

GRANT PROFILE

COMMUNITIES OF FOCUS

Regents of the University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration, aims to improve transition outcomes and the independence of youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities (ID/DD) in Minnesota by building on the current transition programming in urban, suburban, and rural communities. The Minnesota Community Collaborations for Employment (CCE) team leverages the CCE grant to pilot transition activities in four distinct school districts of varying size and makeup. These include Minneapolis Public Schools, the largest metropolitan area in the state with the largest representation of racial and ethnic diversity; Rosemount, Apple Valley, Eagan Public Schools (ISD-196), a large school district located in the southern suburbs of Minneapolis-St. Paul; and the two smaller school districts of the Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative and the Benton Stearns School District.

GRANT RECIPIENT

Regents of the University of Minnesota
(Institute on Community Integration)

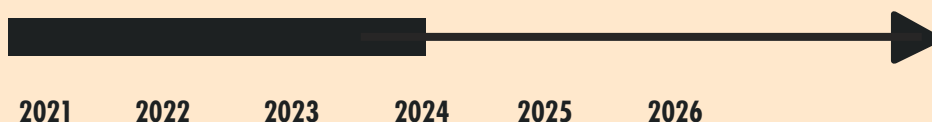
PROJECT TITLE

A Community-Based, Collaborative
Transition Model for Minnesota Youth
with ID/DD

ABOUT THE CCE GRANTS

Among transition age youth with disabilities, employment is associated with improved health outcomes, increased quality of life, greater opportunities for socialization and relationship development, and a greater sense of belonging.¹ Yet, many students and youth with disabilities do not have the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities to pursue higher education, training, and careers. To address these disparities, the Administration for Community Living (ACL) issued CCE grants to increase and enhance collaborations across existing local systems in one or more communities. CCE grants aim to maximize a seamless experience and outcome of youth with ID/DD as they transition between school and post-secondary education or competitive integrated employment (CIE) in the community. ACL awarded seven five-year CCE grants starting September 30, 2021, and ending September 29, 2026, through its [Projects of National Significance program](#). This mid-term report summarizes grant activity through February 2024.

CCE Mid-Term Report and Grant Timeline



¹ Castruita Rios, Y., Park, S., Chen, X., & Tansey, T. N. (2023). Collaborations to Support Employment Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities. *Rehabilitation Counselors and Educators Journal*, 12(1). <https://doi.org/10.52017/001c.72655>



MINNESOTA CCE PILOTS/COMMUNITIES (as of December 2023)

Community Name	Minneapolis Public Schools	Rosemount, Apple Valley, Eagan Public Schools (ISD-196)	Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative	Benton Stearns School District
Estimated Total Population ²	426,047	163,513	84,102	77,765

OBJECTIVES AND FRAMEWORKS

The *Community-Based, Collaborative Transition Model for Minnesota Youth with ID/DD* project objectives are to:

1. Implement a community-based participatory approach within a socio-ecological framework;
2. Collaborate with schools and with community organizations to involve stakeholders representing diverse cultural backgrounds;
3. Investigate the possibility of developing a tiered transition system;
4. Promote an inclusive and culturally competent approach to transition; and
5. Utilize a person-centered approach and the principles of self-determination to empower youth to pursue their transition and adult outcome goals.

The Minnesota CCE grant adopted the [Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0: A Model for Planning, Organizing, and Evaluating Transition Education, Services, and Programs](#) as an overarching grant framework. Additionally, the team works closely with the Minnesota Department of Education and Department of Employment and Economic Development on their rollout of the state's [Youth in Transition Framework](#). This framework defines high-quality transition programming for youth with disabilities and those who support them by outlining guiding principles and promoting collaborative partnerships with youth, families, and professionals.

² 2022 Minnesota Department of Education child count data, as reported by the Minnesota CCE team.



STATE AND LOCAL CONTEXT

Variations in youth transition outcomes occur, in part, due to varying demographic, economic, political, and historical factors in each state. The following factors provide valuable context for the external conditions in which the Minnesota CCE team implements their grant.

The Minnesota CCE team's relationship with the Minnesota Department of Education and Department of Employment and Economic Development pre-dated this grant opportunity and informed their approach. The Minnesota CCE team holds regular calls with these partners to collaborate on the development, refinement, and distribution of the [Youth in Transition Framework](#) and ensure alignment of their activities. The Minnesota CCE team leveraged the momentum around the development and rollout of this framework toward improving transition outcomes for youth with ID/DD to align grant activities with this statewide framework. At the same time, state priorities and activities can absorb time and resources, a factor the Minnesota CCE team must consider in their project planning.

The Minnesota CCE team collaborates closely with their partner school districts, including leadership and staff within their transition programs. This direct connection with transition programs offers valuable insights into the day-to-day experiences that teachers and transition program staff witness. However, similar to many schools across the country, teacher turnover and shortages — exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic — can also hinder teacher capacity for grant activities. The Minnesota CCE team invests considerable time and effort into relationship building with their partner sites and looks for opportunities to align project and district priorities in mutually beneficial ways.

GRANT ACTIVITIES BY STAGE



COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE PILOT

Each CCE grant established a community collaborative pilot – a broad range of diverse community partners involved in all aspects of the grant and representing stakeholders across developmental disabilities, education, advocacy, and employment settings.

Community Collaborative Structure

The Minnesota CCE grant's community collaborative includes full collaborative meetings with all their partners and four monthly workgroups organized by stakeholder type.



▶ Annual Partner Meetings

The Minnesota CCE team holds full collaborative meetings annually. They hold these meetings in a hybrid format (i.e., format with both in-person and virtual options) and invite collaboration from all grant partners, including school district partners and stakeholders (e.g., self-advocates, employment program staff, policymakers).

▶ Monthly Workgroup Meetings

The Minnesota CCE team also hosts four different monthly workgroup meetings, each comprised of a distinct set of stakeholders who provide input on the project and collaborate on solving transition program challenges. The four workgroups include 1) school transition program representatives and representatives from the Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Consortium, 2) employment and self-advocacy agency representatives, 3) state agencies and policymakers, and 4) partners working on a similar project through the Institute for Disability Research, Policy, & Practice at Utah State University.

Community Collaborative Members, Roles, and Diversity

The Minnesota CCE team's community collaborative leverages a diverse array of expertise, including representatives from the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, the Minnesota Department of Education, the Minnesota Department of Human Services, four Local Education Agencies and their transition programs, two community employment agencies, the Minnesota Inclusive Higher Education Consortium, two advocacy organizations, and Utah State University. In designing this collaborative, the Minnesota CCE team built on their long-standing relationships with these partners, as they previously collaborated on transition, employment, and post-secondary education efforts.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

The Minnesota CCE team's community collaborative structure facilitates discussion of big-picture issues during annual meetings, as well as focused attention on specific transition topics via four workgroups. In addition to inviting feedback and collaboration on project activities, the collaborative workgroups offer opportunities to share ideas and experiences more broadly on the topic of transition in order to underscore the national significance of the project. Leveraging existing relationships with state agencies and other stakeholders in their state, the team fosters a culture of collaboration while preventing duplicity of efforts.



LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Landscape analyses for the CCE grants aim to assess community resources, strengths, needs, and gaps related to providing consistent and seamless services for youth with ID/DD and their families that promote opportunities for CIE, post-secondary education, and independent living.

Landscape Analysis Approach

The Minnesota CCE team's landscape analysis consists of site visits, case studies, interviews, focus groups, a photo-elicitation project, a literature review, and a longitudinal survey.

▶ **Transition Program Case Studies, Site Visits, and Interviews**

The Minnesota CCE team develops a transition program case study for each of their four partner school districts using qualitative data analysis. To inform these case studies, the Minnesota CCE team visited each school district site to collect data through observation and interviews with students. The Minnesota CCE team completed 16 interviews with youth with ID/DD to understand their perspectives on the school districts' existing transition programs.

▶ **Photo-Elicitation Project**

The Minnesota CCE team conducted a photo-elicitation project with 11 students, for which students took photos to represent their transition experiences. This photo-elicitation project added a complementary visual component to the landscape analysis interviews.

▶ **Focus Groups**

The Minnesota CCE team collected broader stakeholder perspectives on transition program gaps and challenges through eight focus groups with teachers, support staff and other professionals, and family members.

▶ **Literature Review**

The Minnesota CCE team's extensive literature review on transition focuses on effective ways to improve the employment, post-secondary education, and independent living outcomes of transition-age youth with ID/DD in the United States. The team completed data extraction and is preparing a manuscript about their findings for publication.



► Longitudinal Survey

The Minnesota CCE team developed and piloted a longitudinal survey for students and parents in order to collect statewide data about the extent to which transition programs are serving their needs. The team is currently revising this survey before launching it more broadly.

Landscape Analysis Findings

The Minnesota CCE team completed landscape analysis data collection for three of their partner districts, with the exception of Minneapolis, for which data collection is still underway. One key finding was how transition programs are often segregated from general education programs. Findings also revealed a disconnect between student transition plan goals and outcomes, a lack of alignment between the state's new transition framework and existing district transition programs, and a lack of sufficient supports for youth with extensive support needs. The Minnesota CCE team collected rich data on work-based learning sites in the community. The team is developing a manuscript about these sites, including information on whether they offer paid work and how many students are participating.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

Progress in each school district requires alignment between the efforts of the Minnesota CCE team and the individual district, and competing priorities slowed the progress of data collection in some cases. Despite this, the Minnesota CCE team collected a significant amount of data from diverse sources, which helped the team tailor their transition plan activities by revealing key gaps within and differences between partner school districts. In addition to interviews and focus groups with youth with ID/DD, teachers, support staff, and family members, the photo-elicitation project helped the Minnesota CCE team explore the “whole person” lives of youth with ID/DD outside of school-centered transition. It also facilitated engagement with staff from another Minnesota school district's transition program, who attended the Minnesota CCE public photovoice display at the [Institute on Community Integration Art for All Exhibit](#) in 2023. The transition program staff attended the exhibit to see the photos and learn about students' transition experiences. The photo-elicitation project enabled the Minnesota CCE team to broaden the reach of their landscape analysis as well.



TRANSITION PLAN

Transition Plan Development and Implementation

Informed by landscape analysis findings, CCE grant recipients must develop and implement transition plans to address the needs of youth with ID/DD and their families. Each grant recipient develops and implements a unique transition plan approach, tailored to their community or communities' needs, to achieve their intended outcomes.

Transition Plan Development Approach

The Minnesota CCE team is currently analyzing and synthesizing the findings from their landscape analysis to inform their transition plan activities. While Minneapolis Public Schools has an initial transition plan in place, the Minnesota CCE team is still refining the transition plans at Rosemount-Apple Valley-Eagan ISD 196, the Benton Stearns Education District, and the Northern Lights Special Education Cooperative. The team is tailoring aspects of the state's [Youth in Transition Framework](#) for each partner school district based on their landscape analysis findings.

Transition Plan Characteristics and Activities

The Minnesota CCE team is still in the process of developing transition plans for three of their partner school districts and planning community conversations across all four of their partner school districts.

▶ Partner School District Transition Plans

The Minnesota CCE team collaborated with their Minneapolis Public Schools partners to develop an initial transition plan. The Minnesota CCE team will film a documentary in the Minneapolis school district, which will follow three to four students as they navigate the transition process, including their outcomes after graduation. Minneapolis Public Schools hopes to use this documentary as a resource for future students and parents to familiarize themselves with the transition process and envision successful transition outcomes. Additional activities at Minneapolis Public Schools will focus on including students with severe developmental and cognitive disabilities in transition programming. The Minnesota CCE team will provide technical assistance to the school district toward this aim, and they will continue to work with their three other partner school districts to develop transition plan activities and implement them in the remaining grant period.



► Community Conversations

The Minnesota CCE team will host one-and-a-half-hour community conversations to engage community stakeholders in discussions about how they can support successful transition in each region. The team hopes to engage stakeholders beyond the school setting, such as employers, local city council representatives, healthcare professionals, and service department members (e.g., firefighters) in these discussions. By holding at least one or two community conversations in each partner school district's community, and perhaps expanding into other districts, the Minnesota CCE team hopes to inspire wider community involvement in improving transition outcomes.

Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned

The Minnesota CCE team is in the early stages of transition plan development and implementation. The relationships they built and enhanced with their partners will serve as a foundation for continued development and progress. In addition to the ongoing discussions with partner school districts, the Minnesota CCE team strengthened its relationships with the Minnesota Departments of Education and Employment and Economic Development as they planned for the implementation of the Youth in Transition Framework. As the Minnesota CCE team assists the state agencies with the rollout of the framework to school district leadership, the team will continue to look for ways to align and streamline CCE grant transition efforts with this state priority.



EVALUATION

Each grant recipient will use process and summative evaluation techniques to analyze the delivery of project activities and determine the project's success in meeting intended outcomes.

Methodology and Approach

The Minnesota CCE team leverages their internal evaluation data to track their progress. The team aims to ensure that grant partnerships sustain beyond the grant, transition programs improve according to needs identified in landscape analyses, youth with ID/DD have access to increased opportunities in their communities, and that transition outcomes better match student transition plans and goals. A key aspect of the Minnesota CCE team's evaluation approach is a longitudinal survey. The team collects data from students at various phases in the transition process, including data from students a year after they complete the transition program. With this longitudinal data collection, the Minnesota CCE team hopes to map out the current state of transition in Minnesota and develop improvement strategies to share with schools.



Intended Outcomes

The Minnesota CCE team is tracking progress toward their intended outcomes in multiple ways, including but not limited to surveys, structured interviews, data from their longitudinal survey, transition program-level data, as well as state policy shifts. They are fully or partially collecting their data for all intended outcomes and will have data by the end of the grant.

LOOKING AHEAD

- The Minnesota CCE team plans to launch their longitudinal survey and recruit participants throughout the spring of 2024.
- The Minnesota CCE team plans to start holding community conversations in the spring of 2024.
- The Minnesota CCE team plans to complete their scoping literature review on transition, a work-based learning manuscript, and a manuscript on photo-elicitation in the spring of 2024.