



How are Transition Age Youth with Intellectual/ Developmental Disabilities in Lawrence Being Prepared for Adult Life by Lawrence Public Schools?

Findings from a Survey of Families in Lawrence, Massachusetts

Background

Established in 2021, the Lawrence Partnership for Transition to Employment (LPTE) facilitates collaboration among local programs and services that support youth with developmental disabilities in Lawrence to assist them with the seamless transition from school to jobs in their communities. The LPTE brings together stakeholders from multiple sectors and organizations to form a collaborative consortium, including Lawrence Public Schools, Massachusetts state disabilities agencies, community organizations, advocacy groups, youth with developmental disabilities, and family members. A 13-member steering committee guides the work of the Consortium and works closely with the LPTE Core Team, which is made up of staff from The Arc of Greater Haverhill-Newburyport and the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston. Consortium members serve in four workgroups to develop and implement plans to promote positive transition outcomes. The four workgroups focus on: (1) providing work experiences in school, (2) preparing students for other aspects of adult life, (3) partnering with families, and (4) fostering cross-agency connections.

Purpose of the Survey

The Partnering with Families workgroup focuses on exploring creative strategies to support, educate, and build trust with families in ways that raise expectations for community-based employment for all youth. In May of 2024, the workgroup developed and distributed a survey to Lawrence-area families who have students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) in the Lawrence Public Schools. The survey aimed to better understand the experiences and needs of parents and family members of youth with disabilities in the transition process. The transition process is the time when youth are moving into adulthood and planning for employment, postsecondary education and training, and independent living. This period is typically between the ages of 14 and 24.

The workgroup conducted this survey between May 2024 and February 2025. It included multiple questions about the transition process, including IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting attendance, employment and other future goals, family familiarity with the transition process, ideal times to schedule meetings about the student, and family communication preferences. With support from Lawrence Public Schools, the survey received 205 responses.

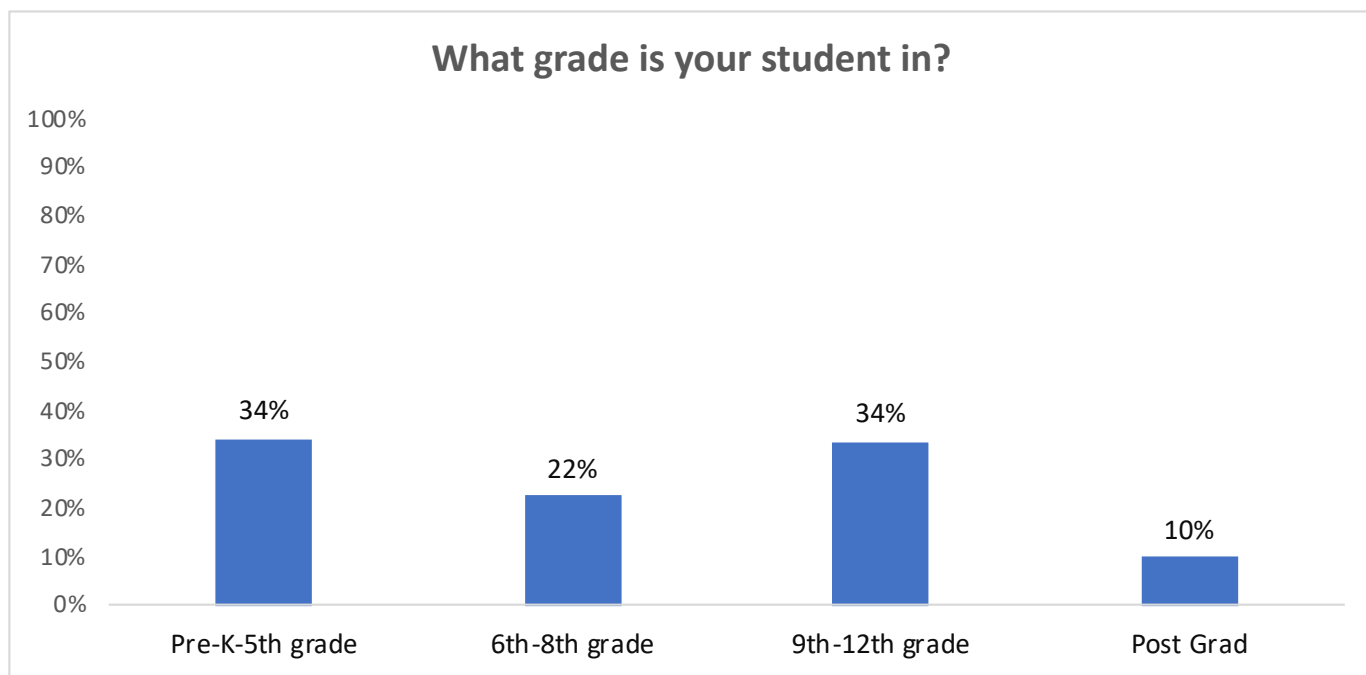
Summary of Key Findings

The LPTE Core Team analyzed the survey data using Microsoft Excel. Key findings include:

- Most respondents with students in high school said their student attended IEP meetings.
- Common barriers to IEP meeting participation by family members include inconvenient meeting times, lack of understanding about what an IEP is, language barriers, and lack of childcare. Still, most family members reported that they are able to attend their students' IEP meetings.
- Families want their students to pursue employment after high school, but only 12% of families reported that their high school students were receiving pre-employment training.

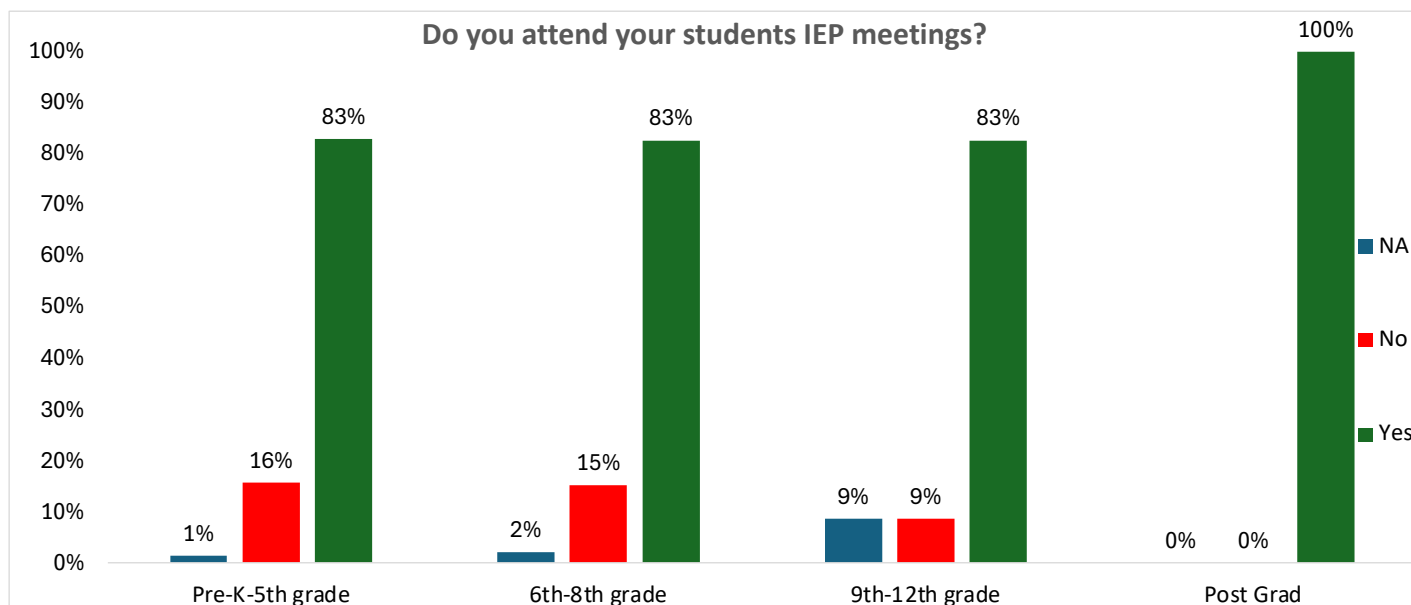
The following charts provide a more detailed view of the key findings.

Findings: Demographics

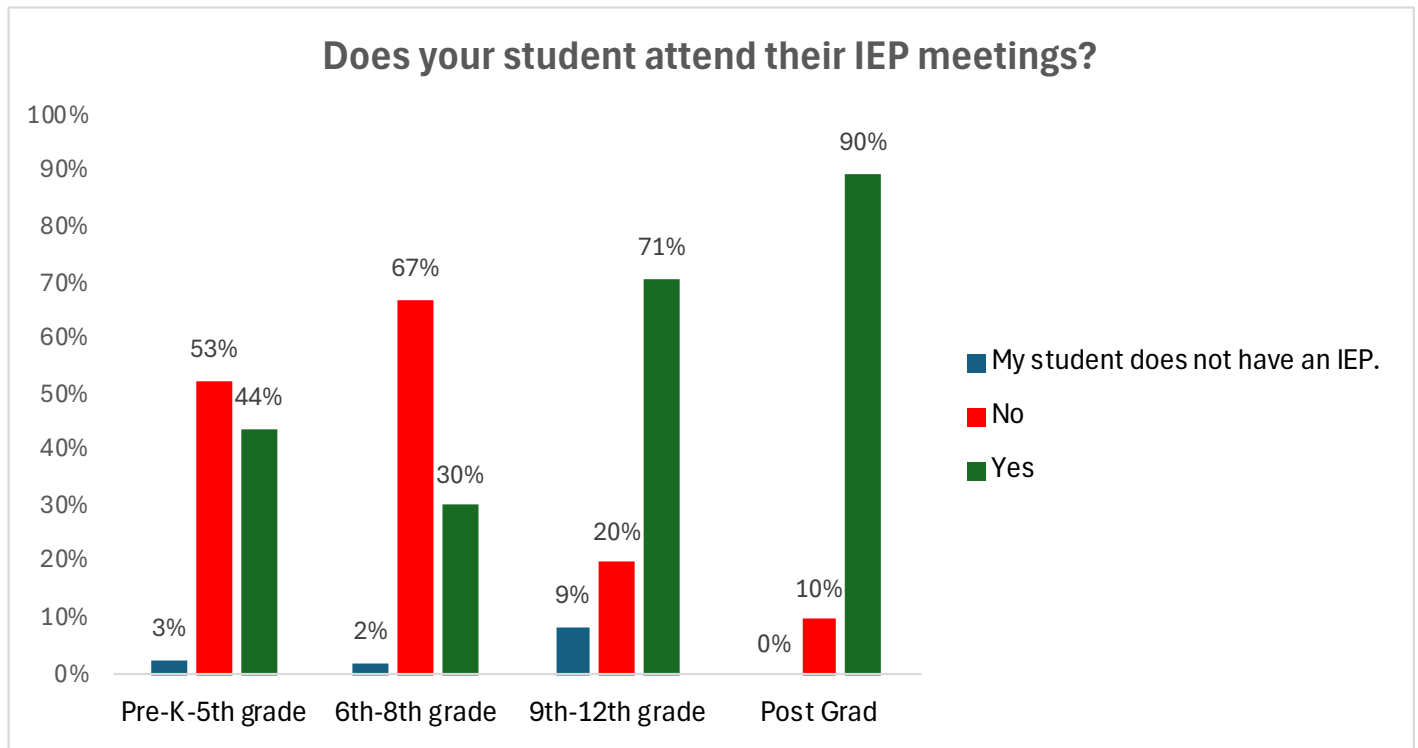


This chart about grade level shows that of the 205 family respondents, 34% (70) had a student in pre-K to 5th grade, 22% (46) had a student in 6–8th grade, 34% (69) had a student in 9–12th grade, and 10% (20) had a student in Lawrence Public Schools who was 18–22 (post grad).

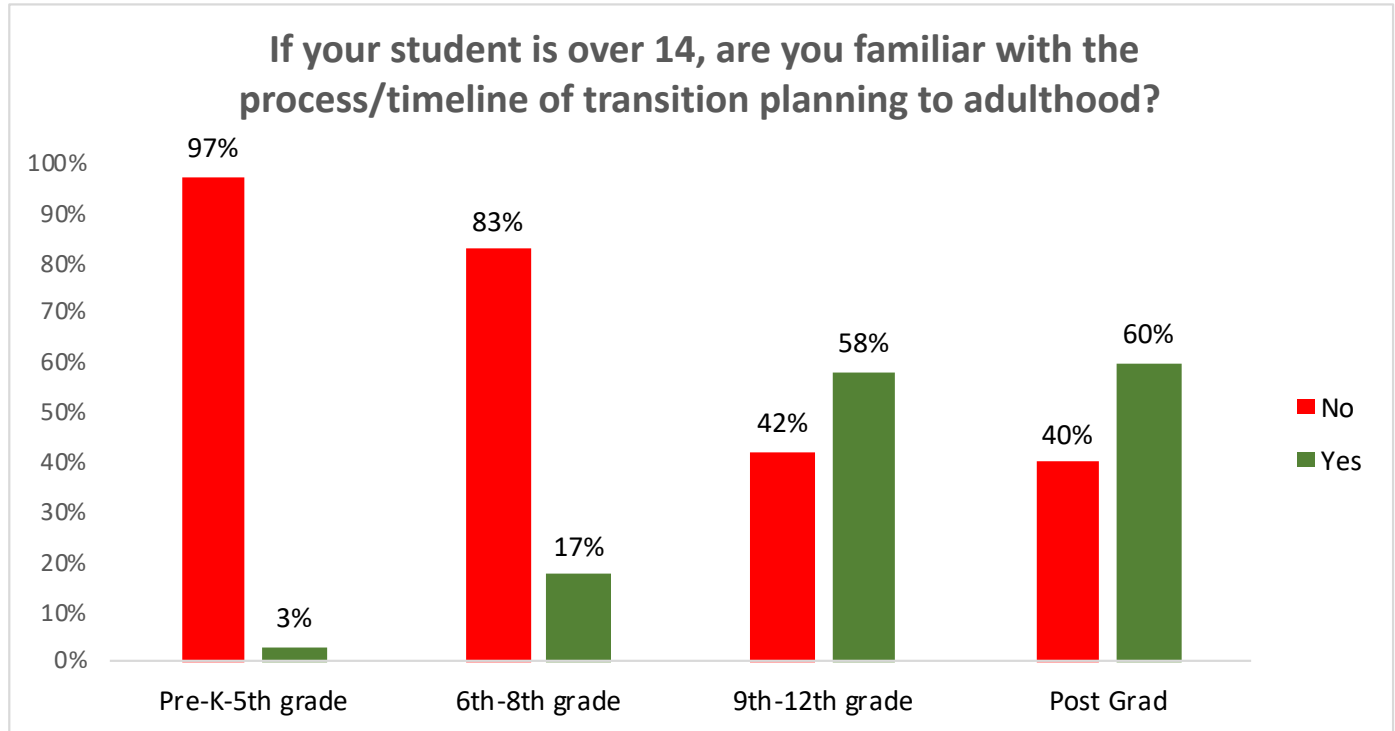
Findings: IEP Meetings and Transition Timelines



This chart about attending IEP meetings shows all respondents with post grad students, and 83% of respondents with students in pre-K through 12th grade, said they'd attended their students' IEP meetings.

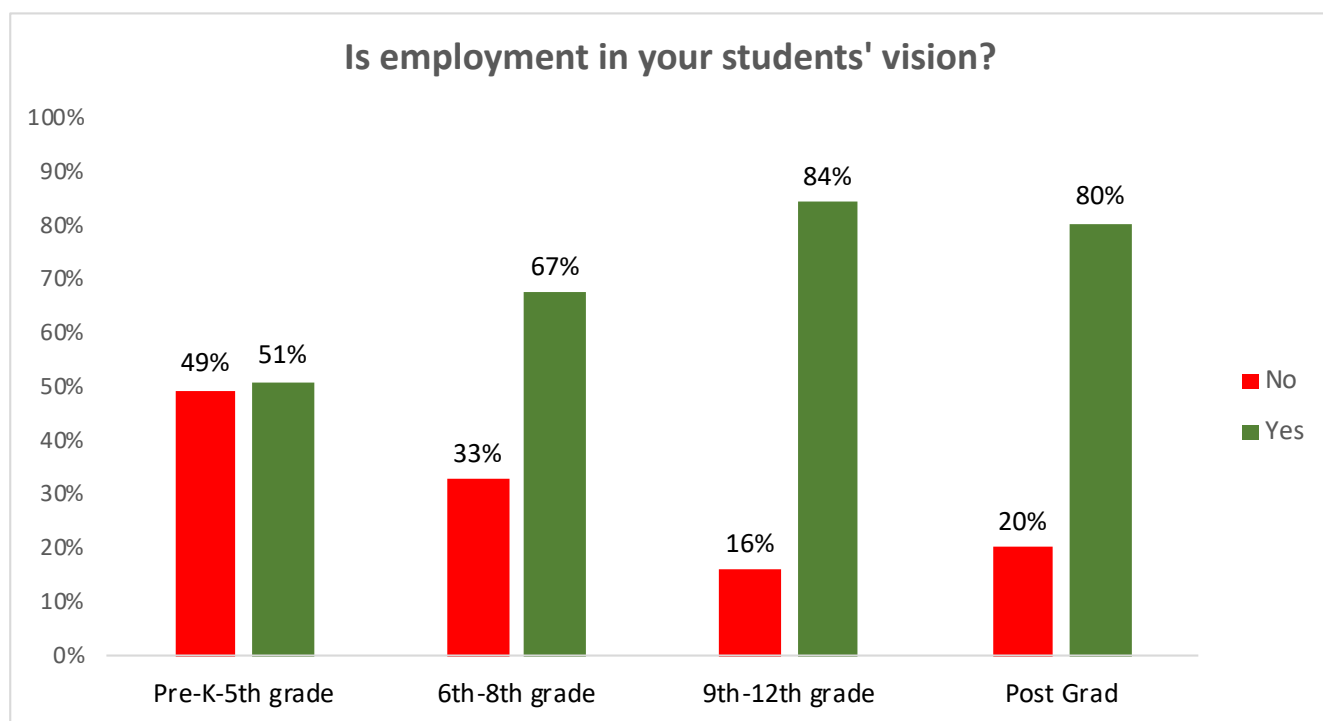


This chart about students attending their IEP meetings shows the majority of respondents with students in pre-K-8th grade reported their student does not attend IEP meetings. However, the majority of respondents with students in 9th grade through post grad reported that their student does attend IEP meetings.

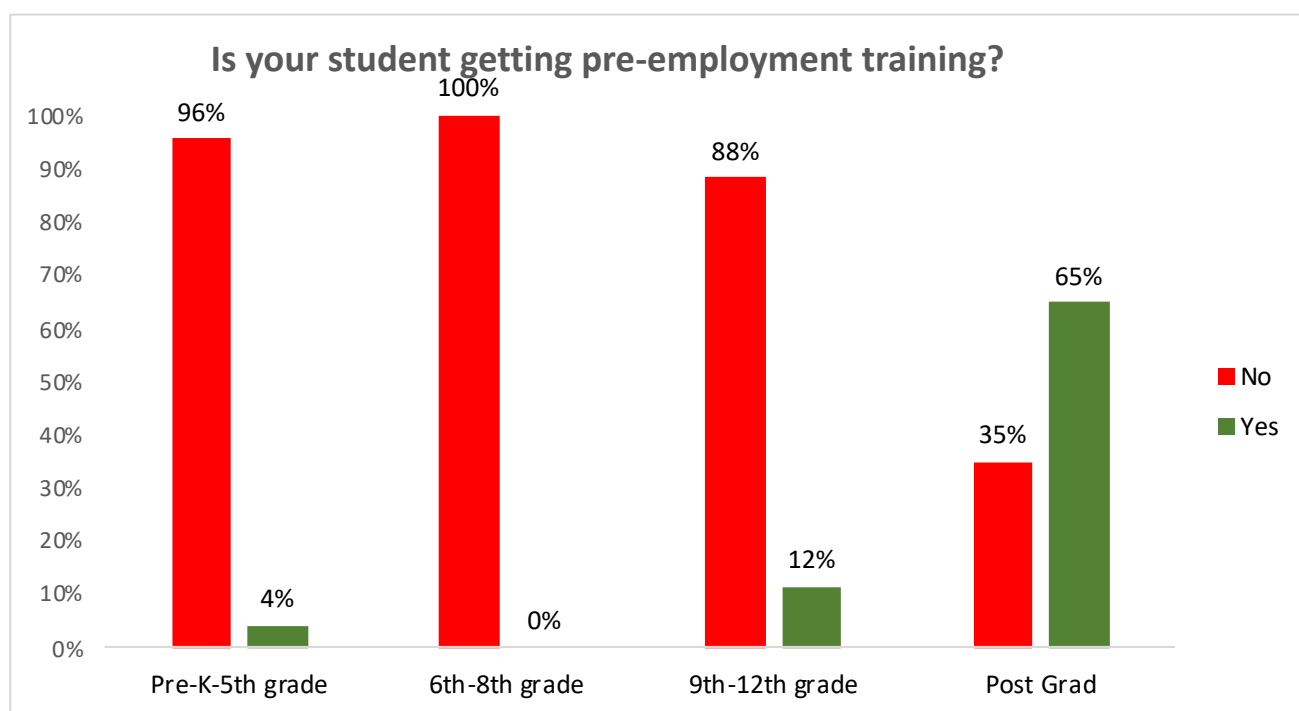


This chart about the timeline for transition planning shows that only 17% of respondents with students in 6th-8th grade were familiar with the timeline of transition planning to adulthood, and 60% of respondents with students in 9th grade through post grad were familiar with the transition timeline.

Findings: Employment

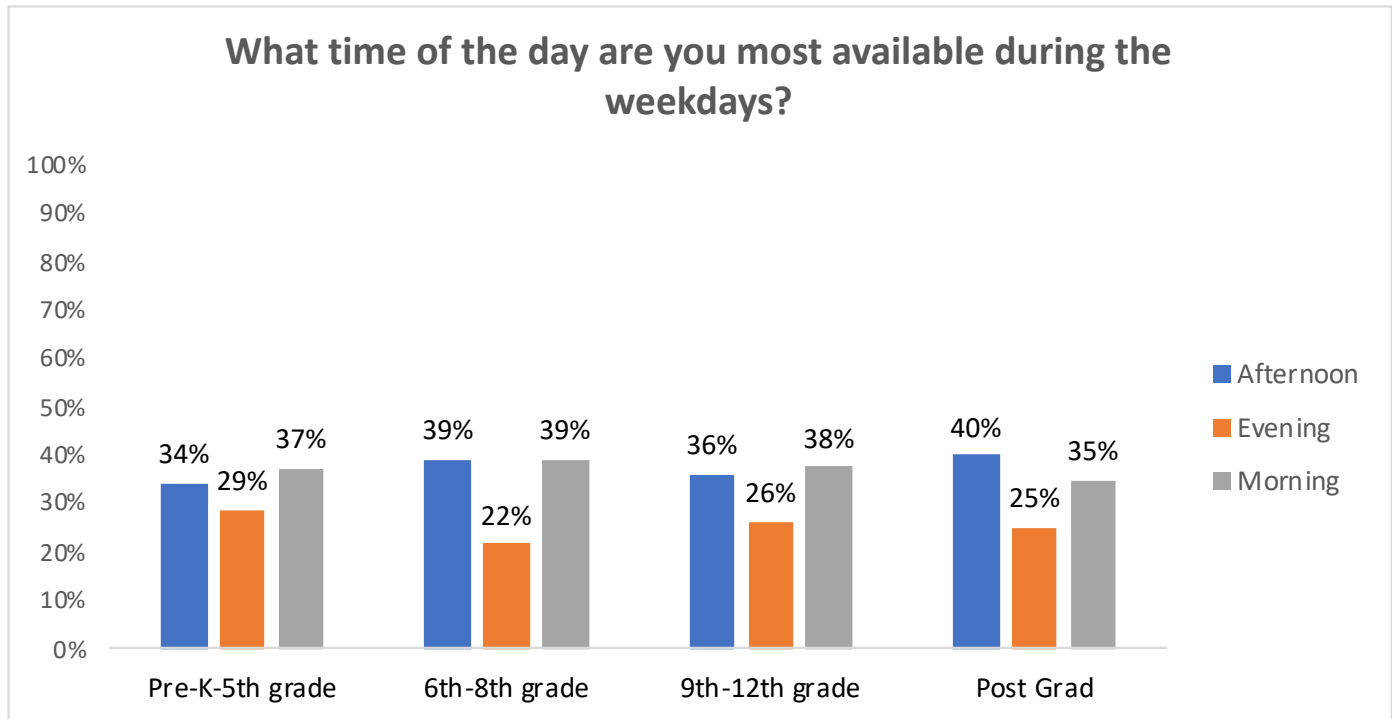


This chart about a vision for employment shows that the majority of respondents across all grades reported that employment is in their student's vision.



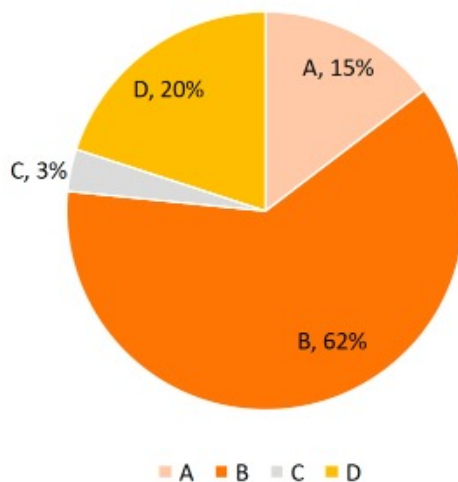
This chart about pre-employment training shows that only the respondents with students in post grad overwhelmingly reported that their student receives pre-employment training (65%). Only 16% of respondents with students in pre-K through 12th grade reported that their student receives pre-employment training.

Findings: Location and Accessibility



This chart about family availability shows that all respondents were evenly split between morning and afternoon when asked what time of day they are most available to attend meetings. Evening meeting times only worked for about a quarter of the respondents.

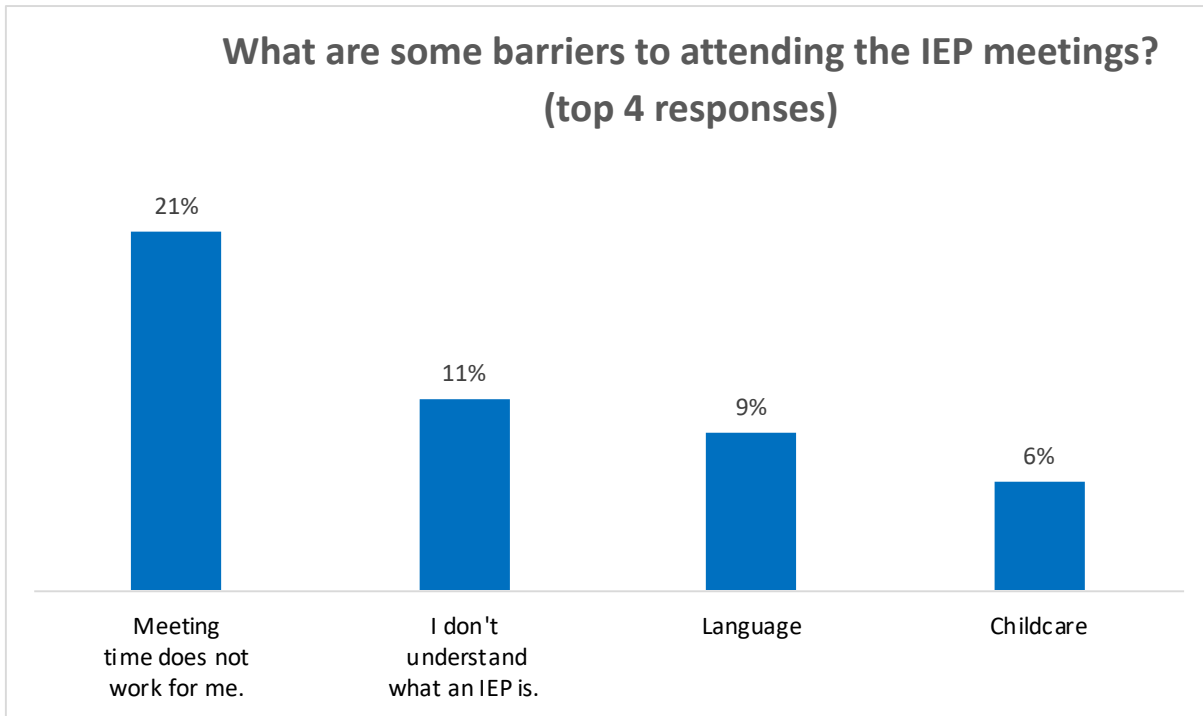
Where in the Lawrence area do you live?



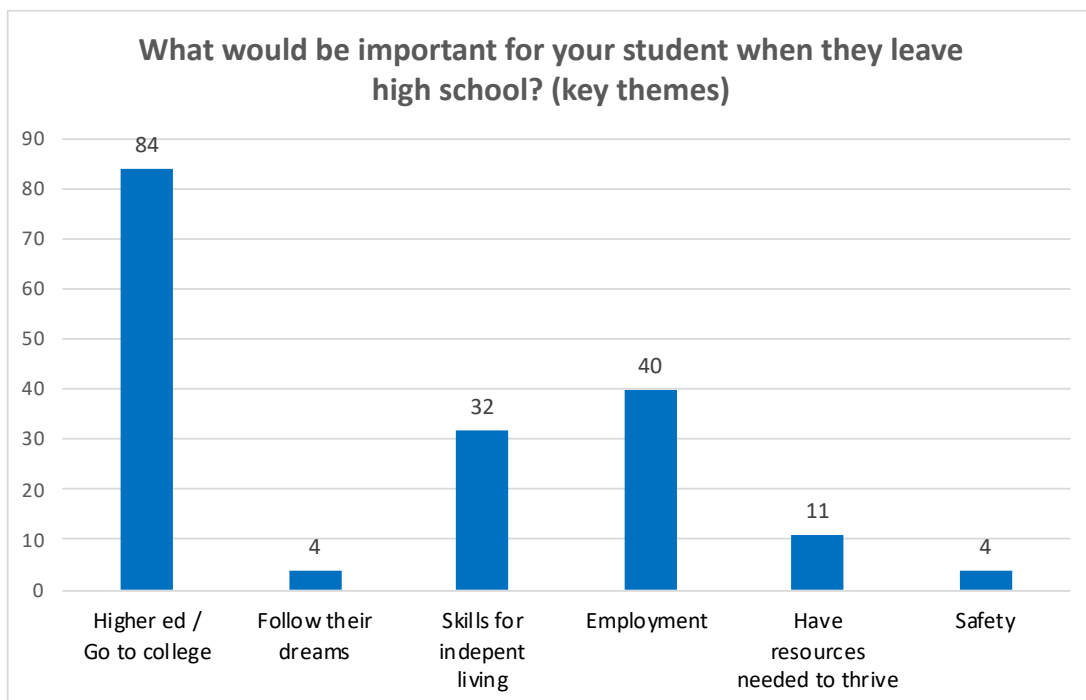
This chart about where families live in Lawrence shows that a majority of the survey respondents live in the B area (62%), which is Northeast Lawrence.

Findings: Open-Ended Survey Questions

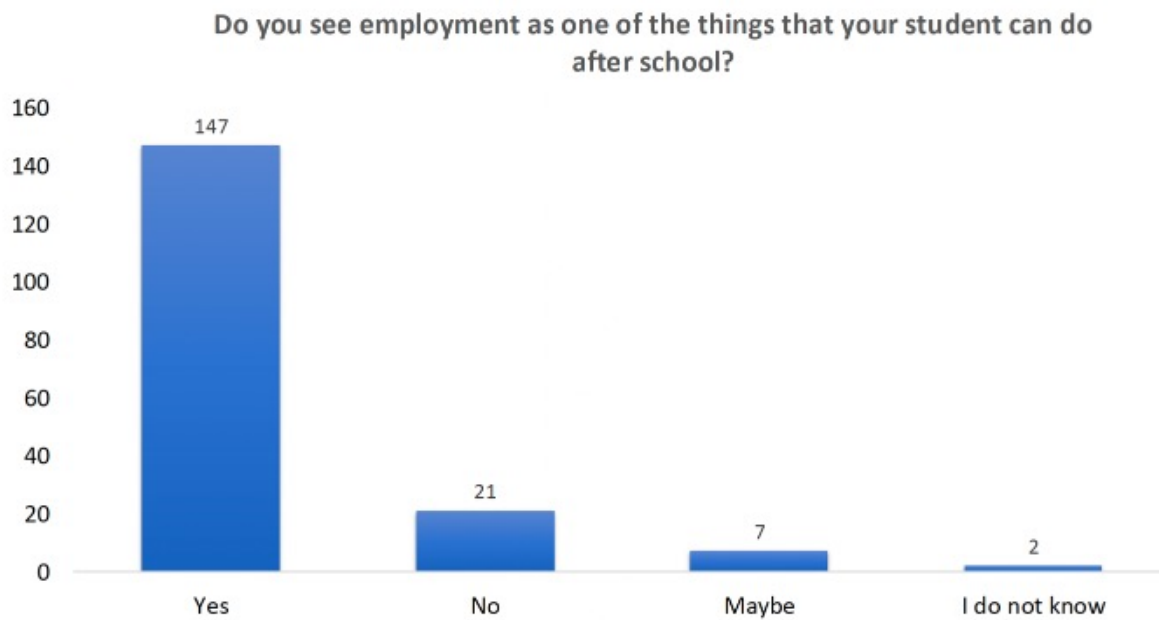
The following four survey questions were open-ended, which allowed respondents to type out their answers. We grouped the answers together by theme, and the following charts show the most common responses.



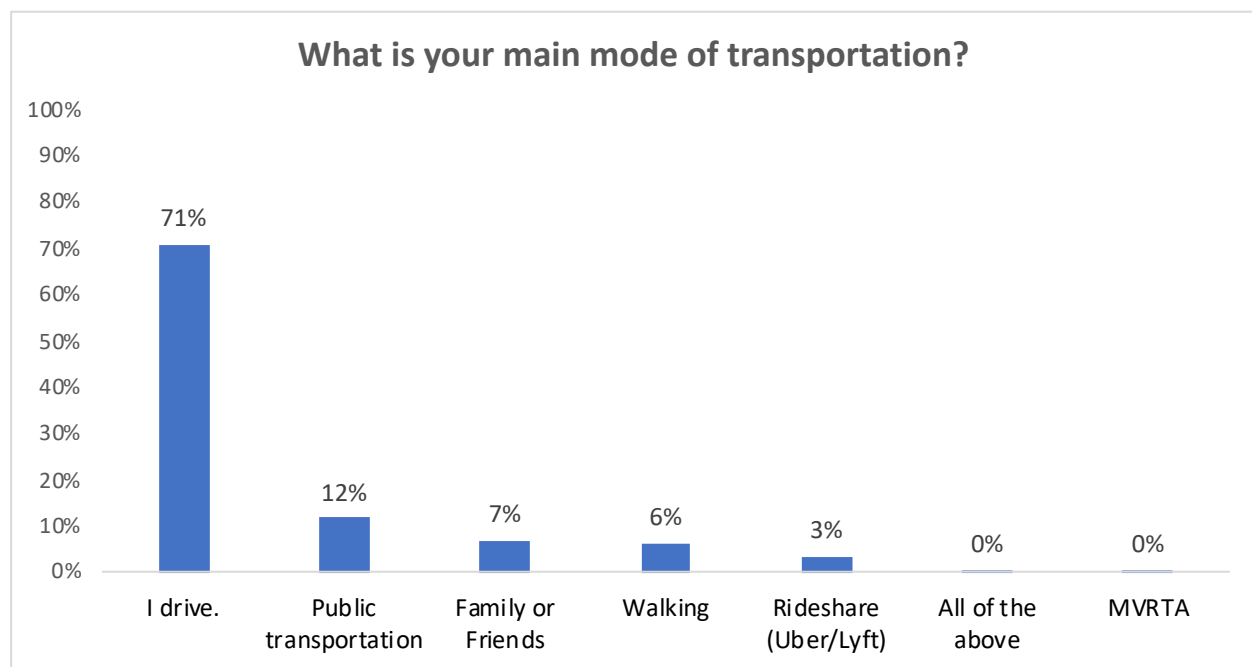
This chart about barriers shows that the main barrier respondents gave to attending their student's IEP meeting was that the meeting time did not work for them. Other top answers included: not understanding what an IEP meeting is, language barriers, and lack of access to childcare.



This chart about what is important for students when they leave high school shows that the majority of respondents said that higher education/college was the most important thing for their student after they left high school. Other top answers included: employment, skills for independent living, and having the resources needed to thrive.



This chart about whether students are capable of employment shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents (72%) reported that employment is seen as one of the things their student can do after they leave school. Only 21 respondents (10%) out of the 205 reported that they don't see their student employed after leaving school.



This chart about transportation shows that the majority of respondents drive as their main mode of transportation. Other responses included: public transportation (12%), a ride from family or friends (7%), and walking (6%).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is clear that while most families and students with IDD are actively participating in IEP meetings, significant barriers remain. Scheduling conflicts, language barriers, lack of childcare, and lack of understanding about what an IEP meeting is, make it difficult for some families to fully participate in their student's transition process. Addressing these barriers is key, as family engagement in the transition process is a predictor of positive transition outcomes (PACER Center, 2017). Further, the IEP process is a critical component of transition planning, designed for students with disabilities to ensure they receive the appropriate supports and services.

Additionally, there is a strong desire among families for their children to pursue college or employment after high school, yet only a small percentage report that their students are receiving pre-employment training, which can be critical for facilitating post-school employment.

Results of this survey highlight the need for more transparent, accessible, and inclusive IEP processes along with expanded transition planning supports to ensure all students with IDD have the opportunity to achieve successful post-school outcomes.



Lawrence Partnership for Transition to Employment

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Special thanks to Lawrence Public Schools for their assistance in distributing this survey.

To learn more about the LPTE, please visit LPTE.info