

Illinois Center for
Transition and Work



INCLUSIVE WORK IN ILLINOIS

Overview: Illinois Center for Transition and Work

January 27, 2026

The Arc of Illinois, QIDP Conference

Jim Mayer, ICTW - UIUC



Mission and Goals of the ICTW:

MISSION:

The [Illinois Center for Transition and Work \(ICTW\)](#) is a statewide resource that utilizes research to develop products, deliver professional development, and provide technical assistance to enhance the transition from school to work for students with disabilities who have extensive support needs.

GOALS:

- To be a statewide resource on evidence-based practices for special educators, vocational rehabilitation professionals, related services personnel, and school administrators.
- To build Illinois's capacity for interagency collaboration to support the transition from school to work of students with significant disabilities.



ICTW - Resource Offerings and Updates

- Website resources
- Individualized support
- Targeted Technical Assistance
- Regional workshops
- ICTW Symposium
- Regional Board Projects
- Interagency Collaboration



Website Resources Available

- Case studies
- Fact sheets
- Research briefs
- Webinars

ICTW
CASE STUDY
Identifying Community-Based Work Experience Sites

Ms. Jenkins and Ms. Cash teach high school students with moderate and severe disabilities. When they first started teaching they developed a variety of in-school work experiences to help their students learn job skills. Although both teachers felt students benefitted from the experiences, they knew that without community-based work experiences, their students would be less likely to achieve post-school employment. They decided to work together to remedy this problem.

The teachers began by thinking about their students' skills, interests, and needs. They also thought about the resources they needed to provide work experiences in the community and whether those resources were available or could be easily acquired. They synthesized this information (see Table 1) to clarify the key factors they needed to consider when identifying potential businesses for work experiences and the criteria they would use to determine which businesses they contacted.

Having clarified the factors and criteria they needed to consider, Ms. Jenkins and Ms. Cash used 3 strategies to identify potential business partners. These included identifying businesses they currently visited during community-based instruction, searching the internet for businesses that had jobs of particular interest to students, and networking with members of the community. Once businesses were identified, they ranked the businesses according to how well they met the criteria they had established for selecting businesses (see Table 1).

Ms. Jenkins and Ms. Cash contacted the businesses they ranked highest to determine whether the employer might be interested in serving as a work experience site. They found that sending the employer an email providing a basic description of the program, information about their students' abilities, and how the partnership might be mutually beneficial was effective in sparking the employer's interest and getting a response. Once a response was given, the teachers

Table 1
Factors and Criteria for Selecting Potential Business Partners

Factor	Criteria	Rationale
Location	The business had to be within walking distance from the school.	The school did not have resources to provide daily transportation.
Student abilities	The business had to have an array of tasks available that matched students' abilities.	Many jobs require adequate reading and math skills; however, most of Ms. Jenkins and Ms. Cash's students were not proficient in those areas.
Student's interest and preferences	The tasks performed had to be meaningful and of interest to the students.	Some students had limited interests and work experiences.
Staff support	There needed to be enough staff support in place in the community so that students could actively participate at all times.	All students required support to participate in work experiences at school.

ICTW CASE STUDY | Identifying Community-Based Work Experience Sites
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FAST FACTS
Counseling on Opportunities for Enrollment in Comprehensive Transition or Post-Secondary Education Programs

1 Counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary education programs is one of five legally mandated pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) listed in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014).

2 Counseling on postsecondary education refers to a process for providing support and guidance to students with disabilities and their caregivers regarding the transition from school to postsecondary education.

3 Postsecondary educational opportunities may vary across states but typically include university programs, vocational-technical programs, community colleges, military, and other training opportunities in career pathways.

4 Counseling activities may include, but are not limited to, working with students and families to understand their legal rights upon leaving high school, the post-secondary options available, and procedures for requesting academic accommodations during post-secondary education.

5 Students with disabilities who receive counseling about post-secondary education have greater success when entering postsecondary programs and more positive outcomes upon completion (e.g., access to competitive employment).

6 Counseling activities that facilitate success in postsecondary education focus on how to obtain services, empowering students to enroll in postsecondary education, and sharing information with students and families about the differences between high school and post-secondary education environments.

7 Counseling activities that include the family positively impact access to post-secondary educational environments for students with disabilities.

This fact sheet was developed by the Illinois Center for Research and Work at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in partnership with the Illinois State Board of Education. Information presented may not reflect the position or policy of the Illinois State Board of Education.

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RESEARCH BRIEF
Workplace Readiness

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, 2014) is a legislative mandate focused on improving the employment outcomes of secondary students with disabilities. WIOA requires that funding from the State/Federal Vocational Rehabilitation System be used to ensure that state vocational rehabilitation agencies (e.g., Illinois Department of Human Services) in collaboration with schools provide pre-employment transition services (pre-ETS) to all students with disabilities who qualify, or could potentially qualify, for vocational rehabilitation services. Under WIOA, vocational rehabilitation counselors and teachers are required to engage students in the following five required pre-ETS: (a) job exploration counseling, (b) work-based learning experiences, (c) counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition or postsecondary educational programs, (d) workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living, and (e) instruction in self-advocacy. This research brief will focus on workplace readiness.

What is Workplace Readiness?
Self-advocacy is defined as the ability to understand and communicate one's needs, interests, and views to others in an effective manner. It also involves the ability to make informed decisions. Students learn to become self-advocates by acquiring self-advocacy skills in four critical areas: (a) knowledge of self, (b) knowledge of rights, (c) communication, and (d) leadership (Test et al., 2005). The language used to discuss self-advocacy is sometimes synonymous with the term self-determination: a set of behaviors an individual engages in to make vital changes within their life (Burke et al., 2020; Test et al., 2005). Table 1 provides a list of sample self-advocacy skills.

Table 1
Workplace Readiness Skills

Sample Skills
• Communication and interpersonal skills
• Financial literacy
• Integrity
• Networking
• Orientation and mobility
• Problem solving and critical thinking
• Professionalism
• Teamwork
• Workplace safety

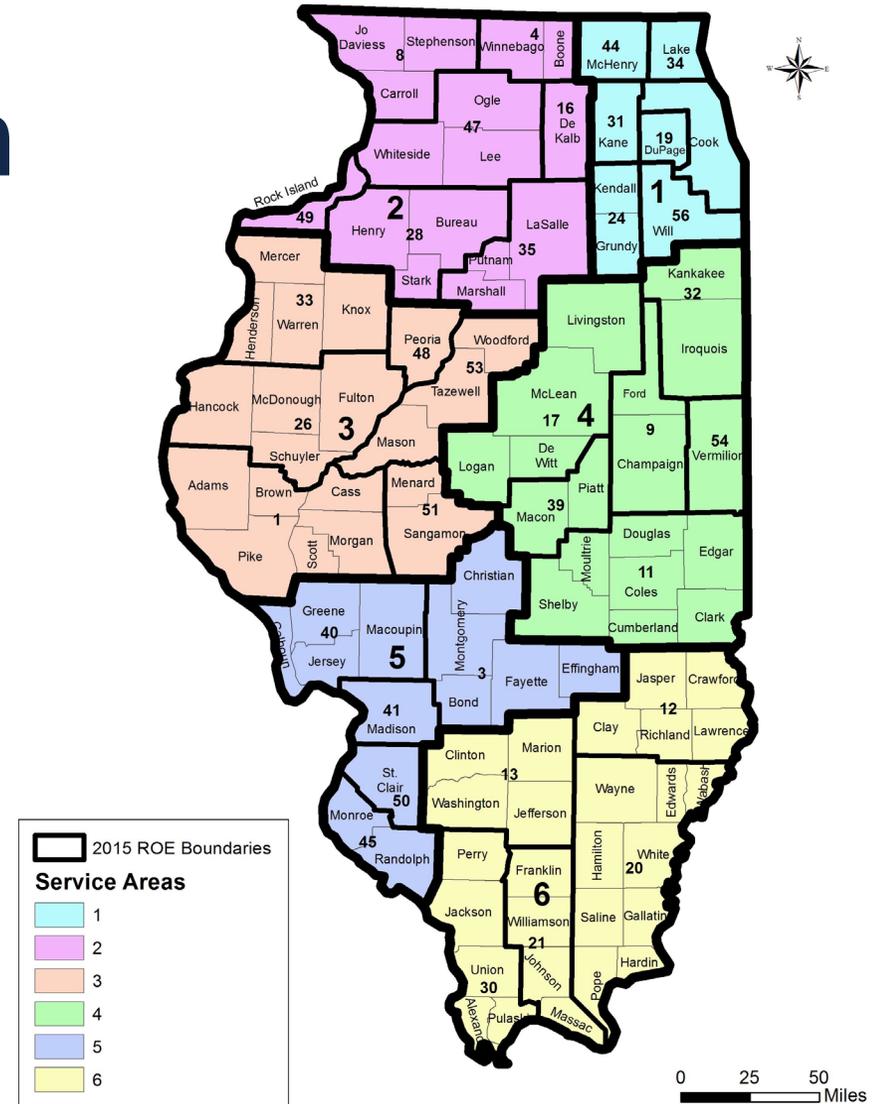
What the Research Says
Soft skills are important for gaining and maintaining employment (Clark et al., 2018). These skills are valued by employers and associated with increased workplace performance (Robles, 2012). Despite the importance of soft skills, there is limited agreement about which skills are most important for job success. For example, a study of employers found that the top four soft skills valued for both employees with and without disabilities were personal integrity, ability to follow instructions, respect for others, and being on time (Ju et al., 2012). Another study noted that employers rated integrity, communication, and courtesy as most important (Robles, 2012). Research has also investigated the perspectives of school transition personnel, who rated the skills of seeking clarification for unclear instructions, arriving at work on time, and refraining from inappropriate touching as most important (Agran et al., 2016). Furthermore, a comprehensive review of the literature across job sectors and regions of the world identified five key soft skills: social skills, communication, higher-order thinking skills, self-control, and positive self-concept (Lippman et al., 2015).

WIOA Series | Workplace Readiness



Region

- Region 1: Jessica Sipovic
- Region 2: Melanie Phelan
- Region 3: Jane Collins
- Region 4: Jim Mayer
- Regions 5/6: Paula Mueller



ICTW Targeted Technical Assistance (TTA)

- Designed to support educators in creating *substantive changes* within their school district or educational program that improve employment outcomes for students with high support needs.
- Proposed changes should improve work-based learning experiences, enhance coordination with adult service agencies, and/or meet other school-identified needs related to preparing students with high support needs for employment.
- All requests for TTA must involve a team approach and include administrative support for creating the proposed changes.
- Learn more and apply today at ictw.illinois.edu/support/tta.

(Note: applications for 2026-27 must be submitted by March 31, 2026)



ICTW In-Person Regional Workshops

- Two topics annually: one in the Fall Semester; and one in Spring Sem.
- Sessions offered in northern, central and southern Illinois
- Full-day, in-person workshops

Fall 2025:

- Topic: Vocational Assessment
- Locations: Sept. 24- Bloomington; Oct. 1- Centralia; Oct. 14- Oaklawn

Spring 2026 (registration open as of Jan. 15)

- Topic: Interagency Collaboration
- Locations: Feb. 24- Edwardsville; Mar. 3- E. Peoria; Mar. 10- Rockford



2026 ICTW Symposium

<https://ictw.illinois.edu/support/conferences>

Dates: April 23-24

Location: [Hotel and Conference Center](#) - Champaign, IL

Focus: Career development and transition to work for students with disabilities

Target Audience: Special education and rehabilitation professionals

Cost: Approximate (based on 2025 rates): early bird rate of \$70 regular rate of \$80. Note: 2026 Registration info available in Jan. 2026.



What Are the Regional Boards?

- The Illinois Center for Transition and Work has six Regional Boards spanning the state. Each board includes leaders in transition from school-to-work, such as teachers, administrators, rehabilitation counselors, and other professionals with expertise in preparing students with disabilities for employment.
- ICTW Regional Board members help ICTW develop practical school-to-work resources that meet regional needs, share effective practices, and gather ideas from the field.



Resource Topics

- Customized Employment
- Pathways to Employment
- Self-Determination
- Transition Assessment
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
- Work-based Learning Experiences
- Work Related Topics



Connect with ICTW!

Scan to find:

- Website
- Resources
- Social media
- Events

and more!



Q & A



ICTW School-to-Work Transition Guide for Illinois



Mission of the Interagency Transition Study Group

- Will be comprised of special educators, vocational rehabilitation counselors, and administrators from across Illinois.
- Will examine the specific roles, responsibilities, resources, legislation, and funding that currently guide the school-to-work transition process in Illinois.
- Will examine federal & neighboring state resources.
- Will develop an Illinois School-to-Work Transition Guide that can be used by key stakeholders throughout the state.



Why a School to Work Transition Guide?

Identified the need to clarify the following aspects of school-to-work (STW) transition for all parties involved, with info specific to Illinois:

1. Key individuals, and their roles and responsibilities
2. Important steps and stages in the STW transition process
3. Key terms and definitions for the STW transition process
4. Legal aspects of the STW transition process
5. Helpful guidelines and resources for the STW transition process

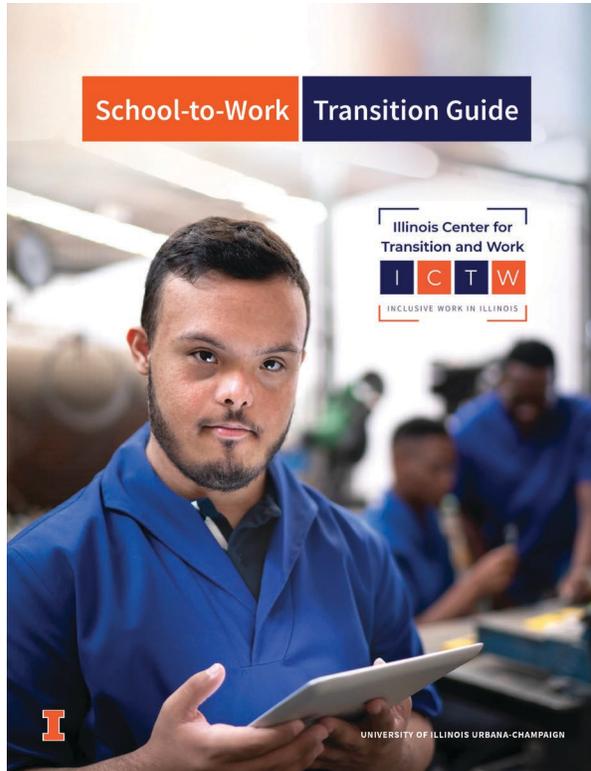


Development of the STW Transition Guide

- National guidance: e.g., OSERS Transition Guide, NTACT
- Ideas from other states: e.g., WI, IN, PA, VA
- Federal and State Laws re Transition
- IL Policies/Regulations: e.g., ISBE, IDHS/DRS
- Important Components/Content for Illinois



Access to the STW Transition Guide



Direct Link: <https://ictw.illinois.edu/resources/school-to-work-transition-guide>



Components of IL School-to-Work Transition Guide

- 1. Words and Terms to Know
- 2. Overview of the Transition Process - a Flow Diagram
- 3. Features of the Transition IEP
- 4. Transition IEP Team Members - Roles & Responsibilities
- 5. Timeline for Transition Planning
- 6. Transition and the Law
- 7. The PUNS System (for Students with Developmental Disabilities)
- 8. The Summary of Performance
- 9. Key Resources & Sample Transition Surveys

(Note: Interactive Table of Contents – built-in “buttons” to each section/component)



Section 1: Words and Terms to Know

Goals:

- Spell out key terms and acronyms
- Strive to define terms in understandable language
- Provide a convenient, alphabetized list of terms at the front of the manual, so it is easy to access at any time

Result: 41 key terms defined and "demystified"



Section 2: Overview of the Transition Process - a Flow Diagram

Notes:

- Annual Process, beginning at age 14.5
- Guided by ongoing assessments, and student experiences



Section 3: Features of the Transition IEP

- Defines and provides examples of key features of transition IEP, including:
 - Age-appropriate transition assessments, measurable postsecondary outcomes, courses of study, coordinated set of transition services/activities, annual IEP goals for transition, & linkages to after-graduation supports and services
- Highlights information on Illinois ABLE accounts, PUNS, and opportunities for CTE - schools are now required to disseminate this information at annual IEP meetings



Section 4: Transition IEP Team Members - Roles & Responsibilities

Essentially, "job descriptions" for the following key team members:

- The Student*
- Parent(s)/Guardian(s)
- School Staff: Special Education Teacher/Case Manager, General Education Teacher(s), School Administrator(s), Guidance Counselor, Vocational/STEP Coordinator, and Related Services Staff (e.g., School Social Worker, School Psychologist, Speech Therapist, PT/OT services, etc.)
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (from IDHS/DRS - Div. of Rehabilitation Services)
- Community service provider(s)

Includes basic definitions and clarification re various services.



Section 5: Timeline for Transition Planning

- Includes key tasks for each transition grade level
- Indicates ongoing tasks
- Highlights tasks unique to each given grade level
- Includes details for given student scenarios/goals (e.g., info for college-bound students; info re PUNS list registration.)



Section 6: Transition and the Law

- Highlights key legislation that impacts transition-age students with disabilities (e.g., IDEA, The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, WIOA, Americans with Disabilities Act, etc.)
- Describes the difference between entitlement systems (special education under IDEA) vs. eligibility systems (adult services)
- Outlines important terms related to Social Security
- Describes options for families related to Educational Rights, Transfer/Delegation of Rights, and Age of Majority (e.g., Guardianship, POA, Supported Decision Making)



Section 7: The PUNS System (for Students with Developmental Disabilities)

- Explains what PUNS is and who it is for
- Describes how to enroll in PUNS and how to regularly check your status on the PUNS "list"
- Answers FAQs that families or service providers may have about PUNS, such as
 - What types of services can this funding cover?
 - What is the difference between the two categories (planning and seeking services)? How do I move from one to another?
 - How do I know if/when I am pulled for funding?



Section 8: The Summary of Performance

- Describes what a Summary of Performance (SOP) is and why it is needed
- Breaks down the key components of the SOP
- Shares helpful tips for educators to ensure the SOP is meaningful and beneficial for the student, such as
 - Actively involving the student in developing the SOP
 - Linking the SOP with the IEP process
 - Thinking about a student's future environment (e.g., adult services) when developing the SOP
- Provides a link to a sample SOP template from ISBE



Section 9: Key Resources & Sample Transition Surveys

Resources Alpha-listed, by category, with embedded links

Categories:

- ADVOCACY & FAMILY SUPPORT
- ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY & ACCOMMODATIONS
- BENEFITS
- DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY SERVICES
- EDUCATION/TRAINING
- EMPLOYMENT
- HOUSING & INDEPENDENT LIVING
- GUARDIANSHIP & LEGAL ASSISTANCE
- MENTAL HEALTH
- RECREATION & LEISURE
- TRANSPORTATION



Section 9: (Continued) Sample Transition Surveys

- Includes two sample transition surveys (one student, one parent/guardian) to be completed at least twice while the student is in school
- Covers domains of employment, postsecondary education/training, independent living, and recreation/leisure.
- Information gleaned from these surveys can contribute to a meaningful and individualized transition plan
- Surveys can be modified from their current form for students with diverse learning and communication needs



Distribution and Promoting Use of the Guide

In Process – Please help get the word out:

- Social media announcements
 - Conference presentations (e.g., Statewide Transition Conf., IAASE, ICEC, TASH, etc.)
 - Links to the Guide on commonly used websites (statewide & local – consider posting link via TPCs, school districts, and community agency websites.)
 - Outreach to parent and advocacy groups (e.g., newsletters, announcements, etc.)
 - Other ideas?
- 

Q & A





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