The broadcast is now starting. All attendees are in Listen Only mode.

Good morning! I’d like to welcome everyone to today’s Webinar, Making Transition Happen: Dream, Believe, Achieve. It’s part of the 2014-15 PA Community of Practice on Transition series. Today’s topic is Transition Tools of Engagement for Families and Caregivers. My name is Michael Stoehr, and I work for the Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education through the PaTTAN system, the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network [INAUDIBLE] totally for secondary transition for the state.

We are using GoTo Webinar technology today for today’s session, so if you do have any questions, please type those in in the Question Panel Box on your GoTo Webinar system that should be on your desktop.

I wanted to mention that while this session is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Community of Practice, one of the contributing sponsors of today’s session is the PaTTAN System. And the mission of PaTTAN is to support the initiatives of the Bureau of Special Education, and to build a capacity of local educational agencies, our school districts, charter schools, to serve students who receive special education services. We are committed through the Department of Education to ensure that all students are educated in the least-restrictive environment, and for those of us working in secondary transition, it’s a natural fit as we prepare students to go on to further training, employment and independent living after they graduate from high school.

The materials for today’s session can be found on the secondarytransition.org Website, and let me just take you there real quickly to show you where those are located. So, if you go to the secondarytransition.org Website, and you scroll down to Hot Topics, you’ll notice the very first thing that comes up is Upcoming Events. And what is contained here are all the sessions in this series. And if you go to today’s date, February 20th, and you click on that link, you’ll see that we have both the PowerPoint, as well as a supplemental resource for today called “Supporting Decision Making” that Becky will talk about a little bit in her section of today’s PowerPoint. You can also locate today’s session on the PaTTAN Website. If you go underneath the Training Calendar for today’s date, you can find those resources there, also.

I wanted to mention that we have an additional resource for today. It’s actually something we have been working on the last several years, and it’s specifically for family engagement for youth, young adults in the transition process. And that Wiki, the link is on that slide, and it’s Transition Family Engagement. And what you’ll find on that site, one of the resources is a presentation that was done last year in collaboration with the PEAL Center. It’s talking about starting transition and the importance of starting early with transition planning. So, what you will find on there is the resource material, the PowerPoint, as well as the link to the recorded session on YouTube. Then, on the Wiki, you will also find information that’s specific for educators, involving or engaging families in the transition process. There’s the section for Family and Caregivers. And in the Family and Caregivers section, there’s some basic what families need to know about secondary transition. There’s a section on transition surveys to assist the family, the youth/young adult and the school in transition planning. There’s some
employment readiness surveys, as well as self-determination resources. Again, that can be found on our Transition Family Engagement Wiki.

Today, we are very pleased to have with us presenting Dana Baccanti, who is the Chief, Special Programs Officer for OVR, and she oversees the secondary transition program through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. We have Cindy Duch from the PEAL Center, Becky Fogle, who is an Educational Consultant in PaTTAN, and she works out of the PaTTAN King of Prussia office. Mary Hartley, who is a Consultant with 21 and Able, which is a program of the United Way of Allegheny County. And Mary will be talking about the planning for the future checklist, as well as other programs that are run through their 21 and Able initiative. Liz Healey from the PEAL Center, and myself.

Today, we’re going to be going over some basic fundamental foundations of the secondary transition process, why we focus on secondary transition for students in middle school and high school. The bulk of today’s session is going to discuss family engagement. We’re going to start by taking about some misconceptions, work through strategies for family caregiver engagement, and things that families need to be aware of in this process, looking at next and frameworks for family engagement. Then we will be doing a section regarding how best to prepare youth and young adults for employment. Then, the last section of today’s Webinar will be discussing resources for schools and families in Pennsylvania around secondary transition and family engagement.

So, why focus on transition? I think one of the most important [INAUDIBLE] is that life-long learning is an expectation for students with disabilities, that being involved in further training, having a job, living independently in the community are all important outcomes that we want for all students. And it’s the process of secondary transition that allows that to occur within a middle school/high school program. Giving a high school diploma is not the final step in this process. While it is great that all students that graduate from our Pennsylvania high schools, whether they have an IEP or not, do receive a high school diploma. The preparation for the future is really the key point. So, making sure that students are prepared to go on for further training, employment and to live independently in their community, it’s very important.

Transition, when we look at really what are the components for secondary transition, it is focused on that individual, youth, young adult, the student’s preferences and interests. It addresses their individual needs; both what they’re interested in doing in the future, as well as where they are currently functioning, what their academic skills are, what their functional skills are. Secondary transition starting at age 14 and continuing until graduation should lead that young person to success in their post-secondary goals of going on for further training and employment, and to live independently in the community. Secondary transition also involves a coordinated set of activities, which means that the classes that the student is taking in middle school and high school, the activities they’re involved with, the community experiences they’re engaged in, should all lead to that student’s success in going on for further training, employment and independent living, and we should see this process as promoting the movement from high school to adulthood.
With that, I’m going to go ahead and turn over the presentation so Becky Fogle from our PaTTAN King of Prussia office, so just give me one second, and we’re going to turn over to Becky. And Becky, you’re on!

>> Okay, now Michael, I don’t have the PowerPoint up.

>> If you could pop it up, that would be great, if you have it there. If not, I’ll just advance your slides.

>> You know, why don’t you do that, because until I find it and get it ready, that’s not going to be so conducive.

>> I will do that.

>> Sorry about that!

>> No worries!

>> Okay, while Michael’s doing that, I’ll just say “hello” to everyone. I’m glad you’re with us today, as we talk about transition. As Michael mentioned, I am also one of the Educational Consultants in the PaTTAN system, working out of the very chilly King of Prussia office this morning! And I am also the parent of three young men, one of whom is now adult, with disabilities, so I’ve kind of gone through some of these same types of things. And then, I have two other boys who are not identified with disabilities, but are in college. So, I’m facing a lot of the same transition kind of issues with them, as well.

Okay, so starting by looking at this slide, has anyone ever been in this position, where they’ve heard words or phrases, or something that they’ve always thought they understood and knew, only find out later, oh, that’s really not what it meant? This cartoon that Michael shares with us kind of talks about that. It’s always been three fishes, not wishes! So, a lot of times we see things like that, or have things in our brain that we think are correct or true, and may not be. And sometimes we need to take perspectives of others around us. Okay?

So, here are some examples of some misconceptions that family members may think or know, or think they’re supposed to know. Some families might think that if there’s something I need to know, the school will tell me, so I don’t need to ask questions or go in and find out things. I trust the school, they know what’s doing, that’s their job, they’re the professionals. Some families may say, I don’t need to be as involved now that my child is in high school. Some of us would say that’s really not true; again, I have two sons in college. I’m involved in a much different way, but I’m still involved. Not helicoptering, but still involved. Well, they might disagree with that, but... And people may feel like, what is all this paperwork? They’re giving me so much paper, how can this be important, and maybe not understand the value of those things. So, these are all misconceptions that family members need to really think about and question if it’s accurate, or not.

And on the next slide, then, we’ll talk about some additional misconceptions – go ahead, Michael.

>> I’m sorry, yes. Hang on.
There you go!

All right, so here are some other misconceptions that educators or agency staff may have. It may be real easy to judge families and say, oh, they’re just not as involved when they get older. And without looking deeper into that to finding out if that’s true, are there reasons why that’s true, is again, some of those misconceptions that both families and professionals may have. Also, it may be easy to say, you know what, families and youth, they have unrealistic expectations. This student wants to be a veterinarian, and he doesn’t have the skills. And that may be the end of the conversation, instead of really going deeper to find out, what is it about being a vet that this student likes? It may not really be that, it may be that they like working with animals, and there may be another field. Or, we may also find out that what we think a student can’t do, maybe they can, you know, it’s our task as an IEP team to really delve into that deeper, and find out what’s going on. Staff may feel like it’s the family’s job to connect with those adult agencies and services., my job is to do what’s happening during school, and I’m not involved with that later. But again, it’s our responsibility as the entire IEP team, both school, agency, parents, families and the youth themselves to make those connections and decisions about what’s the next step for our youth.

And the next bullet here, or the box, says, families don’t understand the process. So, it’s all right that they’re not at the meetings. Oh my goodness! If a family doesn’t understand the process, it’s our job to make sure we explain that to them, we help them. Obviously some families are going to be much more involved, much more knowledgeable, much more savvy about the transition process. But if families aren’t, we need to be the folks that help them do that. And the last box here, families trust us. So, they know they don’t need to come to the meetings. Well again, that might be true. And I have had families say to me, oh, again, you’re the professionals, you know what’s best. But it really has to be all of us working together to do what’s right for their child. Okay, next slide.

All right, so let’s take a look at some of the goals of what schools and teachers and those folks might want, as compared to what parents expect. So, here’s some different things. So, schools may have on their radar, okay, this student’s going to graduate in 12th grade. End of conversation. Parents may feel like, you know what? It may take longer. My student may need to stay in school while they’re 19, 20, graduate at 21. We need to really look at what’s right for that individual student, not all students as a whole. Schools are under a lot of pressure to be compliant, and meet regulation and rules, and things like that. But parents don’t really care about that. When it’s your child, you want what’s right for your student, and you’re not as worried about the compliance piece, as schools have to be.

And we may want our students to be able to graduate with their same-age peers, we may want them to walk in graduation and then do some additional transition-related schoolwork after that. There’s a lot of individual things that we really need to look at for those goals. And schools – I truly believe that schools do want to have their families involved. They don’t always know how to go about it, or they don’t always understand what some of the reasons are, why their families don’t seem to be involved. And not being involved is not the same thing as not being engaged, or not caring. So, we have to make
sure that people understand both aspects of that. Families certainly want to know that the most important things are being addressed, again, for their individual student. When you’re a mom or a dad, it’s not so much that you care about the other 400 kids in the class, you worry about what’s right for your student.

Families want their students to have individual program, and schools also want the students to be independent in the school environment. And I don’t think those two things need to be opposite. They need to be worked together to be, again, what’s right for that student. Sometimes schools feel like we have to use our existing program, and this is all we have to offer, where on the other side, families want to be listened to and understand that the existing program may or may not meet the needs of my student. Schools may feel like, well, we don’t do that here. We don’t have that available. We don’t offer that kind of transportation or service, or job coaching skill. Again, the important thing is that it’s about the process. It’s about the discussion about the planning that’s based on the individual’s strengths, needs and preferences of that student. So, we can’t ever say, “We don’t do that here,” we have to figure out if that’s what’s right for my child and for my student, then we have to figure out the best way to meet that need. Okay?

So, what do youth and families want? We’ve talked a lot about, now, what families might misconceive, and what schools and agency folks might misconceive. But what do youth and families actually want? We’re going to talk about a project that delved into that. Okay, go ahead, please. Thank you!

So, there’s a project currently underway that is a partnership of the three groups that you see listed on the bottom of this slide; the Institute on Disabilities through Temple University, the George Washington University and the PYLN, or the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network. And if families are not familiar with the work of the PYLN, it’s an incredible group that you should learn about. It’s a group of young adults with disabilities in a leadership role that are really making changes for not just themselves, but for youth in general. It’s an incredible organization.

So, this project that combines these three groups is called, “Transition Discoveries.” This group is represented by an advisory board that includes parents, family members, professionals, like Michael and myself, as well as youth with disabilities. And the work of this group has gone out to really find out directly from youth and their families what they’re feeling or thinking or expressing about authentic dreams and goals around transition. So, the next couple slides, we’re going to talk about some of the information that Transition Discoveries has discovered. Okay?

All right, so here’s some of the preliminary findings that this project gleaned from youth themselves. And it may or may not be surprising to families to know this. Youth are really interested in talking about relationships. That is so important to you. And I dare say that even our youth and young adults without disabilities, I believe many of these things would be true of as well, but our youth with disabilities are maybe hindered much more in some of these areas. They express a desire for friendships, wanting to get married and have children as they get older. They’re interested in being independent from their families. Ooh, that’s sometimes hard to hear as a parent, right? Sometimes it’s harder for us to let go than for the youth, and I’m speaking from experience on that, I know that. Youth are really thinking
about immediate concerns, short-term. They’re looking at getting out of high school, driving, getting a job, going to school. Having those social friends and outlooks. Again, I think that makes perfect sense. I think back when I was that age, those were the types of things I was interested in, too. It might have been a little easier for me, however, because I didn’t have a disability as a barrier to reaching some of those things.

They’ve also discovered, sadly, but not surprisingly, a theme of bullying. Many of the youth that shared mentioned that, but then became very quiet. It was very difficult to talk about. And I think that it is harder to talk about those types of things, but it’s something that we as families and we as professionals need to be keenly aware of, and be ready to address. Okay, go ahead.

So, what do youth want? Okay, again, not surprising. They want to achieve their dreams. They want to live on their own. They want to be able to get to and from places, again, independently as possible. They want to have a job, and they want to have relationships. I’m thinking those are pretty powerful things, but it doesn’t seem like too much to ask. It doesn’t seem like pie in the sky. I think that’s certainly reasonable things for youth to want and realize.

Okay, next, we’re talking about what families want. So, what this project is finding again, I don’t know if it will be surprising to some of us or not, but there are some different values that families have, as opposed to their youth. So, as mentioned earlier, youth are really expressing that they’re really thinking about the now, the present term, the short-term; getting out of school, those immediate kinds of things. Where us, as family members, are really thinking about the whole life; you know, we’re looking much more long-term about this. So, we’re worried about what’s going to happen with our sons and daughters when we’re no longer around to take care of them. So we have siblings in place that can help them, and is that reasonable? I am also the sibling of an older adult with significant disabilities, and my parents, I think, were really careful about not making me feel like I had to be the sole support for him, but yet, I grew up knowing that that was always a part of my life; that I was going to have to be able to help support him. So, I think it depends on the family, and what the family is, or that sibling is interested in and able to provide. But I don’t think it’s fair to just say, oh, well, you have a brother or sister, so therefore, that’s what’s going to happen. So, there’s a lot of interesting phenomena around siblings as well.

Families did express a strong sense of frustration with schools and systems about getting information they need. Not knowing what to ask – you know, sometimes we ask families, do you have any questions? But if you don’t know what to ask, you can’t ask the questions. So, we have to go a little further than that. Also, we might say, well, I gave them information on this particular service, or this particular thing, and they didn’t follow up on it. Well, as a family member, I’m sure I’ve gotten multiple copies of things. Sometimes it takes me a while to wrap my brain around it and be able to pursue it and move forward with it. So, that really shows up, that families really need to have that presence, someone to help them navigate those things. It’s not easy to do. And also, frustration over feeling that they might have to go as far as suing to get what they need for their child. We certainly don’t want that to be the norm out there, but that’s the feeling. Okay, next?
So, again, kind of summing up some of these family findings, they’re really looking at a broader community and society perspective, more than the short term of their youth. Obviously, big concerns about safety and security out in the community, especially as we strive to help our youth and young adults to become more independent without us. We worry about us trusting the wrong people, and we worry about our youth trusting the wrong people, ongoing concern about bullying, and feeling tired. Oh my goodness, yes – how will they survive in the long haul? How does it impact the family? What if we don’t have respite? What if my child isn’t ever able to get the supports they need to live independently, and I have no respite? There’s long waiting lists for things, families are terrified about moving forward with some independent living options. That’s difficult. I mentioned my brother; he actually lives in a group home in another state right now, and that is very scary. But we know that he’s living as independently as he can. He’s in a good place. But it’s not easy for us as a family, and my father is now 86, and he’s still trying to drive out to visit him and spend time with him; so those are family issues that we all have to face. Okay, next slide.

Okay, so here’s some additional things to remember about families. It’s not just a school. This is absolutely a misconception. It’s life-long for families and for the youth themselves. So, we have to make sure that our school and agency folks remember that, as well. And there is a great deal of fragmentation. We spend a lot of time in transition training, helping families and teachers understand the difference between the entitlement system and the eligibility system, when students graduate and no longer have a school-based IEP. It does feel very fragmented, and there’s not always a case person who knows all the different areas that can help youth, young adult and their families. And so, it does feel like, I tried that, or I called them, or, I called them three times, they didn’t call me back. It can be very frustrating for families.

Concern about fitting their son or daughter into the “what’s acceptable” peg, so a square peg into a round hole phenomenon. You know, if my student doesn’t fit exactly here, what services can I help find them? What IEP supports can I give them? If my child doesn’t fit here, how can I find people to help me find agencies or supports or services that will provide this for them, as they age out of the public education system? And lastly, we realize that systems don’t always focus on the strengths, gifts and talents of our sons and daughters. Sometimes all we hear about is that they can’t do, or what’s wrong with them, or what’s going badly, and sometimes we forget that strengths can also be built upon and further developed as the student becomes an adult and goes out into the world. There may be some strengths that can be looked at and formed into a useful job activity, or independent living skill, or just a useful adult task. Okay, next?

So, what families want for their sons and daughters – take a look at this circle, and look around. I think every parent out there wants these things for their children. They them to have friends. They want them to be safe and healthy. They want them to be included, like everyone else. They want them to be able to give back to the community, and do helpful, positive things. And I think the self-advocacy piece is hugely important, and is sometimes difficult for parents, because when our children are small, we’re doing it all for them, and it’s difficult to come to the point where we have to help them build their self-advocacy skills and their self-determination skills. It’s not easy, but it’s so important, and we want that for our children. Okay, next?
So, why should families be involved? Now, this might kind of be a no-brainer list of materials here, because I can’t imagine that anyone on this Webinar would say, “No, we don’t think families should be involved.” Probably anyone who does believe that is probably not listening to this Webinar. But let’s talk about why we know families should be involved. Clearly, for all students, whether they have a disability or not, whether they’re in elementary school or high school, we know that if families are involved, we see higher achievement, we see better, more positive attitudes and behaviors, higher graduation rates and greater enrollment in post-secondary education. So, that’s for everyone. Then, if we look specifically at students with disabilities, in addition to those things, families should be involved because we know we’re going to see more comprehensive transition plans.

Again, I mentioned earlier the importance around the discussion, the planning, the transition section of the IEP, driving the rest of the IEP. Those things must have family involvement to really reach this level of quality that all our students deserve. We know we’ll see a higher rate of post-school outcomes being positive, that we’ll see things like students going on for post-secondary education, being competitively employed, living independently. All those types of things, we’re going to see that in higher rates, if families are involved. And we’re also more apt to meet student preferences, because the families know, historically, what their children have been good at, what they’ve struggled with, what’s been easy for them, what’s been hard for them; and really help that, help build on those strengths and preferences. Okay?

So, now we’re going to look at a little slightly different take on this, but certainly it builds on what we’re talking about so far, and that is the family and caregiver engagement in the transition process. It truly is the highest stake and of great value for our families and our youth. We know that long after all of our hardest-working, most dedicated teachers, transition coordinators, supports folks, Counselors, job coaches, everyone who is so invested in their student’s education and transition process, at some point, they’re going to be gone. The family, however, will still be family. Some families are tighter knit, some families are more dysfunctional. But the family will always be there for that student and young adult, as they move forward. So, we have to remember that. That’s hugely important! Okay, next?

So, families, we know, I mean, clearly we’ve established that families are essential to the transition process for any youth. Again, they’re the most helpful historians; they understand the complexity of what’s happened prior years leading up to the point where they are in their transition process now. They can help early on develop those transition plans, even as young as 12 or 13, as we’re moving into the formal transition years, they can help build that. And I also know that as a parent, when you’re struggling just to get everything done that you need to be to be a good parent for your child, when they’re approaching 12, 13, 14, adulthood seems so far away. But speaking from experience, being on the other end of that right now, I tell people often, you blink and they’re adults. You don’t know how it happens. It seems like it will never happen when they’re small, but all of a sudden, boom! You’re there! So, we really do need to involve our families, and our professionals early on, to really be giving not just short-shift and rushing through that, “Oh, we’ll get to that as he gets older,” it really needs to be that important. And the level of detail needs to really be expanded upon, as they move through their school years. But it really must be based on all these things listed on this slide. Okay?
So again, we’ve mentioned how important the families are as a part of that team. We need to make sure that families understand their value to the IEP team. We need to make sure that professionals understand the value of the families being a part of that. We really – it does take a village. We really have to all work together to do this. We know that families have provided long-term support. They are the advocates for their service and benefits, and continue their life. We know that families are dealing with multiple issues, not just the homework for tonight in Steven’s history class. They’re really dealing with such big problems; it could be medical issues. In our case, we spent a lot of time going through medical crises and hospitalizations, and how we still make sure that all the things that happen that need to, they could be having money issues. There’s just so many issues that families must face. But we also know, this last bullet I really think is the key here. Families will be more likely to participate if they feel that they’re valued. Isn’t that just human nature in anything and everything we do? Don’t you feel more likely to be a part of something, if you feel that your participation is valued? If you feel like you’re just a token member of some committee, or some team, you’re not going to be as invested. You’re not going to be as participatory. So, again, families and school and agency teams need to realize this. Okay?

So, it’s vital that we work diligently and early on to build a trustworthy relationship not just with the family, but with the child themselves, because they’re not going to be the child forever. I still joke around and call my adult son “my boy,” and I tell him that, “No matter how old you’ll get, you’ll still be my little boy.” But I do know that he’s an adult. He’s out working, he’s living independently. Still needs support from agencies, from family, from friends. But you have to build that relationship. We also know that working with multiple professionals is not easy. Medical, agency, educational – all those things – it’s very difficult. And we know that in some fields, there’s a lot of turnover. So, every time you get a new case worker or a new nurse practitioner, or a new teacher’s aide or paraprofessional, it’s really difficult to start over and have that, built that history and that trust. Sometimes the Special Education Director works with a family from sometimes early intervention through graduation, and if you haven’t built a good relationship with that person, that’s a lot of years to be working together to not have a good, trustworthy relationship. Teachers you may have just for one year, and you may feel like by the end of that school year, you’ve finally gotten somewhere, and now you’re terrified about what’s going to happen the next year. So, there’s a lot of history things that we really need to be cognizant of, and aware of.

And we need to make sure that we’re supporting families as they go through that. We need to introduce the concept early. As I mentioned, I often tell elementary school special educators to not just rush through that transition page and say, “Oh, you don’t have to worry about this until he’s 14,” but at least start building the bridge and saying, “This section of the IEP we’re not going into great detail now, but here’s what it’s about. And when your child is 14, or younger, here’s when we’re going to really start planning that,” so parents don’t all of a sudden see that their child is 14 and not understand it, or understand the importance of it, I think that’s really important.

And here’s a thought to help families understand the phrase of, “We’re preparing for after school,” “We’re preparing for adulthood,” instead of maybe the transition, because that maybe doesn’t hold the same weight or importance to some families that it does to professionals. So, maybe we need to think about explaining transition as a way of preparing for what comes next, and helping them understand
that the term “transition” really does mean that. We need to help parents promote independence and self-advocacy. I mentioned earlier, I know that’s not easy. But the earlier you begin to help your son or daughter start developing some self-advocacy, some independence, the more helpful it will be. Early on, one of the things that we built in for our son was having him start keeping track of what medical supplies he needed to order from week to week. And I didn’t realize it at the time, but that really made a huge difference. He was probably in middle school-ish, when we started having him do that. But now, when I see him as an adult navigating the difficult maze of insurance and how many times a month you can get a new certain medical device, and how to do that, I see him doing that masterfully, and I think back, boy, I maybe should have even started that a little earlier. But those kind of things do help, and having them learn about why it’s important to be self-advocates. That doesn’t mean that families never stop advocating for their child, again, as my son being an adult, I know that. But he really has to be the person that makes the decisions and moves that forward. And as family members, the earlier we start that, the better it is for them, and for us. And again, don’t ever forget to continue to build that trust and ongoing communication. It’s crucial. Okay?

So, training for families, moving from the elementary IEP to a transition-driven IEP; we talked about that a little bit already, too. Trying to encourage families to maybe start thinking about that sooner, and to understand that a transition-driven IEP doesn’t mean that you have all of a sudden new and separate transition ideas, it really needs to meld that entire document together. The whole IEP becomes the transition IEP, and the transition plan really is what drives everything; the academic needs, the functional needs, the plans of what’s going to happen afterwards. We need to make sure that’s helpful. So, another thing we can do is introduce them to transition, again, early on. Provide them with materials like the Wiki space page that Michael introduced us to at the beginning of this Webinar, like the transition Website that Michael also shared with us. There are a lot of materials out there, and our colleagues at the PEAL Center are going to talk about some of them in a little bit on this Webinar. There are so many ways that we can help transition families into transition that we really need to be aware of that, and do that.

And the third bullet here, provide information multiple times and in smaller chunks. It is so overwhelming to be handed a pile of documents and expect to get that all the first time. I’m a professional in the field, and it was hard for me! So, I can imagine families that don’t have the same educational background that I do, or maybe some of the same family structural supports, or supports from agencies like PEAL, or OVR or places like that, that they don’t know about them. We really need to make sure that we’re giving information multiple times, and in smaller chunks, if that’s appropriate for that family. Another family, you may be able to hand a whole bunch of documents, and they’re going to be on that like a duck on a June bug, and they’re going to take off, and you don’t ever have to do anything again! But we need to understand the individual needs of families. Okay, next?

All right. So, now, work backwards. So, think about the end result – and again, it’s kind of easy for me to say this now, because my son is an adult. And it was hard for me to think about the future when he was small. In all honesty, I was busy focusing on keeping him healthy and in school as much as he could be. But now, think really what you envision in their future. Allow yourself as a family to think about what that future could entail, what it could look like. As an educator, think about not just this IEP here
with your student, but really think long-term, what types of things are you helping develop for this family and this student to be an adult? Parents really do make the difference as they move forward, because as we said, the family is always there.

To help the youth understand that their self-perception as a capable person is absolutely influenced by you, both professional and family members; and, their experiences. So, if we don’t start early to build some of those self-determination and self-advocacy skills, if you wait until they’re graduating and going out into the adult world, and then decide, oh, now it’s time for them to understand they’re a capable person – that’s going to be too little, too late. We really need to start building that early on. Setting expectations that are high and rigorous, but realistic – there’s a balance there – expectations don’t mean you just say, “Okay, go on out into the world, now, I expect you can get a job and be independent and live on your own, go at it,” that’s not enough. We have to have the expectations that they can do it, and then the supports in place to help them achieve that. And I love this one – develop a transition place for yourself, to move from primary care taker to secondary support person. Again, not easy! Because as moms and dads, we’ve spent many years being that primary person. But we really need to work on our own transition plan to guide us in being able to assist our son or daughter to be able to take more of that responsibility to go out in the world, and still need us a little bit. I tell my kids all the time, “It’s okay to still need mom a little bit, but I can’t do it for you anymore. I’ll be here to support you, I’ll give you guidance, I’ll do whatever it takes, but I can’t do everything for you anymore.” So, that’s a huge lesson for all of us. Okay, next?

Universal truths – okay, Learned Helplessness – that absolutely comes from those things we just talked about; not starting early to build in tiny little chunks of doing more things more independently. Maybe fading some of the supports that are in place, not cutting them totally out, all of a sudden doing away with it, but fading that in, and doing that gradually over time. There is true dignity in risk, and sometimes as a teacher or professional and family member, we have to let our children have little failures, not that are dangerous, I mean, obviously we have to keep their safety in mind, they have to always be safe and okay. But there may be some little risks that we need to allow them to take, and let them experience the consequences of perhaps a failure or a disappointment, and support them in working through that, and how to perhaps change something into a more positive spin, learn from that experience. If they don’t learn that, they’re never going to be able to move forward, and that whole idea of self-determination is based on experiences, attitudes and opportunities, not just of the youth themselves, but of the family members, as well. Okay?

So, why let go? Hmm! Okay, I think we already talked about the immediate mom and dad reasons why. But there’s some even bigger reasons, perhaps, that have been documented. We know that self-determined students are twice as likely to be employed after high school. And not only to be employed, but stay employed. If our youth have not developed these self-determination and self-advocacy skills, getting them the job is only a small portion of that; they’re not going to be able to keep it, they’re not going to be able to advance, if they’re not self-aware enough, and self-determined enough. We know that there’s greater post-secondary enrollment if we allow our students and encourage our students to become more self-determined. When our students go to college, for example, they don’t have an IEP anymore. And one of the rude awakenings for me was, we don’t get sent report cards when we’re in
college. It doesn’t matter if you’re paying the bill. Their report cards go to the student, and it’s your student’s choice whether they allow you to access their electronic grade books, their attendance records, and the like. So, if you haven’t already built that trust and that self-determination in, it’s going to be really hard to all of a sudden learn it, when you don’t have a learning support teacher to call, you don’t have a learning support teacher to come and pull you out, to read a test to you. Any types of post-secondary enrollment, not just college, but those kinds of things would all be true for, as well. And even though we said the family will remain there forever, we, as the mom or dad or the sibling, or any family member, may not be the one person that’s there forever, for a lot of reasons. And we need to be able to equip our sons and daughters to go forward without us doing everything for them. Okay, end of soap box for that!

All right, so we, again, talking about some research here, we know that if they’re more self-determined, they’re more likely to be employed, and live independently. That’s really important, and that’s one that lives close to my heart, because that was something that was very difficult for me as a parent to move forward on and support, and it terrified me — it still terrifies me sometimes — but my son is doing it, and I’m very proud of him for that. So, we want to continue to do that, not just because it’s what the research says, but because it’s what’s right for our kids. Or, excuse me, our young adults. Okay.

So, we also know that the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities has shown us four skills that students can have that will serve them well. So, these next few slides, we’re going to look at those skills. All right, so first, the ability to assess yourself, and really understand your disability, and what needs are associated with your disabilities. I know sometimes we try to shield our children from knowing what their disability is, or that they have a disability, because we don’t want them to feel hindered by a label; we don’t want them to feel held back because they have a certain syndrome or disability area. But we have to find that balance about understanding that it’s okay to have a disability, lots of people have them, but here’s what we need to do about it, not what we can’t do because of that, so much. We need to be aware of the accommodations that we need, and that would be helpful. And again, in high school, a lot of accommodations might be provided that may or may not be available to our youth as they go on to post-secondary, or the workplace. So, we need to help our youth understand that.

We also need to help them to understand what is within their civil rights, what types of accommodations should they be certainly able to request in the workplace, and what types of things should I be sure to ask for that have worked for me in the past, or that might work better for me in this situation. That all leads to those self-advocacy skills to be able to express those needs, and that’s not easy for a lot of youth to be able to do that. So again, working early on to do that. These four things together don’t guarantee a successful transition outcome, but it certainly guarantees the likelihood of it being much more successful. Okay?

All right, so here’s some of the barriers. I know we really try to put the positive spin on it. But being realistic, we know that there are some things that get in the way of us being able to be as self-determined as we would like. Obviously, some of these we can do something about, some of them are a little harder to do something about. The lack of self-knowledge is something that we can build. We can
equip our families, we can equip our students and our young adults with self-knowledge. Over-protection – that we can work on. And again, that’s not just families. Sometimes school and agency folks can be over-protective of our youth, too. But that is something that we can do, we can work on. Low expectations – clearly that’s something we can do about – we can work with families, we can work with professionals about raising expectations, and presuming more competence in our students and our families.

Few opportunities for choice – this one’s a little tougher to work on, because depending on your particular area that you live in, there may be very limited opportunities. We may have to be very creative about how we construct things, or manipulate the environment to provide opportunities closer to what we would like for our students to have available. We may have to be creative in finding agencies or grants or programs out there that can help provide more opportunities. And lack of a stable support system – that’s another tough barrier, because if you don’t already have that basis there, and you don’t know how to ask for it, that’s really difficult. So, we may have to reach out parent to parent through agencies like PEAL that can help folks through other agencies; HUNE in Philadelphia area for some of our Hispanic families, school PTA groups that meet others, tasks force, churches, other places of worship. There may be supports out there that we don’t even know about, or families don’t know to ask for it. So, we need to all be on the lookout for that because it’s probably not going to just happen without all of us really trying to build that. Okay.

All right, so what we really want to do is foster this competence that I mentioned a few minutes ago. We need to presume competence in others, and help foster that competence. So, we always need to start where the skills are of that family, or that student, or that IEP team, and build from there. We need to make sure that students experience competence when they’re challenged, by giving them feedback, by helping them have some of that dignity of risk, some of those small failures that they can learn from, and learn to adjust, and not be crumbled when something tiny goes wrong. And for some students, that’s really difficult. And for some families, that’s really difficult.

We have to make sure that – with a demand that they ask for permission in everything, they’ll learn to be helpless. So, we need to make sure that we’re helping them understand how to be self-advocate, not necessarily adversarial. But they need to learn how to do that. Beware of learned helplessness, we already talked about that, as well. And provide opportunities – that’s fine, Michael, go ahead.

All right, so the dignity of risk that we talked about – we need to make sure that we develop opportunities for our students to take risks and to move forward. And one of the ways we can do that is, this document, Supporting Decision Making that Michael mentioned earlier. In this document, it talks about the types of things that people should be allowed to have the right to make decisions about things that affect them. They should have the right to learn from their experiences. They have the right to make decisions that others might not agree with. And this document provides some scenarios, some links, some resources and suggestions for supporters and support workers, people with disabilities and services providers, ways that they can move forward to help young adults with disabilities make their own decisions.
Okay, I think that’s it for me! Is that it, Michael? I believe I’m turning it back over. Thank you, everyone!

>> Actually, you have two more slides, a couple more slides.

>> Oh my goodness, I’m trying to rush, I’m so sorry!

>> That’s all right!

>> Okay!

>> We love hearing from you, though, so keep plugging!

>> Oh, boy! Okay. So, independence does not mean doing everything for yourself. We all need a little help from our friends, whether we have disabilities or not, whether we have families or not. We all need one another. And families need to support their sons and daughters, as they move forward in their life, and remembering what we want to see them do as an adult.

And use those teachable moments! Use real-life situations to help our children, maybe make a mistake and learn from it and move forward. Make choices as much as they can, with the reasonable level of risk. As I said, you know, it’s not right to just say, “Here you go, go forth and be self-determined, now,” you know, we really have to do it in small chunks. And help them understand how to live with their consequences and not be devastated by consequences, but how to move forward through that.

All right, here’s what you can do now. You can help your youth identify their needs, and further develop strategies that will help them meet them. You can help them improve their decision-making, and goal attainment skills, and thinking about what is realistic, but high, expectations or goals for me. Enhance communication and relationship skills – that will probably serve our youth in whatever they do after high school, more than anything else. If they can communicate and build relationships on the job, in the community, in school, that will help with those gaining employment and keeping employment skills. Celebrate successes. I think making sure that students know when they have these challenges or this risk, dignity of risk, that’s not a bad thing, and it’s good to learn from that, and move forward. Help them identify information that they would like to share about the educational team – that’s a huge part of self-advocacy and self-determination that will serve them well later, in post-secondary education training, or independent living, as well. Okay!

>> Great, thank you, Becky! Appreciate it!

>> Now I’m done!

>> Now you are finished.

>> Okay, thanks so much! And now Cindy can share her...

>>Okay, now we’re moving over to Cindy, and Cindy’s going to share her personal story of her journey in this transition process with her son, Andrew. So, Cindy, over to you!
>> And, I think you just need to unmute on your end, Cindy, so you can unmute your mike on your computer, it looks like it might still be muted. You’re on muted on my end. Go ahead, Cindy, we should be able to hear you. Go ahead.

>> Okay, thanks, Michael! So much of what Becky was talking about, really, we went through on our journey through transition. And that’s what helped us plan for Andrew’s successful transition. Andrew was always included with typical peers, and he did have behaviors that required a behavior plan, but through a lot of learning and teaching, Andrew learned replacement behaviors and some coping skills that helped to make him a successful student. In the end, all of these things were critical to his success in transition.

Again, similar to what Becky said, we really had to remind every team of the presumed competence. I would purposefully tell every teen that he had so much potential. We saw so much from the time Andrew was born through school, that there was so much potential there. His behaviors, it’s easy to see those, and see where they were a barrier to some instruction, but what we has, and what he’s able to learn – those are things that really, we do rely on the teachers and the school to really bring out in him.

From the time Andrew was in fifth grade, he was a part of his IEP team. This was probably an idea that I had heard about somewhere; most of the best information I would get throughout this whole process was from other families. And I probably heard it somewhere to bring the child in, let him be part of his IEP team.

Now, this doesn’t mean as a fifth grader he was sitting through the entire meeting; I often say I didn’t want to sit through the entire meeting! But he would come prepared. He had index cards that he had prepared the day before, or leading up to the meeting, where he’d list his strengths. He would list what he felt his needs were, and he would indicate that his goals were for himself. Doing all of this really taught him a lot about self-advocacy, it taught him about public speaking, speaking in front of people, speaking in front of adults, and gave him confidence in what he thought he needed, and in asking for those things. I think kind of an example of this was in sixth grade when it was really a goal of Andrew’s, being that at that time they had moved into middle school, that he wanted to learn how to talk to girls.

So, Andrew would mention this at his IEP meeting, and the IEP team agreed that for Andrew, this was a goal that he needed to learn. So, it was something that the team included in his IEP, and worked on.

Again, thinking about transition as planning, and starting at younger ages than a lot of families might think is needed, in seventh grade, we started going to some transition fairs. At that time, Andrew really enjoyed picking up brochures, so he would pick up a lot of brochures. But at one of the transition fairs, they had vendors speak, and one of the vendors that he heard was from the local community college. And he really became interested in what the community college could offer, and the supports that they could have for him. And from that point on, it became a goal of his to attend community college.

In eighth grade, our family moved to a new school district. And as Andrew has done his entire life, he surprised us, and he transitioned very well to a new school and a new school district. But this wasn’t done without preparation, there was a lot of preparation, visiting the school numerous times, actually
going in and having lunch in the lunchroom over the summer, identifying bathrooms, which is pretty important, and going through his schedule the summer before. Then, in ninth grade, we had another change when he went to the high school. And he entered into the marching band. This was one of the most successful confidence-building and amazing experiences that Andrew had in high school. I would probably encourage families, and the people that support families, in exploring extracurricular activities, and providing the support that the children need in these extracurricular activities, because what’s learned there is really much more what they need to know as they venture out, than even a lot of the academic stuff they’re learning. Andrew was supported at home games with an aid, he was supported with away games – which this was, kind of like Becky was talking about, this was my letting go, this is where I was learning how to let go, and allow these things to happen without me right by his side. Andrew did attend out of state band trips. His aid went along, and he did that just like all the other students. This was a big transition for me, but he did it! I did it!

By eleventh grade, Andrew was thinking more about his transition, and thinking about what interested him. He’s a very outgoing person, he likes helping others. He’s also a rule-follower. So, one of the volunteer opportunities that Andrew explored was at a local hospital, and he did go to the hospital, and they ended up initially placing him in an office with some office ladies, and the office ladies were very set in their ways. And Andrew found this wasn’t the experience he was looking for, and I think the office ladies thought the same way! So, he ended up going to another area of the hospital where there was more interaction with people, which is really what he enjoys. And he was very successful.

At that same time, in school, we were starting to talk with our OVR counselor. The OVR counselor would help by taking Andrew’s application – and this wasn’t something that I knew how to start; so the Counselor came to the meeting, and talked us through the process; what they would do for Andrew, and we really got that process started. So, through this process, we also learned about the Paratransit system, and Andrew was, through school, Andrew was learning travel instruction, and this included the Paratransit system. And we found that Andrew could take Paratransit to the hospital for his volunteer position. So again, stretching that independence, he was using what he learned as far as more independence, and was getting to his volunteer position on his own. And this experience at the hospital kind of cemented his decision to go into healthcare.

Again, we were always attending transition fairs, finding what would be appropriate for Andrew. And we always went to the transition conferences at Penn State. We probably went to about three transition conferences, and Andrew – I think he enjoyed them probably more than I did. I always learned something there, but Andrew, he was learning about self-advocacy, independence, leadership. I was there to learn about adult services and eligibility. I think one of the best memories I have was learning about goal writing; it finally clicked what goal writing was like, or how to do that successfully. And of course, the connection with other families. Again, that opportunity in school for families to connect really helps make for a successful transition; families who have gone through this before are invaluable to us having successful outcomes. So, there’s opportunities in school, talking to other families was really important for us.
Through these connections, we learned about Project Search. Project Search is a collaboration between Office for Vocational Rehab, Goodwill, and in Allegheny County it’s with UPMC, and with the school district. We started by going to an orientation; Andrew was very interested in that. He was well-remembered as the student who was shaking his head, “Yes! Yes! This is what I want to do!” And we took the tour, which is part of the application process. He did his application, the school submitted that, and Andrew was accepted to Project Search. He was very successful in his rotations, which included pharmacy and the emergency department. He loved the emergency department! I think it was, again, there were so many people there that he could talk to, interact with. While he was in the emergency department, he figured out a new way to load the carts; what they would do is, the carts that are in each emergency room they would load, so they were always prepared for another patient coming in. And his process was made the new standard in the emergency department, so that made him feel very successful. During the time he was at Project Search, Andrew got a job at Giant Eagle grocery store, and he enjoyed, again, somewhere where he – we knew, that this was a strength of his, being very outgoing and talking to people, smiling like he is in this picture.

So, he’s been at Giant Eagle for two years now. When he graduated school, he asked for more hours and more responsibility. And Giant Eagle gave him that. He’s still pursuing a job at UPMC, but until that happens, he’s been a very loyal employee that Giant Eagle likes to have. Of course, Andrew’s transition was not without some difficulties and struggles, and those weren’t always necessarily because of or by Andrew. But the key seemed to always be in the planning; very purposeful and thoughtful planning. So, that’s the story that we have. Thank you, Michael!

>> Thank you, Cindy, for sharing. I think it would be reflective a lot of what Becky had talked about, but really shows how successful the process can be, if you are looking at the supports you have connecting with other families. So, thank you so much, and we’ll hear from you a little bit later in the Webinar. Thank you!

Okay, the next section that we’re moving into, it’s going to talk about some frameworks that exist to help agencies and schools best engage with families, and strengthen their networks. And I guess I should preface this section by saying that on this call, I know we have a variety of different participants; there are family members on the call, advocates, as well as folks in the education system; teachers, administrators, folks from our intermediate units and our PaTTAN systems, as well as agency personnel. So, in saying all that, this next section is somewhat geared more towards the agency and education folks on today’s webinar, but I think for the families listening, it’s really important to know how you can participate or better engage in the systems that you’re working with.

So, when we look at that, in what role do your parents play, or what roles do families play? This comes from a resource that was put together, it’s actually a book that’s used at the university level, called Engaging and Empowering Families by Pleet and Wandry. But what they looked at was that families’ parents are really collaborators in this process. They’re instructors in helping their sons, daughters become more independent. They can act as Cindy and Becky were both referring to as peer mentors, you know, mentoring other families through this process. And they really are system-change agents;
really kind of looking at how to help both education systems, agency systems improve what they’re doing to better serve the youth/young adults that they’re working with.

One of the frameworks, and this is actually the framework that we use through the PaTTAN system as a basis for our family engagement initiative, is the PTA National Standards for Family-School Partnerships. And when we look at this, there are six standards that are part of this model, our framework for family engagement. And it’s really looking at welcoming all families, communicating effectively, supporting that young person in their education process. Speaking up for every child, but I think along with that, you know, having that young person being able to become that good, effect self-advocate. Sharing power among those partners in this process, so the family, the education entity, the school, as well as our agency and community partners. And then that important part of collaborating with the community.

There are a number of other frameworks similar to the PTA Standards framework, and those are listed on this slide. So, there is a new framework that came out, it’s called The Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, that the Office of Special Education Programs, OSEP, that the federal level put together. We also have on this slide the two resources that I mentioned that are actually books on this topic. And then, there’s another framework that I want to highlight, actually, on the next slide; that is the Guideposts for Success. And I’m going to actually take you to the Guideposts, so just give me one second to show you kind of what that looks like.

So, the Guideposts for Success is a document that was developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, NCWD, which is part of the Federal Department of Labor. And in looking at the Guideposts for Success, the original document was really a guide for youth and young adults in preparing for successful transitions. But there is a new piece to this that is now looking at a framework for families. So, when you go to the link, it’ll take you to this page, and I’m going to scroll down a little bit to the Family Involvement and Supports, and then how families — how can families influence and support the young person as they transition into adulthood. And when you look at those, and I’m not going to read through all these, you can see them on your screen, they did add a lot of what both Becky and Cindy were referring to in guiding success, and helping your sons and daughters, the young folks we’re working with, be successful as they transition from high school into adult life.

So, again, I would highly recommend looking at this particular document. The nice thing, too, with the Guideposts, you can find them electronically, but you’ll notice that they’re also available in hard copy versions; there’s a PDF version and a Word version of that particular framework.

The next thing I want to talk a little bit about are the levels of involvement, or family involvement for supports. And this particular model was developed by Dr. Miriam Morningstar from the University of Kansas, and it looks at this idea of family involvement, engagement as a tiered process. So, similar to other tiered processes that exist for RTII, our behavior, this is another model, or way of looking at this. So, really, starting off as involvement for all family members in middle school-high school in helping with planning, then looking at some more types of engagement and supports. And then lastly, at the top,
looking at more intensive supports for those youth/young adults, family members that need more support in this process.

So, at the first level, this is really what we’re talking about for all families, which should be occurring in schools, so it really would be engaging the PTA Standards as a model, as an example of this. It’s how that school communicates with families. I know one of the schools I work with, they have an automatic dial system that calls families with information. It also has – I think they now have also developed an app that they send information out to the families, communicating information. Oftentimes through the school district Website, they provide information specifically for families on how to best support their sons and daughters. So, this is, at this Tier One level, what is happening in the school to really engage all families in supporting their sons and daughters in their education and transition process.

At the next level, with Tier Two, this is a more intensive approach, where we’re working directly to reach families perhaps from different backgrounds, or perhaps those from low income areas, where the school is really trying to reach what we often term “hard-to-reach” families, how best to engage, is that by scheduling meetings at different times? Or, through different technologies, or meeting at a community location that families are more likely to attend? So again, how to support families, how to engage families, especially those that are more difficult to connect with.

And the last level of this three-tiered model, this is really the section where we’re looking at families that have sons or daughters that have a disability, that are involved in having IEPs. So, this is that active involvement in what supports are out there. And this is really where centers like the PEAL Centers, our state’s PTI, or Parent Training and Information Center, is involved; you know, where they are doing supports, where they are doing family to family engagement, trainings to help families best support their sons and daughters, especially through this transition process. But it’s also what mechanisms are in place for that family engagement in the transition process? How is information relayed? Are we engaging families and asking, along with their sons or daughters, what they would like to see for their sons’ or daughters’ future, so doing surveys, doing interviews, and then incorporating that information in the planning process.

So again, important to think about what steps are in place within the school system to support all families, and then what additional supports are needed to actively engage hard-to-reach families, as well as families that have sons or daughters that do have a disability.

The other thing that we want to talk a little bit about that ties into this is, looking at this idea of youth/young adults involved in this emergent adult role. And what this is really referring to, as youth reach the high school years, they’re really changing in what responsibilities they take on, and really how society views a young person. They’re no longer considered a little kid, or even a teenager. I think the expectations are that a young person will be more independent, will be traveling independent, will be engaged in experiences that their same-age peers are involved with. So, when we look at this, what are we doing to help support it? And looking at, are we offering typical experiences for our teenagers that we’re working with, the youth in our lives that are adolescents? Are we looking at ways to support families in fostering that self-determination, that independence that Becky was referring to in the slides
that she was doing? What are our strategies for supporting that process? But then, also being cognizant, keeping in mind cultural issues and differences, because that really does play an important role as we look at transition, looking at other possible obstacles that families may face to really helping that young person emerge into this adult role.

These are some questions to really think about, in thinking about this for the young person that you work with, whether that’s a student, a client through your agency, or maybe your son or daughter. And you know, how has your son or daughter, or the young person you’re working with, participate in taking on adult roles? Where are you as far as promoting that young person’s independence, their self-determination? Are there strategies that you can use to help support that young person and their family in moving forward, in being successful as they are working towards those goals of going on for further schooling after high school, involved in employment, living independently in the community?

When we look at supporting families in this process, I mean, this is kind of reiterating some of the things that we have talked about earlier today. It’s really encouraging early expectations, and not waiting until the requirement age of 14 to start the transition process, but talking about this early. I really think as soon as the student is really entering school, or starts having an IEP, to talk about what are that young person’s needs? What accommodations and supports best help that young person? And then, really looking at what are the goals for the future for that young person and their family, and starting that as early as possible. Really helping the family, know that their involvement is important. I think oftentimes, families, especially of high-school age students, sometimes feel like it’s really difficult, why should I be involved? Or, the thought that perhaps the agency or the school does not care about their input, and that’s really far, far, far from the truth. So, how to ensure that families feel welcomed, and feel that their input is valued and important.

We talked a little bit about this idea of letting go, the dignity of risk, but really encouraging families to honor what their sons’ or daughters’ choices are, and how to best support those. Looking at increasing the social network, looking at how to best engage the young person in the community, and in their community. And I think that was one of the nice things that Cindy had talked about with Andrew, you know, the involvement in the band was really an important aspect of his high school career. So, what types of things can we do to encourage that involvement?

These are some questions to think about for a school or a agency on how do you engage? And I guess from the family’s aspect, how does your school involve you in this process? How are we involving families in the transition planning process? Are there things that are sent home? Mary Hartley from the 21 and Able, the United Way Project, is going to talk a little bit about the planning for the future checklist, in a few minutes. So really, talking about how is the family engaged in that process? Are we starting this early? Is there, or are there, meetings that occur outside of the IEP meeting, where transition is discussed with the young person in the family? How are we obtaining information from our families and students, or the young folks we are working with? And, not only how are we getting information from them, but how are we communicating back? And then again, what information or skills do we need to foster to ensure family engagement?
And this slide really is a kind of a take a pause back, and thinking about from your agency, your school, what has worked in the past? What really has shown a really good turnout? I know back when I was a Transition Coordinator, one of the things that I did was, we held transition planning meetings outside of the IEP meetings, and those were usually held towards the end of summer. Families came in and we discussed transition, we looked at the assessment that was done. And then that information was relayed to the other folks working on the IEP team with the young person, and that really helped to foster the program for the coming year, as well as the IEP process. So, that was really effective. It was an effective means of engaging families in that process.

Thinking about how you’re able to connect with families, when are families more likely to engage in meetings? When are you able to actually have input from both the youth and the family? How is that done in your system?

These next slides, actually, were taken from folks working on several [INAUDIBLE] grants that we had a few years ago on what they utilized to best-engage the families of the students that they were working with in this process. So, some of the suggestions that they had were to engage the families when it wasn’t just a negative engagement and when you were calling up because there was a problem at school, but to really showcase that the young person, you know, this was a success that happened, and contact that family for positive things that were occurring at the school. Having a personal invitation – making contact with the family on a periodic basis. Letting families know how important their involvement was in this process, whether that was returning information – for example, a parent survey, or how important their presence was at a meeting. Looking at locations for meetings, to make sure that they were convenient, that they were safe. Ensuring that families felt that they were welcomed, invited to not only the meetings, but the school itself. Following up on their attendance, you know, thanking them for attending a meeting. Looking at what was the best time to meet, if that was outside of school hours, or at different locations, and again, celebrating successes of the young person.

The folks that worked on these grants also relayed information as to why it was really important to engage family in this process of transition, and having their input. And it really helped with the items that are listed on this slide, you know, having open dialog and good family communication and engagement helped with obtaining information needed for employment. Working with that young person on being successful and community placements. Issues may have arisen with how the young person was dressed for their job, or hygiene issues, and being able to talk with the family about the appropriateness of how that student needs to be dressed, for example, in going to a workplace. Following through with agency connections, helping that young person become more independent, working on their own self-advocacy skills.

Okay, the next section that we’re going to move into is kind of the next step. You know, we’re looking at the ultimate outcome, one of the ultimate outcomes of engagement in the secondary transition process is gainful employment, or competitive employment. So with that, we’re going to turn this over to Dana Baccanti from the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, OVR, and she is going to talk about the importance of engaging families and preparing folks for employment. So, hang on one second, and Dana, you are unmuted, and you’re on.
Okay, thank you! I’m hoping that you can hear me now.

You’re good, we can hear you. And I’m going to move to your next slide, and I think we’re good to go!

Okay, thanks, Michael! Truly a pleasure to be here, and to be joining this panel. It was really, I guess, reassuring to hear both Becky and Cindy talk about their children’s involvement with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, and helping their sons become employed. So, it’s good to hear that OVR is serving a role in helping young people reach their goals for employment and independence. But really, you know, before OVR gets involved with youths with disabilities and their employment goals, families really serve the primary role in setting expectations for employment, and helping to facilitate their child’s transition from school to work.

So, when you look at it, the early input from a family throughout the transition process in terms of planning and building skills, and making critical connections and helping their child to have those early experiences, the family is really the key to helping that happen. Helping youth with disabilities learn about work from watching parents, family members, hearing about their parents’ experiences at work, or other role models and their work experiences is really key. And truly, allowing youth with disabilities to have responsibility at home and in their neighborhood can be a foundation for future work experiences. And certainly neighborhood and community experiences, possibly at church and other – Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, other type of community – Cindy had mentioned her son’s involvement in the marching band. So, things like that can certainly lead to having those experiences that involve responsibility, and in learning about some critical work skills, maintaining a schedule, being responsible for a uniform, those types of things.

In addition to this neighborhood and community experiences, parents can work with their schools to develop opportunities for career development and training. And one of the things that I was thinking about, sometimes we have parents who are not able to work outside of their home, for whatever reason; whether it’s because of parenting responsibilities, whether it’s because of disability. I think that it’s really key to look to the school, to your network of family members and friends, and other support to develop mentors for your child. And the school can be a really key place for that. Okay, Michael, I’m ready to go on.

I think what you can do is to foster independence by assigning specific responsibilities in the home, building responsibility, choice making, a strong work ethic as well as pride in the quality and the quantity of work that a young person does, helping that child develop appropriate social and communication skills that are so key to being successful in the work environment. When we hear about youth that are challenged in the workplace, it’s most often not because they can’t perform the work, it’s oftentimes because they lack the social skills or the self-monitoring skills to be successful in the workplace. But also, looking at exploring neighborhood and community experiences and training opportunities, I think that there are so many opportunities that we don’t often think of that area available through our informal network.
I think a lot of times, families are looking to agency personnel and/or school personnel to facilitate more formal opportunities, but really, you folks, parents, know your kids the best. Parents know what resources are going to exist, and I think Becky had mentioned it earlier, that there are – you know what’s going to work for your child in terms of the level of independence that they can assume early on. And that really changes over their development, but I think as your child evolves into a young adult, looking at what is available, what resources are available to them in their community, and what you feel comfortable with, and what they feel comfortable with exploring. I think it’s really important to discuss future goals and adult realities.

One of the things I think oftentimes is very surprising to young people is, what it costs to be an independent adult in terms of finances. You know, rent, car insurance or transportation expenses, utilities, things like that. Those are things that I think are really important to share with a child as early as possible, even long before they are even at a point where they would consider working, so that they are aware of the things that they may want to have as part of their life, and independent living that they’ll need. And I think that developing and supporting a work ethic that’s common to your family culture is really important as well, and also, just helping the child, or your young adult, explore their interests, their abilities and aptitudes and needs in relation to their career goals and personal interests, versus avocations.

And certainly, things that we enjoy doing can often lead to employment. You know, my personal experience, when I was growing up, I spent a lot of time with a maternal uncle who had developmental disabilities, and it’s something that I really enjoyed doing, and it’s something that made me feel good, being able to do that in my spare time. And it led to me pursuing an education in special education, and then working with folks with disabilities in my career. So, I’m not suggesting that things that we enjoy doing are not things that can’t lead to employment opportunities, but certainly if a young person enjoys playing basketball, it doesn’t meant that they should necessarily pursue a career as a basketball player. And I think that those are things that we need to talk to our young folks about. I know that a while back, when I was a VR Counselor, culinary arts were really popular. And so, cooking shows became very popular. And a lot of the people, the young folks that I talked about wanted to become chefs, but yet they had never even worked in a restaurant, or a food establishment, or a hospitality establishment. And so, it was – I like to cook too, but I don’t know that it’s necessarily that it’s going to lead to a career change for me. So, things like that.

And so, I think that you need to help – you need to explore that and the realities of certain career choices. Families can certainly help their young people prepare for job interviews, and assist youth with job retention. Helping them prepare for work in the morning, helping them maintain their schedule. Helping them maintain assistive technology that they may use in terms of work. But helping to maintain and helping to prepare does not mean that you do everything for your child. And I think cultivating those external natural supports in the community is one of the things that families can do to help their child achieve maximum levels of independence. I think it was Becky that said earlier that we all need a little help from our friends, at times. So, learning how to rely upon external supports and resources that help maximize our independence; we don’t exist in a vacuum. We all are inter-dependent upon one another in our respective roles as employees, as professionals, as colleagues. So, I think that that’s
really important to help young people recognize, and that we play a huge role in helping families – and when I say “we,” families help play a huge role in helping to cultivate those natural supports in the community, and building that trust.

Providing a safe haven for youths to talk about their jobs and their problems and frustrations, and helping them to develop problem-solving strategies; not necessarily solving their problems for them, or calling the employer to solve the problem, but helping the youth to identify how they are going to solve the problem. And helping them to deal with challenging workplace situations, sharing your own experiences. How you dealt with a similar situation or problem, or maybe suggesting they talk to a friend who is working, who may have had a similar situation. And also help them to identify problems, signs that they might be experiencing problems on the job. You know, if they keep coming home every day complaining about a particular coworker, but not necessarily citing a problem, you know, talking with them about that and helping them to troubleshoot before it becomes a really significant problem, or an issue that might cause them to lose their job. So, I think that that’s really important. Or, if they keep, let’s say, missing the bus to get to jobs, or they’re having difficulty getting up in the morning to go to work, start talking about those things and looking at ways to overcome those potential problems.

Finding employment – you know, especially when transportation can be an issue, if a young person with a disability is not going to be able to obtain their driver’s license, and they’re going to rely on either public transportation, family members or other community resources for transportation to and from work, looking at what’s available in your immediate network is really going to be a key to helping that person be successful. And looking at what exists within your community that is a good match for your son or daughter’s abilities or interests, and really their life goals. And truly, that’s the kind of thing that you can do to help them be successful in employment. Helping to support them in their job search, not necessarily setting up the interviews for them, or participating in the interviews, heaven forbid, but looking at truly how you can support them in terms of transportation to and from interviews, helping them to locate jobs and helping them with the application process – those are types of things that you can do. Not doing it for them, but supporting them.

And really, there are no silver bullets, but there are some universal truths. Work requires specific skills, a work ethic, including the presence of social communication skills, some basic academic skills, teamwork, pride in work and the ability to solve problems and to ask for help when needed. And this is something that I’m really glad that we included, is that both learned helplessness and independence come from families. You know, that you, families are the most important factor in helping youth learn independence, and learned helplessness, and there is true dignity in risk, but always helping your son or daughter, or the youth that you’re working with, to learn from their mistakes. Self-determination is a learned behavior, based upon experiences, attitudes, and opportunities. In today’s world, individuals with disabilities are working and contributing in employment settings. But, you know, the demands are high, and the competition for each job is fierce. And that, you know, what we want to do is, and this has been mentioned several times, you know, set the bar high. And set the expectations high, but provide folks with the supports that they need to reach those higher expectations.
In terms of, you can help them build life skills, desire to work, provide them with enriching experience, helping them set appropriate goals. And sometimes that means allowing them to experience failure, learning for themselves. You know, I think we all have experiences ourselves as young adults, or adolescents, where we didn’t want to listen to what our parents said, or to an adult in our life who was trying to give us very sage advice, that we sometimes had to make our own mistakes in order to set appropriate goals. Helping the youth in our lives develop self-advocacy skills and self-determination, it sometimes is very challenging. Sometimes easier to want to do things ourselves and to do things for them, but ultimately, we’re doing both. We as adults in their lives who are trying to assist them, as well as the youth, we’re doing them a disservice by not helping them to develop those skills themselves.

I just wanted to share with you, one of the ways that families can become engaged, specifically, with OVR at an earlier time in the transition process. We recently started the Early Reach Initiative, which is an outreach program to help identify youth earlier, and their families, in the transition process, to discuss OVR services and vocational planning and what to expect from OVR, and when to expect it. We also are hoping to educate families about what they can do to take advantage of the services that are available to them through the educational system, as well as through other agencies that could assist them. So, Michael, we can move on to the next...

The main focus of the Early Reach Initiative is really to provide group services, to provide outreach presentations to school personnel, students and families to outline the services offered by OVR, to provide consultative services, to leverage the full array of services provided or offered during the secondary school years, to best prepare students for OVR and vocational goals. So really, there is a limit to what OVR can provide before the youth is actually determined eligible for our services, which typically happens their junior or senior year, but there are things that youth and their families and school personnel can be doing well before that time, that can help an individual become more prepared to engage in our services. And that’s really the focus of the Early Reach Initiative. You can move forward, Michael.

Sometimes there are individual services that are necessary to ensure that students don’t fall through the cracks, so that the Early Reach Coordinators, who are trained social workers, can meet with students and their families on an individual basis, on a limited individual basis, in order to assist them in determining when it’s appropriate to apply for OVR services, and to help them identify services that they may need to benefit in terms of an employment outcome. So, they will also assist the VR Counselor, in effectively and accurately determining timely eligibility for students with disabilities.

If you look here in terms of the Early Reach Initiative, truly early reach would be prior to the application of services, but there are times when the Early Reach Coordinator can assist in helping the VR Counselor to facilitate that, the timely application and eligibility for services. So really, the Early Reach Coordinator can help with group activities, doing presentations to families, students, school personnel, agency personnel, earlier in the transition process, to help youth take full advantages of the services they can, so that it be successful later in the transition process.

>> Thanks, Dana, so much, I appreciate it!
>> You’re so welcome, thank you!

>> [INAUDIBLE], and thanks for sharing with us today, and presenting. The next section that we’re going to move into is, starting to be talking about the resources for schools and families in Pennsylvania around secondary transition and family engagement. And the first part of this section, we’re going to turn to Cindy and Liz from the PEAL Center. So, you’re unmuted, and go ahead, guys.

>> Thanks, Michael! This is Liz Healey. I’m the Executive Director of the PEAL Center. And I just wanted to give you a little bit of background about the PEAL Center. The PEAL Center was established and created by parents of sons and daughters with disabilities, and we all really share a passion of wanting to help other families understand the nature of their child’s disability, and help them to be able to navigate systems, education systems and other systems, as they’re transitioning into adulthood.

So, the mission of the PEAL Center is to ensure that children, youth and adults with disabilities and special healthcare needs lead rich, active lives, and participate as full members of their schools and communities. And we do that by providing training, information, technical assistance based on the best practices for individuals, and we have added leadership development, and we do that with families and all people who support them.

I think in thinking about the work we do, we feel it’s really critically important that families understand the style of communication that’s going to make them an effective team member. So, we kind of – one of our mantras is, you don’t have to be disagreeable when you disagree with something. And so, we work on families thinking about how to be a critical team member, and how to be effective, at those times when they may disagree; how to do that in a way that’s going to help the whole team move forward. We also work with helping families understand evidence-based practices, and I think a little anecdote that I think is really helpful to think about this is, sometimes when a family comes in and they are an expert in their child’s disability, or they may have done a fair amount of research and thinking about what programs or approaches may be most effective with their son or daughter, that can sometimes put school folks on the defensive, because they typically think of themselves as the experts in this situation. We did a study a few years ago, and one of the things that we found out was that families who have access to the Internet tend to be not as satisfied with their special education services, as those families whose only source of information is school district staff. And the folks who live in rural areas, have very limited or no access to the Internet typically are happy with what the school district tells them, because they don’t know about any other options. So, I think that’s an important thing to think about.

The PEAL Center has several sources of funding, we’re the parent training and information center that’s funded by the U.S. Department of Education, the Office of Special Education Programs. And through that work, we work with families and students with disabilities and transitioning adults from birth through age 26. We have a strong history of working with parents, and this year, the Office of Special Education Programs has added a second emphasis for parent centers, and I think we may need to rename ourselves, because it becomes kind of a misnomer, because now we’re both parent and youth centers. And we are working with youth, and we have that work. We’ve hired young adults to do that
work. You might be interested to know that we’re going to be doing Youth Leadership Development Institutes, too, this spring. We’re going to be doing one in Cranberry in April. The date hasn’t been finalized, but for people in Western Pennsylvania, you may want to be checking our Website to look for information for that. And we’ll be doing a parallel session for youth. And the Leadership Institute is a two-day Institute that we bring youth to. We’ll be doing one in the Lehigh Valley area. And the outcome of this is, we’re going to be preparing youth to take on leadership roles, and they’re going to be working to prepare to present a session at the transition conference this summer, as the first opportunity for them, so we’re kind of excited about that.

The PEAL Center serves the entire state of Pennsylvania now. Previously, OSEP had divided the service area for parent centers into two in the State of Pennsylvania, and people in the eastern part of the state may be familiar with PEN, the Parent Education Network. This year, going forward, the Department of Education has decided to only fund one project, and so now the PEAL Center is serving the entire state. And we’ve opened an office in Philadelphia, and we have staff in Philadelphia who can assist families and youth there.

The other project, that’s another statewide project that we have, it’s funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; it’s called the Family to Family Health Information Center. And with that, we work with parents, transitioning youth, health care providers, and also service providers, helping families access the services that they need. One of the biggest areas that we work on with that is helping families with health insurance. That’s often denials for health insurance services.

And I just wanted to let you know that this spring, we’re going to be doing a workshop on medical assistance transition to adult life, and access to waivers. And we do those, we repeat that workshop around the state, and we partner with the Health Law Project to do those. We’ll be doing one in Philadelphia, suburban Philadelphia, Central PA, and we haven’t decided whether that will be Harrisburg or State College area, as well as Pittsburgh, and again, you can look at our Website for those.

We also have a series that we publish called Stepping Stones. That’s a two-pager that’s produced in both Spanish and English, we produce almost all of our materials in Spanish and English. That really looks at some of the elements of transition, especially relate to health care transition. People may want to – you can find those on our Website, and you may find those interesting.

So, we’re a one-stop shop. We can assist people, both parents, youth and educators around education questions, as well as those other issues around healthcare, health insurance, social security. And as it says on our brochure, if you’re not sure whether to call us, call us anyway. If we aren’t able to help you directly, we are likely to know – we can direct you to someone else who can provide assistance. So, we encourage people to call us.

Now, I’m going to turn it over to Cindy Duch. Back to Cindy. Thanks!

>> Thanks, Liz! So, the PEAL Center serves families of children age birth to 26. Our focus regarding transition includes, for parents, trainings on transition and IEPs. These trainings would be available to parent groups. We come to schools for their parent groups, independent parent groups, and assist in
understanding the process and what it looks like on an IEP. We also do one on one consultation. A lot of the work we do, and the contact, we come into contact with parents, is that one-on-one consultation, where they’re calling the PEAL Center, looking for some information, resources, strategizing in order to provide appropriate services to their child, and how to get those services. Our parent leadership sessions assist parents in becoming those leaders, to help other families. Like Liz mentioned earlier, some of the best information comes from other families who have actually lived through transition, who have survived transition. So, we provide parent leadership so that parents can rely on each other.

Regarding youth, there is self-advocacy development. Again, this is the newest part of the grant that the PTI holds, and in hiring the youth – again, they’re living it. They are the ones that are helping come up with the process to teach and lead, rights in adult systems and agencies, and preparation and understanding eligibility. As our youth are involved in their transition in school, they also have the understanding that there’s not as many rights as they transition out; that it’s eligibility that they have to rely on.

As was mentioned, the Youth Leadership Institutes and learning advocacy on systems change, this is where so much of the changes, the legislative changes happen, is at this grassroots level. So, the youth component will be taking that on. The resources that the PEAL Center can provide to families include an online IEP course. This is a replication of our miniseries, which we offer to parent groups, school districts, any entity looking for training. The IEP course is online, it’s very user-friendly, and comes with attachments that parents can actually see the documents that we’re talking about. There is a second that is exclusive to transition, and helps families understand that part of the IEP.

Our resources on medical assistance, SSI and waivers for transitioning youth is a workshop that’s done, and will soon be posted on our Website. The Healthcare Transition video series is to assist youth and families in healthcare transition, another important component to those families. And exciting news, now, about the PEAL Center’s Inclusive Communities Conference, which is coming up this March 25th at the DoubleTree in Monroeville, that’s in Allegheny County. You can register at www.pealcenter.org.

The Resources for Access, Independence, Self-Advocacy and Employment Technical Assistant Center, just to make you aware that where the PTIs get their information from is from RAISE. This is Rehabilitation Services Administration-funded, and assists the PTIs in getting information about transition in order to help our families. This is a national project, whereas REACH, the Resources for Employment, Access, Community living and Hope is a regional technical assistance, again funded through Rehabilitation Services Administration through the U.S. Department of Ed, to provide the PTIs with innovative and responsive services, in order to help families through the transition process. And this is done through a community of practice that helps the parent center reach more families around transition, and adult service systems.

So again, as Liz mentioned earlier, who contacts PEAL? Anyone can contact PEAL. Families, friends of children with disabilities and special healthcare needs, the actual youth themselves in doing self-advocacy can contact the PEAL Center. We hear from professionals in education, healthcare, human service fields, anyone who supports the family and children. Again, mentioning the PEAL conference,
March 25th at the DoubleTree, Monroeville, Allegheny County, and the PEAL resources include developing the strong IEP, that’s the online mini course that I talked about earlier, it can be found on our Website; on YouTube, the “Did You Know,” eligible services for age 21, a public service announcement; Transition to Healthcare, Waivers and Managed Care can be found at the following address, and the Medical Assistance, SSI and Waivers for Transitioning Youth can be found as soon as it will be posted. One last plug for the conference, March 25th in Allegheny County. A quick mention, too, that one of the earlier slides on NICHCY – while NICHCY no longer exists, the materials can be found at the Center for Parent Information and Resources, that’s at cpir.org.

>> Okay, great! Thank you!

>> Thanks, Michael!

>> Thank you Liz and Cindy, appreciate the information on the PEAL Center and your resources. And with that, we’re going to now move into talking about resources and supports that are available through the Allegheny County – United Way of Allegheny County 21 and Able project, and the planning for the future checklist, which is something that we’re going to be utilizing across the state. So, I’m going to turn this over to Mary Hartley, Consultant for 21 and Able, United Way of Allegheny County.

>> Hi, everybody! So, I just wanted to introduce myself, not only as somebody who works for the United Way of Allegheny County on this exciting project, but also as the mother of a 14-year-old on the autism spectrum. Many people in the field, of course, are right in this framing as parents, too, but I think it’s pretty interesting because my son is actually at the beginning of this process, and I’m feeling really good that the state is moving in the right direction to make sure that supports and services are in place to get everybody going to where they need to be for adulthood.

So, this is a copy of the statewide transition checklist. In Allegheny County, we have a customized version of this, and in the future there could be more opportunities for other counties to customize their version, and we’ll talk a little bit more about that in a minute.

So, just as background, 21 and Able is working with young adults, families and over 50 agencies and organizations in our county, and on policy solutions across Pennsylvania to ensure that we have the infrastructure for young adults to build a better road map to adulthood, and really abridge to employment, housing community-based opportunities as they graduate. You know, the challenge is that at 21, a lot changes. Right now, most of our students are enjoying the resources, the support that we get through special education services. Many of us are getting services through – children are getting services through Medicaid. This may or may not be available to them as they graduate. Many young adults will not have access to waivers and other supports that will help them maintain community-based supports. And so, one of the key pieces of 21 and Able is making sure that people who are registered, who are registered and set up to enjoy those benefits if they can get access to then, but in addition to that is also making sure that every young adult has a road map, a plan, whether or not they will get those resources or not. We really need to start earlier, and you’re hearing that pretty strongly today.
In this particular project, we started out a few years ago, working on this transition checklist. It is really a joint project of the United Way of Allegheny County, with tremendous support and direction from Pennsylvania Department of Education. We have worked with stakeholders across the state to really try to make sure that this is a key document that will work with young adults. So, clearly, if you have a chance to look at it, and if you can blow it up from the other piece, there really are four major sections to this, and they’re based on age groups: 14-15, 15-16, 16-17 and 18-21, which is, of course, I like to refer to the “super senior years,” it could be super for life, is really what it should be. But the concept is that every single grouping has some major milestone piece that you could be looking at at that age, but you also could be looking at within any section. So, for instance, my son is 14-15, but he might be working at a 16-year-old level on some of these pieces. In addition, you might be building up to some of these pieces. So, it really is personal, and it depends on the individuals – or, where the individual is themselves. But there are key pieces that you do not want to miss along the way: Signing up for services, learning about SSI, whatever it is, we really want to make sure that people are sort of addressing them at a certain age group, so it’s really critical that you kind of use this as a way to sort of connect to what that road map will be for that person.

The checklist, it certainly addresses some of the top considerations that parents and youth have, and what we’re really trying to make sure is that young adults become sort of the leader in the checklist. It’s critical that, you know, we’ve talked about this a little bit before, but the self-advocacy piece can really be developed and worked on in this transition IEP process. You know, young adults are invited to their IEPs at least from age 14. Some of our children have come in earlier. But we want to try to get them almost to lead their IEP, ultimately. So, you’re building the capacity for them to do that. The checklist is written from the young person’s perspective, so hopefully, if they’re able to read, or if they can understand some of the key concepts, they can be bringing their families and their educators and supports from the community through this process.

And Michael’s putting up the Secondary Transition Website. I don’t know if he wants to talk a little bit more about that.

>> This is just let folks know you can locate this on the PaTTAN Website under Secondary Transition. And there’s a section for the Planning for the Future Checklist. The reason I pulled this up, when you click on the link, you can actually obtain copies of the checklist. You can download them. They are writable PDFs. So, just to kind of give you an idea of where you can find the document, and Mary, in a minute, is going to talk a little bit about how we are disseminating this across the state. So, give me one second, and we’ll go back to that slide.

>> So, as Michael put up here, there really is a statewide effort, it comes from the top, the idea came from the top. And so, the process is key, because it really makes sure that every single school and every single student should have access to this. We want to hear from you if you’re not getting these documents. It’s really in Allegheny County itself, we’re actually measuring how many people are getting them, who’s using them and how they’re feeling it’s helping them. And that’s key. But I think throughout the state, there are so many different avenues to which people will receive them. So, a cover that’s here by February 6th, every single superintendent, what we call the LEA, which is
oftentimes the principal of the school, too, or the CEO of, say, a charter school, would receive these
documents, would receive a color copy of the checklist. In addition, a paper copy of the checklist will be
provided to all students age 14 to 21 years old. And Michael, if you want to talk a little bit more about
how that process goes?

>> Sure! They’re going to be sent out to all of the schools districts, charter schools and career tech ed
centers across the state, by the end of March, beginning of April. Basically, we’re going to be using a
child count from December, so we know who the targeted 14 to 21-year-old folks are. And they’re
actually going to be distributed through the Bureau of Special Education, the advisors are going to give
to those to the districts, and we make sure that they get into the right hands in each school district.

>> And then following up in May, just to make sure that everybody’s received them, another cover letter
will be sent to all the Special Education Directors, reminding them of their responsibility to monitor the
use of these forms. We want to see these used in IEP meetings, but that doesn’t mean we don’t want to
see them used everywhere else, too. I mean, I can see using this at my son’s agency meetings when we
go annually now to review his case. I can see using this in a doctor’s office, if he were a medication user,
and some key points and information along the way about managing his own health care. So, I think
that every parent, every individual young adult is going to take this and use it in very different ways with
their own families, just to go over and say, am I really starting to address these issues?

The last thing Michael is putting up, really, is our Website. The United Way of Allegheny County, this is
just – Planning for the Future Checklist is just one of the United Way’s projects. This year, we’re
especially focused on employment solutions, that key piece right at the front is about the Kessler Grant;
we’re expanding a pilot project we did in Allegheny County last year to three to five more companies to
employ young adults with disabilities as they transition to adulthood.

In addition, we’re working on housing initiatives in our county, really just targeting information and
trying to find out where things are, but also where they need to be in terms of housing and support and
community-based opportunities. And we’re also working with people with very complex transitions, to
find valuable inclusion day experiences that are really inclusive of the community, not separate day
programs.

So, that’s really the focus of where we are right now. You can read more about us on our Website,
21andable.org. There’ll be some new information that will be going up over the next couple of weeks,
so I encourage you to check back and learn about the particular projects we’re working on right now.
And we’re also working on a huge policy initiative, I just want to make my quick plug for hashtag –I
Want To Work, and you can contact me to learn more about that, that’s policy initiatives, and that’ll be
on this Website, as well. But my email is MHartley@UWAC.org. I don’t think it’s on the Contact Us,
but...

>> No.

>> I’m happy to talk with you more about that.
>> Okay, thank you, Mary!

>> Great!

>> Appreciate it! Okay. So, the last section for today’s Webinar, I just want to talk about a few additional resources that exist in Pennsylvania to assist families, educators, agencies, youth, young adults in this transition process. And I had mentioned at the very beginning of today’s Webinar, the secondarytransition.org Website, if you haven’t had the opportunity to go to that Website, I highly recommend looking at the Website. There is a search feature where you can type in specific terms, such as, say, if you have an individual that has autism, you can type in autism as a keyword, and then you’ll notice that all the resources that are housed on the secondarytransition.org Website around an individual with autism will come up. So, there’s a number of resources and guides that exist there.

There are also, as I mentioned earlier, at the top of the Webinar, information about the other Webinars in this series. We do record these Webinar sessions, including today’s, and then they’re closed-captioned and placed on this site, as well as the PaTTAN site. So, you’ll notice that the secondarytransition.org Website is divided into categories. When you click on a category, such as Employment, it then takes you to additional resources that are connected to that topic, so in this case, it’s employment. There are links to Webinars, there are links to other documents, as well as links to Websites that can assist you in these areas. The other thing I wanted to mention, that there’s also a session that goes through Skills and Strategies by age band that help you reflect upon what things should be worked on; in this case, around employment, to help a young person be successful as they move from high school into adult living. So, this is a feature that you can find in several of the sections. You can find it in the Employment section, Self-Determination, Post-Secondary Education and Training, as well as Community Living. So again, secondarytransition.org Website, I would highly recommend utilizing that site, and going there for additional information.

I’m also including, as you flip through the end of the PowerPoint, there are links on the frameworks that we discussed, so you can go and find out additional information, more detailed information on those, for family engagement. And then, additional information regarding the Center for Parent Information and Resources, the Parent Center Hub, has additional information about family engagement, as well as secondary transition. The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center is the help for secondary transition. The Transition Coalition, out of the University of Kansas, provides a number of resources, including an online course in understanding family engagement, and how to better-engage with families in the transition process. And again, on this slide are a number of projects that are specific to assisting in family engagement, as on this last slide.

I wanted to mention, we do have two additional Webinars in this series. There’s one coming up on March 18th, that is Transition Tools of Engagement for Youth and Young Adults. Members from the Pennsylvania Youth Leadership Network will be helping to present that on how to best engage youth in this process. And on April 1st, we have a Webinar on Transportation Resources and Strategies. We also had a request just to look again at the very beginning of today’s broadcast, I also mentioned a Wiki that we have in the state, Transition and Family Engagement. And on that particular site, you can watch a
Webinar that was done last year with the collaboration of the PEAL Center on secondary transition, and
the process for secondary transition. And then on this particular page, there’s information for educators
and family members on engagement in the secondary transition process.

I appreciate you joining us today on today’s Webinar. And as I mentioned, this Webinar will be
recorded – we are recording it, it will be closed-captioned and posted to both the
secondarytransition.org site, as well as the pattan.net site. If you have any questions, or you would like
to follow up with any of the presenters today, please feel free to send me an email, and I can either
answer that directly, or contact you and put you in contact with one of the other presenters. I’d like to
thank, today, our presenters, Dana Baccanti, Cindy Duch, Becky Fogle, Mary Hartley, as well as
Liz Healey, for their time in putting together today’s Webinar and presenting this valuable information.
Thank you all for joining us today, and have a great rest of the day, and a wonderful weekend!