



Transcript of Conference Call Presentation

Connecting to Success: Mentoring Through Technology to Promote Student Achievement—The Iowa Experience

presented by:

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April 23, 2002

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MS. MACK: My name is Mary Mack. I'm an associate director of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition at the University of Minnesota. I want to welcome all of you to this call, but first let me give you a brief history. About two years ago, I found out about an E-mentoring program that was being implemented by a local community-based organization called Minneapolis Youth Trust. It was an adopt-a-classroom model that matched each young person in a classroom with a mentor from a specific company. General Mills and the Minneapolis Youth Trust developed the model which has expanded to include additional companies and classrooms. Currently, approximately 2,000 middle school students in the Minneapolis Public Schools have mentors through this program. Upon learning about this initiative, I met with people from the Youth Trust and discussed adapting the model for youth with disabilities and linking it with transition planning in the IEP process. Over the past couple of years, we've developed the model, training materials, a Web site, and have piloted the model in Iowa and Minnesota.

Today, we are going to tell you about Connecting To Success and how it has been implemented in Iowa. Now I'll turn it over to the first speaker.

MS. MCCLANNAHAN: Okay. This is Barb McClannahan, and I am the project manager for a systems change grant here in Iowa. We received this grant in Iowa in '98. It's a five-year grant. In '99, we started talking with people in Iowa about mentoring. One of our overall goals of our grants is to expand employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities who also receive public support. One of the objectives of the grant was to look at mentoring in Iowa and we wanted to come up with a way to connect youth with disabilities in the schools with the mentoring program. And so as we started doing research on that in '99, we, through some networking with our School-To-Work individuals, found out about the Youth Trust Mentoring Program and invited Mary and someone from Youth Trust down to visit with us about that. So, in that meeting, we were able to identify two communities that were interested in helping us pilot it and take a look at whether or not this would be an effective tool for youth with disabilities and at-risk youth in these school districts to become engaged in.

Today we are sitting here in Bettendorf. Katharine Hill, from the University of Minnesota, and myself have just been completing some focus groups with students who have been participating. Some have been participating for two years with e-

mentoring, some for one-year, and a few for just six months. We have spent two days with focus groups and are learning a lot from the students themselves about what their impressions have been. We think we have some new information to make the model even better.

We also are sitting here with Tammy Rogers, who is the local coordinator from School-To-Work here in Bettendorf. And in Bettendorf, we are working with three school districts. I will turn it over to Tammy to give you the local coordinator's point of view of what it took to put this model into place.

MS. ROGERS: I am just to go through and kind of give you a brief synopsis of how we put our local programming together for students and kind of a rundown of how it was all set up and some of the training aspects.

And like Barb said, I am a School-To-Work coordinator, and I am hired by both the Bettendorf school district as well as Pleasant Valley. And so I found some teachers that were interested in doing this from both of those school districts. I am also working with our alternative education program from Bettendorf called Project Ready.

We are right now working with six teachers. We have students who have mental disabilities, learning disabilities, behavior disorders as well as our at-risk population involved with this. Between our six teachers, we have, this year, roughly 70 students and 70 mentors from our business community.

When we started talking about doing this, we signed up for an interactive teleconference with Mary. I invited a couple of teachers to attend that. And they thought this might be something that would be interesting for us if we can get our businesses with.

So I went out and talked a little bit. I met with a couple of service agencies. I went to a Kiwanis I know and a Rotary and just kind of talked about what we were looking at doing. And then we had a couple of companies that contacted me and said, "you know what, we would be interested in doing this." We have got a big accounting firm, RSM McGladry. We have Ruhl and Ruhl Insurance and Siryer Steel which is a steel manufacturing plant.

And then we have some separate people who had called. I know there is a credit union and a couple of other people that just wanted it on their own.

So, within the first two years, we have kind of built up a pretty much of a base and we have a lot of interest, a lot of support. A lot of the same people that did this the first year of the pilot have decided to come back and do it again. Some of them weren't able to bring in the same mentors, but they went ahead and found other mentors that were interested in doing this.

So, that's how we went out and recruited our business professionals. After this we asked all of those professionals to fill out an application form. And we also had our students fill out application forms. And I know that there is a manual that is available that has some of the paperwork and so on that can be utilized. This will give you an idea about what kinds of things to ask for the application.

But what we had decided to do is look at this both as a career awareness as well as with our disabled population kind of building on some social skills. Basically building some partnerships and building on friendships and certain things.

So, on our applications we decided to match our students with our mentors on interest, because we didn't fill out and recruit different people in different occupations. That was student-interest based. We thought it was just easy to say, "what are your hobbies, what was your favorite class?" those kind of questions, and then we are able to match our students that way.

We may have changed some from our first year to our second year in how we did our matching process and probably need to look at it again when we continue to do this next year as far as that matching process.

But we went ahead and then held our training. And the training was held in the fall. In our school districts, everybody comes back in August. Usually there is a lot of things going on in August as far as youth orientation and just different kinds of activities that teachers have to do right away and everyone is kind of nervous about the beginning of

the school year. So we waited until mid-September for our training date.

We held a training from 8:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. for the teachers who were interested in it. We paid for a substitute for all of those teachers in the classrooms. And we invited our business mentors to come between the times of 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. because we decided that we didn't want to have our businesses have to give up a whole day for training. And then we supplied a luncheon.

With our training, we went through from about 8:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. with just the teachers doing things that are included in the manual—going through the logistics of what the mentoring would consist of, the roles and responsibilities for all of the different partners. It takes quite a bit of time to do the matching, so that was part of our morning activity as well. Some of the technology issues were covered in that time.

And then at 11:00 a.m., when the business mentors came, we had a lunch planned for everybody. We again went through what the roles of those mentors would be. Now, this is really, really important because the people that sign up to be a mentor have some big responsibilities. You are working with high school kids, some of which have disabilities, and I think it's important that commitment is there when you are going to be a mentor for these students.

So, we really we went through that. We talked a lot about the confidentiality issues. Went over some of the boundaries as far as our E-mail messages and what kinds of things would be allowed and wanted to do just some school communication so that they weren't E-mailing each other from home and those kinds of things.

We also, when our business folks were there, discussed that sometimes we ran into the mentor running out of things to talk about and it was difficult. You can only ask so many things about your family and what you did over the weekend and those kinds of things. So, we went through that with our business mentors and teachers there and developed monthly topics. And then I just wrote a couple of them down. We have what we call the ABI skills from the Association of Business and

Industry with things like teamwork. Kind of a soft skills that are career related. We made that one of our monthly topics that the mentors would look at that list and then explain to students how they use teamwork within their business. And another month we did work on some talking about family. We talked about just plain careers. So, those were the kinds of topics.

And then we also actually give time for the mentors and the teachers to sit down together at the end, kind of explain a little bit about her classroom, what she deals with, what the kids are like and if they have specific questions about their own students that give them time to just get a little bit of background on that.

And then basically after the training is over, you go back to your schools. And I went out into the classrooms, talked to the students, gave them some of the pre-test kind of things that we were looking for, explaining what we were wanting to do with mentoring. And then we went ahead and had each of the students write their first E-mail message. And we have set it up so that we see E-mail messages that go back and forth to the business. The students write something one day and sometime during that week the businessperson receives that and writes something back to the students. We did find out that one of the teachers have been doing it every day, instead of one time a week, but I think I will let Barb and Katharine talk a little bit about their findings from today.

So, it's a once a week E-mail experience for the students. Also, we have a face-to-face component to it where all of the students go out and do a job shadowing experience, use their mentor, and probably spend about anywhere from two to four hours with them depending on the mentors. Some do this over a lunchtime so they can sit around and talk and have lunch with them as well.

And then the last thing that we will do here is coming up in May we have an end-of-the-year celebration, we invite all of the mentors back again. Last year we had a picnic out at the park and it was just kind of a downtime to thank the mentors and the students for their hard work. We gave them some specifics as far as participating in our program

and just kind of give them a pat on the back and hopefully we will continue to have that kind of success and look forward to doing this again next year.

Okay. I will go ahead and leave it at that.

MS. HILL: This is Katharine Hill. I am the national coordinator for Connecting To Success, and I am also in Iowa. I've been in Bettendorf for the past couple of days with Barb. We have spoken to many of the participants at some different schools that are participating here. And obviously this was still in the middle of running the groups. The findings are extremely preliminary. So we have really got some exciting things and really have found this basic program has a real impact on the businesses that participate in it. They learn more about what they want to be doing and what they don't want to be doing. This is just as important. Things like as well that – they learned soft skills. They learn different ways to get jobs. One student told us about networking and helping a family member find a job at the business where his mentor works. Other students spoke about mentors helping them make decisions about their future, whether that was applying for the military or where they were going to for secondary education. And students also spoke very highly of the relationship and connection they had with their mentors and that was very meaningful.

As far as the next thing, one of the things that was also brought out by both the students and the teachers was just having that relationship with another adult that's not a teacher. It's a professional in the community. Many of the kids talked about the encouragement that mentor gave them. One of the students told us she's invited that mentor to her graduation. Just a variety of very positive experiences. Of course there was a few that we had some technical problems with. There were some mentors that did not follow through with e-mailing. And Tammy already addressed that—it is really important that if mentors are going to do this, that they are committed. It's just they did not get E-mails. They would just feel badly about that. So we are going to put some things in place in the training that really sort of emphasize the

importance of the commitment to follow through with the E-mails.

And some of the teachers that we have been talking to today have agreed that they would continue in this project beyond this piloting stage. We have seen some good outcomes. But two teachers who were saying today about this time commitment is that between 30 minutes and one hour a week of their time to look at E-mails and work with the students on that. So, once they get through the initial training and matching 30 minutes to one hour a week and they did see some teachers were in it to help kids become more aware of careers, soft skills, those kinds of things. Others were looking for help in writing skills, and I think they all found some positive outcomes, depending on what they were looking for in students and what they emphasize in their classroom.

So, we are going to put all of this information together and have some kind of written evaluation for the first two years of this pilot project.

MS. MACK: There are some things that I would like to talk about. In terms of replicating Connecting To Success and adding some more states, we now feel that we are in a position to do that, and we are looking for other states to replicate the model. Currently we are working on the planning with Idaho, Michigan, Massachusetts, New Mexico, and Georgia.

The process would be to identify someone at the state level that's interested in bringing the model to their state, it could be somebody from vocational rehabilitation. It could be somebody from special education. There any number of entities that could facilitate Connecting To Success being replicated within a state. The process is: 1st Connecting To Success staff would provide a general orientation to anyone who is interested. After a series of conversations to determine whether people within a state have the resources and interest to pilot Connecting To Success within that state, Connecting To Success staff would provide training to each of the implementation sites and partners. The goal is to build capacity within a state to grow the program by training people within the state on the model and thus provide the internal state

capacity to expand and replicate the model. And then there are the resources and the interest to pilot Connecting To Success within the state.

Connecting To Success staff would come in during this initial period, training staff of the intermediary organization so that they are introduced to the training materials and fully oriented on all the components of the Connecting To Success model. On day two of the training Connecting To Success staff and staff from the local intermediary organization would train interested teachers, employers, and mentors. Following the training, each site would receive ongoing technical assistance via phone consultation, e-mail, Web-based training, and site visits. Each Connecting To Success site would participate in a national evaluation.

We are particularly interested in adding more sites and adding to our data set about how this works, what kind of outcomes are we seeing, what are the benefits for young people with disabilities. And we are beginning to get some information that looks really, really good.

The Youth Trust has done some evaluation of their adopt-a-classroom model for the past few years, and there really is some pretty solid evidence that kids have been better attached to school, understand better what the link between school and adult life is, have more information about the world-to-work, and have a caring adult in their lives who is not their mom, dad, teacher, or other authority figure—an adult who is just somebody that they can talk to and get some support from.

I have been presenting information on Connecting To Success at various places—I presented it at DCDDT and I just came back from Idaho where I talked about it in a northwest regional meeting of VR. So we are getting some real interest, and we are excited about helping states replicate it, and then it would be our hope, just as Iowa and Minnesota are going to do, that then the internally trained pilot sites would be available to replicate and to disseminate the information within their state and grow the model and grow the number of sites that are available.

So, I guess at this point, why don't we open it up to questions about Connecting to Success.

MS. LINAM: This is Laura from Arizona. When you go through the training program, is this the business and the teachers from you guys? The kids don't get involved in the actual training of these people?

MS. MACK: That's true at this point, although our vision was that after we had some young people that had been involved in the training in Minnesota, we would have young people as presenters.

MS. LINAM: Okay.

MS. MACK: And I guess, Barb, in Iowa you haven't had young people as part of the training to date, have you, or not?

MS. MCCLANNAHAN: Well, to train the teachers and the mentors we have not had the youth involved. But I will let Tammy answer what she does with the students to prepare them.

MS. ROGERS: I guess we are talking about two different types of things. We are going to have a training here this next fall that we are going to bring to you and invite anyone who would possibly be interested in the model. And we will have student presenters who have been involved.

Our problem with having the students be involved in this training at the beginning of the year were — there's a lot to cover, for one thing, in a short amount of time. We had decided to pare that down. We didn't want to have the students here for an entire day with their teachers just because of logistics of the whole thing.

MS. LINAM: How do you train as children? How do they know what to ask, or when they fill out the application, what do they do after that?

MS. ROGERS: Well, what we have done is I go in and talk to the students at the initial part of it. And then what we hope is that our teachers, because they have gone through the training and we do have some information available about that, they spend time prior to those first E-mails working with students on what kinds of things that they are going to get out of it. Now, each of the teachers it's a bit different. Some of them incorporate this as part of their written language curriculum. So, their goal may be for students to increase their ability to communicate expressively even though they're using

E-mail or computers or looking at sentence structures—all kind of things. There might be another teacher who is having them read a novel. They have the businessperson read that novel. I think that happened in Minnesota. And then going over their assignments that way. And then there are some that are just communicating socially. So I guess each teacher teaches their students different ways.

MS. MACK: And the Connecting To Success model, in terms of certain aspects of it, is not highly prescriptive. It's a framework so there are some adaptations that particular classroom teacher and particular local situations are going to have to streamline it to meet their situation. But there are some core things that we think need to be there. Number one, we feel that there has to be some sort of a third-party coordinator that is not the classroom teacher and not the employer that can interface between those two entities. I think that, Tammy, you are actually with the school district, aren't you?

MS. ROGERS: Yeah, I am employed by the school district. I have an office at the Chamber of Commerce.

MS. MACK: So then some people have been actually employed by the Chamber with some funding. Other examples would be community-based organizations that are third-party conveners with business education partnerships, but we feel that it is critical to have somebody that serves that role. This is an optional program, so it has to be a teacher that really wants to do this, that feels that his or her students will benefit where it makes sense within the curriculum what they are trying to get across and their educational goals. In August, teachers are overwhelmed with all the things that they have to do. We want this to be something that's going to help them, not just be another add-on.

We feel that it's very important to have some central person within a company that helps with recruiting and helps with the internal company logistics and then identifies the employer—the mentors—and then helps to make good matches. And there are some confidentiality rules and some

boundary issues and procedures that are just nonnegotiable items, but there are a lot of negotiable items too. And I think each one of our sites adapts the model to meet their local needs. Do you have a question?

MS. EICK: Mary, if we were interested in participating in this or at least getting an orientation, you would be the person that we would need to contact?

MS. MACK: You can contact me or the person really to contact is Katharine Hill. Let me give everybody the Web site for Connecting To Success because that also gives you a lot more information. It's <http://ici.umn.edu/ementoring>.

MS. HILL: So, if people want to check that out and then have further questions you can just click on a link and it sends the E-mail directly to me. You can track me down through the Web site.

MS. MACK: And I think that would be the first step. That will also give everybody on the call some more information. What we are trying to do with Connecting To Success is expand mentoring opportunities for young people with disabilities whether it be E-mentoring or face-to-face. And also expand a body of knowledge concerning the impact of mentoring experiences on youth with disabilities. What are some considerations that should be embedded into the mentoring programs when serving youth with disabilities.

MS. WILSON: Mary, this is Priti Wilson from Texas. I was wondering what is the range of disabilities the students that were participating in this program? You know, what types of disabilities do they have?

MS. MACK: Pretty broad range, both within the adopt-a-classroom model and Connecting To Success. Barb, you can talk about that in Iowa. Why don't you give a little breakdown.

MS. MCCLANNAHAN: Tammy, I think you have those numbers.

MS. ROGERS: Yes. We have got kids with learning disabilities, behavior disorders, mental disabilities, as well as our at-risk population. And I know when we started this, some of our lower functioning MD kids we were kind of thinking, well, I don't know if this is going to be such a great

match for us. There was really some concern about incorporating this type of program with those kids, and I just want to be the first to say I would be a strong advocate for including those students. Because as Barb and Katharine will attest to, those kids have really enjoyed the program and been involved in it for two years.

MS. MACK: There have been also young people with sight impairments that were involved in the adopt-a-classroom model. There was a young person that was deaf. In the case of a young people with sight impairment, there are adaptive technologies that were part of their being able to participate. And with the young person that was deaf, that person was actually matched with a person that was a sibling of somebody that was deaf and they knew how to sign.

And then there have been people impaired and stuff like that. But the critical issue is for the teachers to look at, is there something that they really feel is going to benefit the young people that work for them.

MS. WILSON: Okay. And this is mainly at the secondary level; is that right?

MS. MACK: The model that we are using is the secondary level. The model that this was modeled after is at the junior high level.

MS. GINTON: Hi. I was looking at the Web site on and off throughout the call and I was just wondering — and maybe this is just more direct this towards Katharine. If there was a way for the students to kind of have a chat amongst themselves on the Web site?

MS. HILL: You mean for those participating?

MS. GINTON: Correct.

MS. HILL: We don't have that at the moment although I think that's a very —

MS. GINTON: Yeah, because they might want to talk amongst themselves maybe and can share some things and even enlighten each other.

MS. HILL: It would be a great way for us to have a continuing sort of input from students.

MS. GINTON: Yeah. Because that's a good way to get the word out, word of mouth through the students.

MS. MACK: That's a great idea. The Web site is a work in progress.

MS. GINTON: Yeah.

MS. MACK: Things that we talked about are to have passwords, areas of the Web site that teachers could share curricula ideas. And then we have also talked about mentees and a bulletin board or a chat room or something like that. You know, and so there have been lots of things — Katharine, that's kind of your area. We have got a pile of things to do with the Web site.

MS. HILL: The manuals will be available for downloading so people can look at that from the Web site. I am just sort of finishing up until we print something. I think we are going to put on the Web site our autobiographies of people who have participated and also people with disabilities who have been successful in life and have had successful mentoring really what we would like to have are success stories in our program so people could look and read those. I mean, as Mary mentioned, I am really hoping to develop the Web site as a vehicle for all the different types of participants to communicate with each other, especially if it becomes more of a national program. I think we really want to build a community of people who can share their best practices and their best ideas. So they are motivated and on track.

MS. MACK: And then our hope is also to identify some research-based, best practice criteria based on the research that we do with the sites that we work.

MS. GINTON: Sounds great.

MS. HILL: The only thing that I would add, Mary, is if you wanted to mention Disability Mentoring Day.

MS. MACK: Yes, I was thinking about that. Do you want to talk a little bit about that?

MS. HILL: Disability Mentoring Day is a one-day event every year. It's a national event which is used to broadcast mentoring opportunities for kids with disabilities and it's all kinds of mentoring opportunities, not just e-mentoring state to state. It's run out of Washington, DC, and it's October 16th this year. And I know that there's a real effort to institute it in each state and set up different

opportunities within local areas for kids with disabilities to have mentoring opportunities to make connections, whether that's job shadowing or having some schools visit businesses or doing an e-mentoring project. There's really a lot of different ways to go about it. But it seemed like it's a good way to check out mentoring. So it's a little bit less than of a commitment. Before looking to commit a little further, it's also really a neat event and I think it can be a very meaningful activity for a lot of different people.

You can find more information about the Disability Mentoring Day on their Web site at <http://www.aapd.com/mentor.html>.

MS. MACK: And Diane, something that you might want to do through the National Conference of State Legislatures — I know that a number of the governors have actually done proclamations stating that a certain date in October is Disability Mentoring Day. It's a good opportunity for some employers to start thinking about, and an opportunity for us to highlight individuals with disabilities and mentoring and promoting mentoring. I am on the National Planning Committee. It's been more of a photo opportunity and a way of marketing and creating awareness that young people with disabilities are getting mentors. Something that I don't think is necessarily being done is to go to your mainstream mentoring types of programs — Big Brothers, Big Sisters, and some of the others in the community — and find out if they have young people with disabilities in their programs and they may have an opportunity to highlight them through their organizations. We would like to see young people with disabilities as the core constituency in all mentoring programs.

MS. HILL: Mary, you had mentioned wanting to draw attention to some of the funding opportunities that were out there.

MS. MACK: Yes. I believe that there is possibly some money available — and I don't know this for sure for mentoring — to promote mentoring through the new Office of Disability Employment Policy in the Department of Labor. I think there will be an article coming out on that and I don't know when. I would think by the end of the year, though.

And then there is—expected any minute—an RFP coming out of the Department of Education on mentoring in general.

MS. HILL: Twenty grants are available.

MS. MACK: Twenty grants. And it's \$250,000 each.

MS. HILL: The third thing that I would say is that you have mentoring mentioned within school dropout prevention grants, safe and drug free schools, some of the JUMP grants, things like that, and they comes fairly often. Mentoring is part of that and actually that kind of money would fund it. But, so, people are interested in pursuing mentoring programming. There are certainly a lot of opportunities out there to find funding for your program.

MS. MACK: And if you are interested in replicating a Connecting To Success model in your state, we certainly would be interested in a partner.

(Conclusion of teleconference)

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