

WEBVTT

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Well, welcome to the Unpacked Podcast, where we are unpacking the realities

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in today's public schools.

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I am Mickey O'Neill, your host, and today I have Michael McDonald with me.

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Michael, could you introduce yourself to our listeners, please?

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I'm Michael McDonald, Director of Transition Programming here at Ingham ISD.

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Well, thank you for joining us. I appreciate it. Could you talk about transition

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programs, just kind of give a little overview of what they are,

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And then we'll dig a little deeper into Project SEARCH, one of the programs

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that's offered by Ingham Icedy.

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So transition programs are programs post high school that, you know, 18 to 26.

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Michigan, we educate till 26 if you don't get a diploma or can.

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It's not mandatory, but it's an option.

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And it's work skills, life skills, community experiences, all that kind of thing.

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Project SEARCH is a little bit of our, it's kind of our high-end

transition program.

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We do have occasionally kids that have diplomas where school districts will

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defer the diploma for a year.

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Kid will come out because they'd be like, this kid really needs to get out in

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the community. He needs to get his experiences.

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He knows how to do the books, but he needs that social interaction.

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He needs that social interaction.

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And we're worried that if we put him at a work site at 18 without that,

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he's not going to, he's going to struggle.

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Okay. So that's kind of a little gap to help get him to the next,

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him or her, to the next part of their journey. Yeah. Okay.

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All right. Wonderful. Well, talk a little bit about Project Search and the unique

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type of program that is, because it's a one-year program, and we've got partners

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that are working on that with us.

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So talk a little bit about Project Search and how kids, once they get into the

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program, what they learn. Yeah.

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So Project Search is, it's an international program that they have in Iceland,

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England, all over the place, all over the United States.

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And it started down in Cincinnati at a children's hospital down there.

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And essentially the program works with a business partner.

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Our business partner is Michigan State University.

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And it works with an outside agency. Ours is Michigan Rehabilitative Services

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to support students for a year to get them to be meaningfully employed,

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just like their peers. at the end of the program.

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It's, it is a pretty intense boom, boom, boom, because it's one year.

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Some kids have gone through some of our other transition programs and have,

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you know, had multiple years of training through the other transition programs.

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And some kids, this is their first experience, but we do feel that,

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you know, due to their skill levels that they should, they would be able to do it one year.

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The intent is for them to, at the end, to be meaningfully employed and

go from there. That's great.

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So we look at where the students are and we make some assessments based on their

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past experiences to place them in a program like this that would help them get

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to the next phase of their life and be as independent as possible.

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It'd be as independent as possible.

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And they, but they essentially get three different, we call them internships,

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three different internship experiences out at MSU.

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Sometimes it's things like the cafeteria or the snack shops or the thing.

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We also have them out at the, MSU has a massive laundry. Oh,

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yeah. I can only imagine.

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Massive for all the Kellogg Center stuff and all the uniforms at every place that there's uniforms.

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There's tons of laundry there to do. So, you know, we do it out there.

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There's custodial throughout campus everywhere to work.

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We've had students who we do try to find things that interest the students.

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We've had a girl who was very into Broadway and musicals.

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Oh, nice. She did an internship at Wharton. Oh, fantastic.

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And we had a kid who wanted to be in more of the construction field,

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and he actually was with the roofers, and we used to get up on the roof and

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do all the stuff up there. That's cool. It was insane.

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Yeah. We had no other takers on that one.

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So they put them in the cherry picker and the whole thing. Oh, that's fabulous.

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So, but yeah, so they get these three different experiences.

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Oftentimes, one of those experiences, the Michigan State,

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The supervisor, because they don't, we don't babysit them.

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We coach them through it, but we don't have an adult that sits there with them

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the whole time. Their supervisor is their supervisor.

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And oftentimes if they do a good job, their supervisor will be like,

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I really want to hire that kid.

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Please, you know, help put me in a situation where we can do that.

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That's fantastic. That's fantastic.

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What is, I know that many, many of our students get employed right

after graduating

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from this program or completing this program. Do you know what the percentage is?

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I think nationally, it's...

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75 to 90 percent. We're usually, so they do a national conference every year

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and they give out an award, whatever everybody gets.

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We, I think we've gotten 80 to 100 the four years I've been here. Okay.

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All right. So 80 percent to 100 percent placement. And you're talking about essentially 10 kids.

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That means eight to 10 of them are getting jobs right after and keeping those

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jobs for a long time. That's fantastic because these programs that we offer

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are so meaningful to the kids.

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I just love to see them, you know, step into the next phase.

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100%. And employment rates for

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students with disabilities without programs like this are in the 40s, 50s.

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So it's really low. So this is a pretty big deal.

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Okay, that's great. Well, is there anything else you'd like to share

about Project

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Search or anything that's happening with our transition programs right now or

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any experiences you'd like to share with the audience? I'm trying to think.

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So, you know, Project Search, every year we're looking to get new kids to come in.

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We don't have enough from our programs to feed and fill the classrooms.

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So we work really closely with our locals.

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We've built a lot of relationships with our locals to get that in.

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But a lot of it is oftentimes parents just saying, hey, I heard about this. Can you tell me?

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And then they come in and talk to us and we get with their local,

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you know, director and then come up with a plan for, is this a good plan for this kid?

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So yeah, if anybody out there knows anybody or thinks of anybody that they think

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would be, you know, a student that.

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Would need a little support to become employed and could use something like this, yeah, reach out.

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Wonderful. Well, they can reach out to us at www.inghamic.org and find out your

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contact information on the website. Okay.

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All right. Well, thank you for joining us today. I appreciate it.

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And listeners, thank you for helping us unpack stories and realities in today's

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public schools, and we'll be back next time.

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Well, welcome to the Unpacked Podcast, where we're unpacking the realities in

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today's public schools.

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I am Mickey O'Neill. I'm your host today, and with me I have Michael McDonald.

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Michael, could you introduce yourself to our listeners, please?

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So, Michael McDonald, Director of Transition Programming here at Ingham ISD,

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and I work with students that are 18 to 26 that are in a program that is post-high school,

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and they're, you know, kids that did not get diplomas and have maybe gotten

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a certificate get a completion from their schools and come over to us. Okay.

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Well, can you talk a little bit about the continuum of transition programming

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for our students with disabilities and how that kind of works,

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what that looks like for our listeners?

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Absolutely. So there's a lot of variances within that.

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Some of the kids start in transition programming at their local high schools,

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and then they'll come over to us either to SAIL or to Project SEAR,

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depending on where they're needed, or what their needs are.

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Some of the kids are down in our center-based programming at Hartwood or Beekman,

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and they end up coming over to us in our transition programs at SAIL after a certain amount of time.

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It really is individualized. It really is depending on student needs and where

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they're at in their transition learning.

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Students can be with us until they're 26. So, you know, it really isn't a race.

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Oftentimes they get to us when they're 18. Yeah.

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And we just try to find the right place along the line where,

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you know, earlier needs. Maybe they're not ready to go out in the community.

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Maybe they're not ready to do some of the more individualized work yet at the

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center-based program. So maybe they're there until they're 22,

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23, and they kind of get a taste for it. And then they come to us. Some come way earlier.

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And then we have kids of the locals that come to us at 18.

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Okay. And maybe stay with us for a year or two, or maybe they stay until they're 26. Okay.

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Well, that's quite a variety of different options for kids based on where they are in their learning.

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Yeah. So that's great. And it's very individualized. It's very,

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and it's, we take the family's needs into account and the students' needs into

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account, and we really kind of try to make it.

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You know, tailored for each student. So I think maybe a lot of our listeners

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might not know that in the state of Michigan, we actually provide education,

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public education through age 26.

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I know you mentioned you support 18 to 26 in transition programs,

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but that's probably a new piece of information.

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But could you talk a little bit about SAIL, the SAIL program specifically,

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skills for adult independent living, and what our students learn in

that program,

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the independent living skills and maybe some more. based learning.
Yeah.

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So they have specific transition goals that they work on. Some of it is community

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experiences. Some of it is working.

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Some of it is training.

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Some of it is, you know, life skills that they'd be working at home.

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A big push in sale is to get kids out in the community working.

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Okay. And it's really, it's unpaid work. It's volunteer work.

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We call them training sites It's more than work sites.

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So they're going out into, you know, we've got, I don't know,

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30 different work sites that we use through all our programs.

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And different sites have different things they work on,

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but also certain students have desires to, you know, like if we're at the animal

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shelter and somebody likes animals and thinks that they want that,

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then we take them there and they get to clean up the messes from the animals.

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And they realize maybe I don't want to work with animals so much.

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So there's a lot of opportunities for them to get out there and just kind of

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see that. Also, we get out in community experiences.

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We have students that, you know, go to Meijer, buy groceries.

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They bring the groceries back. They learn how to cook.

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They learn how to, you know, take care of the kitchen after they're done and

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clean up. And, you know, we're doing laundry.

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We have five different sales sites, two here in Mason, two in Lansing,

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and one out at Waverly High School, and each program does functions a little bit differently. Okay.

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What does a classroom look like in those spots? Like, do they have,

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you said, a washer and dryer and like a kitchen so they're able to learn something? It really depends.

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Like in Waverly and in Mason, they have washer and dryer and a kitchen and the whole thing. Okay.

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In Lansing, it's at the Foster Community Center.

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A lot of our students that are in those programs, we're real thoughtful about

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this, are kids that maybe live in apartments or live on their own.

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We don't have a washer and dryer there. They go to the laundromat.

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Okay. That's a good experience as well. Yeah. And learn how to do laundry at

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the laundromat. They learn how to take public transportation.

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You know, although Michigan Avenue has been tricky to drive up and down. I bet.

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We haven't been doing, we haven't been using NACADA as much that the number

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one bus up and down Michigan Avenue.

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But yeah, so it really is tailored to the students and, and what they're,

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what they're looking for, but, and what their community looks like and what

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their living experiences look like.

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So we have students that live in group homes. We have students that live with families.

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So they all have different kind of needs that we have to kind of think about.

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Okay. Well, can you talk a little bit, too, about, you know,

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what kids expect to learn or families can expect for kids to,

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the experiences they take away from, you know, being in SAIL?

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So a big part of it is, is independence.

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So really going through probably the K-12 system, they, it was more focused

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on content and curriculum and being with their peers and, and being with their

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gen ed peers and all that kind of stuff.

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Once they get to the transition program, they don't have gen ed peers anymore.

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We focus on the things that they need.

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And one of the biggest ones is independents.

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We have students that come to us who are very independent because that's what

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the family needs them to be. Right. And we have students that aren't.

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One of my favorite things that happens is with some of our lesser independent

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kids is they'll be doing stuff here and then we'll tell the parents they're

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doing X, Y, Z. They were like, they don't know how to do that.

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I'm like, no, no, no. They do it here.

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They're like, well, they don't do it at home. I said, well, they're conning you.

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Just like any other teenager or 20 year old. Right. They go home and they're

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like, I don't know how to do dishes. I don't know how to do laundry.

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You need to do that for me, mom.

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We're like, no, they do it every day at school. They know how to do it.

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So, yeah. That's a great story. Yeah, it happens all the time. It's hilarious.

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And then the parents are like, oh, so I can have them do this at home?

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Yeah, absolutely. So it does create that more independence for them.

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Well, that's great. That's great.

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So what makes you most proud of the work that's happening in these transition programs?

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So in the four years I've been here, we have doubled in size. That's very cool.

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We've been able to, you know, work with a lot more students and give a lot more

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experiences and a lot more opportunities because the bigger you get,

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the more you're just able to offer things. So that's a big one.

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Our team has grown as well because we've doubled in size.

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And the thing I really like is how much our team really works like a team,

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functions for the kids. It's always kids first.

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And this is another thing, too. So they're 18 to 26-year-olds,

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so it's a young adult program.

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The kids get mad at me because I call them kids. They say, no,

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we're young adults. Yeah. I'm like, I'm 54.

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One of the perks of being 54 is I get to call 20-year-olds kids.

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So they think that's funny. But so, yeah, I know that's not always the correct

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term. I should be saying young adults, but to me, they're kids.

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So I'm trying to think if I answered that question. Yeah, you did.

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You did. You did. All right.

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So I would just say, you know, you talked about the doubling in size.

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You talked about your staff doubling.

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There's one thing we didn't really touch on. And as students are going to job

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sites or community, how do they get there?

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What's the transportation look like? I think people might not really understand

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what that takes to support students.

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So we do multiple different things. So we do Dean Transportation. It's the most reliable.

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But we also work on CATA, you know, rural CATA or SPECTRAN or all these other things.

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We focus on, you know, hey, we're going to take this to go to Meijer.

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And teaching them how to use, yeah, how to use public transportation.

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Great. So, Spectran is a thing, once you get signed up, you're signed up for life.

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Once they know that you are a student with a disability, you will be able to

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take that with you through the rest of your life and be able to use Spectran

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for, you know, moving forward.

00:16:04.023 --> 00:16:07.163

So, those little things are things that are helpful for the families that they

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can, you know, take with them going forward. That's great. That's great.

00:16:10.663 --> 00:16:14.883

Well, I think that's all we have time for today. So, I would love to have you

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back and talk about another topic later, but thank you for joining us.

00:16:17.923 --> 00:16:18.963

Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

00:16:19.103 --> 00:16:23.983

And thank you to the listeners for helping us unpack the realities in today's public schools.

