it is spending time with the companies and talking to them about how they could get the job done. In your case, the applicable standard is what needs to be done—what does an aide do in the classroom that is important and what are some of the tasks that can be done by different folks or how can that be shared, how can parts of those tasks be done by one person or two people rather than one. Those are the kinds of things we look at.

Dr. Luecking: I assume you are talking about when you are having an individual conversation with a potential partner employer. One of the things that we don't do well is to honor a range of participation options for that person. We go in thinking only about internships or only about job shadowing only for my population, rather than looking at this individual as being somebody who may be able to participate in some way with what we do. So, valuing a range of participation options for those workplace partners is a very important critical thing. Being able to connect them up, even if it doesn't meet what your immediate short-term target or goal is, and that is to value that participation as an important entity and to be able to have a system that coordinates that.

Mr. Trippe: The other is to do your research. You should know what the general needs are in that industry, both in terms of future workforce need projections — what are the drivers, what is driving that person's daily thinking, what takes up their time in the shower, what are they worried about, which isn't, "How am I going to get these young people into my workplace?" It may be, "How am I going to have a work force in a year or two?"

The other is to talk about if there are short-term projects and activities or things that you are unable to get to around here. Every company, every business has them. But do your homework in advance and spend as much time listening as possible when you are in that session. You need to really listen and be able to talk about the work that you do in value statements and benefits to that individual rather than to the young people that you serve. In other words, if you are talking to me and you are trying to pitch me on getting involved, it's great if I can help you out but tell me what are the values to me, how is it going to benefit me and what I'm concerned about. Let me know that you've done your homework. Let me know that you know what I'm going through and how valuable the time is that I'm spending with you right now.

Dr. Izzo: I've got a question. This is Margo Izzo at Ohio State University. I have a question about costs. These intermediary networks sound like a great idea but it's going to take personnel, equipment, and office space. Do you expect businesses to contribute jointly to fund an intermediary network or in your demo projects? How do you

expect to sustain those once dollars go away?

Mr. Trippe: One, the networks that we work with or the intermediaries in different communities that we work with are funded by combining categorical funds, by charging fees on both sides—to school-based partners and employer partners for the services provided, by discrete grants, private foundation dollars, and earned income. If you think about it, if you added up all of the dollars that exist in your community focused on this function and put it into a pot and could do it better by segmenting the connecting functions—my guess is that many people on this call that are involved in programs, a piece of their job is to go out and engage these workplace partners. Not a very effective or efficient way to do it. By taking those responsibilities away from a piece of a number of different individuals and funding a full person is one way places are doing it.

It's not about all new money. It's about using the money we have in a better way.

Dr. Izzo: Right. Well, I have seen schools really struggle with how to fund their school-to-work transition coordinator once the school-to-work dollars went away. They are faced with a lot of competing demands for these costs. Do you find that businesses are willing to pitch in more than educational agencies and programmatic funding sources?

Mr. Trippe: Industry associations in many communities are picking it up in some ways. I think the private sector is willing to support its share, but not if education, this is about values. This is about decisions that are made in our educational systems about what's important and what's a core part of the educational experience. These are hard conversations. Connecting to outside experiences is an important part of the developmental activity for our youth. How do we build the support and infrastructure to do that? The answer is different in many different communities. Some communities are pursuing a very small piece of ADA or core educational funding rather than going into the budgets of the schools themselves to fund this function. It doesn't even get to the conversation at the school level; it's just there.

Dr. Izzo: Okay. My second question is how extensively have these been adopted?

Mr. Trippe: We are working with 50 fairly mature organizations, most of which were around before school-to-work, most of which have evolved

well beyond school-to-work, none of which are funded solely by school-to-work dollars. They represent a number of the major cities, not all of them. There is growing interest in intermediary work. We are seeing multiple intermediaries collaborating in different communities to do the work funded from a variety of sources. Some of the organizations that we are working with have no school-to-work support at all.

Dr. Izzo: Okay. If I wanted to find one in my city, what would be the best place to check?

Mr. Trippe: Go to *intermediarynetwork.org*.

Dr. Izzo: Thank you so much, Steve.

Ms. Kurek: Hi. This is Bobbi from Shangri-La Corporation in Salem, OR. I'm an employment liaison. While I don't deal with youth, I find in talking with businesses the most important thing is to give them incentives to hire this particular person. One way of doing it is sort of an assessment period where the person is paid but they will agree to have this person working for them for X amount of days as determined by the employer. This time period enables the employer and my client to see if the job is a good fit for both of them.

Dr. Luecking: I think that's an excellent strategy. I did cite earlier in this teleconference a study we did of youth who participated in an internship and that's exactly the circumstance. Companies hired youth for a defined period for this internship. They were under no obligation to continue to employ the youth and the youth were under no obligation to stay as continuing employees. However, 75% of employers offered jobs to those students beyond the internship period, indicating that once the student is on the job and the employer has a chance to assess their performance and they understand how they might accommodate them in the workplace, they basically liked it.

Ms. Kurek: I find some employers are just very afraid of the diversity and some embrace it.

Dr. Luecking: Well, I guess that in the end the diversity is less the issue than your ability to explain to them how this might benefit their operation. One of the points that Gary Selvy wanted to make is that his company doesn't care what label the young person might have who comes into their workplace. They don't care what kind of special education program they are in or even if they are in a special education program. If the educator can dem-

onstrate to them that they have the ability to help the employer's enterprise by virtue of that student's presence, they are willing to work with anybody.

My advice then is to de-emphasize the diversity part and emphasize how they might be able to help them.

Ms. Kurek: It also gives them an opportunity for people that they employ who have never come in contact with somebody with a disability. My point is that I offer incentives to the employer rather than focusing on the disability.

Dr. Luecking: What's in it for the employer is always the important question.

Ms. Kurek: Right. They want to know that bottom line, like you said.

Mr. Trippe: Let me just say something about the labels quickly here, Rich. The opposite is actually true. There are some employers that care about the label because of bad experiences in the past with people from our system. We have to tell the truth about that, that employers are reluctant to work with young people that are labeled at-risk, labeled as having a disability, labeled as having had problems in school, labeled as having connections to the juvenile justice system. We have a system that in many ways is deficit-based in terms of the way we fund and support the activities. If we go out into the private sector and talk about, "Hi, I'm from the deficit-based program," that is not a value statement that is going to make me very excited about working with you. If you go in representing all of the young people in a community, representing the values and benefits you can provide to that partner, and letting them know that you will make the right match for them and that match happens to be a youth that's from an economically disadvantaged family, that has had problems in school or that has a disability or something, if you have made the right match you have made the right match.

Ms. Kurek: Well, that's one of the things that I do tell an employer is that we match the person to the job.

Ms. Villa Libby: One of the successes that we found worked all the time was that many of the employers who are in decision making positions were generally in the twilight, let's say, of their careers and in their own family circumstances had people of different labels, shall we say, and were

very willing to be magnanimous about responding to a diverse workforce because perhaps their family member in whatever state that family member might live would pass that on as a legacy. We found people so much more open-minded and open-hearted as the employer across the board. We found more resistance in our own ranks.

Ms. Kurek: Well, I have had employers tell me, "We are not set up to work with those people."

Ms. Villa Libby: We found just the opposite.

Mr. Trippe: There are three core strategies that you can use in not only engaging employers, but any workplace partner:

1. The first is to build on what exists. Most of these people already have something going on, whether it's an employee volunteer program, whether it's release time, whether they have donated money to the football team, whatever it is, to build on an interest and connection that's already there.
2. The second is to solve a business need or business problem, to understand what the business needs are, what the problems are, both short-term and long-term.
3. The third is to invest in community. You will find different people that those three different buttons will hit. The problem with finding folks on the third one, which is an invest in community kind of way or building on philanthropy or goodwill—is that when times get tough, the tough get going and that's the first thing to go.

A perfect example is the Autodesk Corporation in San Rafael, CA: a leader, award winner in school-to-work, had a big foundation, did an annual project-based learning conference, hundreds of interns, leader in engaging other businesses. There was an economic downturn about a year-and-a-half ago, bad quarterly return statements, and the company had to do something. Within one week, the foundation was closed. Now, fortunately, they transferred some of the activity internally into their human resources department so the internships and a couple of their programs survived and are actually flourishing. Now they are part of the core business. They aren't part of corporate philanthropy.

There is a danger in building on the investments in the community as your strategy because as the economy goes for that particular employer and in

general in your community, so goes that investment.

Mr. Freeman: This is Bill Freeman from New Jersey. I just want to raise a concern and question regarding the increased emphasis nationally on standards in education and results based on test scores and how this is a competing factor for attention with the need for students to prepare for employment in adult life. I often hear that programs are being cut in community-based employment in schools based on the need for students to, you know, prepare for a test. I just wondered what your thoughts were about that.

Mr. Trippe: Depending on the state that you are in and what the tests are and the population you are looking at, we are looking at pass rates of anywhere—at the low end from 5% for African Americans in urban areas in some communities around the country to a max of about 50-60% pass rates in the states that have begun to play with these exit exams and high stakes tests.

Well, what you are going to see happening are two things. One, you are going to see, yes, reaction to implement more kill and drill kinds of programs in the schools and pushing toward the tests when in reality more young people have a better opportunity of gaining that knowledge and being able to apply that knowledge to the test by learning in context and having experiences that are valuable and supported learning experiences outside the classroom. You have got to make sure that those experiences—that you document the learning that goes on in those experiences and you are tying the learning to the core academic objectives that are going on in the classroom. You are learning the same content; you are learning it in a different way.

The other thing that is going to happen is you are going to see more and more young people pushed out of the core system into alternative settings and into the so-called second chance system. Both California and Massachusetts are already starting to talk about alternative diplomas. We are talking about exacerbating a tiered system rather than making a one-excellence system for all. It's incumbent on those of us that know the power and value of learning in context and the power and value of providing opportunities for young people to learn outside the classroom and connecting it to those standards.

The way to say it—which is what employers

say—is yes, academic standards are fine, but it's not enough.

Dr. Luecking: Steve mentioned several points I would have made. One more additional point is that we need to show people that there are ways to connect these work-based experiences to success on these kinds of academic performance measures. We did a whole study on youth who were labeled as having severe emotional disabilities, very high risk for dropout. We found out that if they had work that was an adjunct to their educational experience and their activities in that work were linked to their classroom core curriculum, that their likelihood of dropping out of school almost went to zero as soon as they saw the relevance of what they were learning in school to what they were doing in work.

We are going to have to make that the last question because we are just about out of time. I want to remind people on the call that the next teleconference in the series will be held on July 16 at 1:00 p.m. Central Time. The topic of that call will be "Youth Development and Leadership Programs: Including Youth with Disabilities." For those of you who have questions or would like to contact me, my email is rluecking@transcen.org. Okay. Thanks again, everybody. Steve, thank you very much.

Mr. Trippe: Sure. Good luck, everybody.

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