

2022

## Special Education Challenges in Transitioning to Online Learning in Wyoming During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Elizabeth Merritt

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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Walden University  
2022

Abstract

Special Education Challenges in Transitioning to Online Learning in Wyoming During  
the COVID-19 Pandemic

by

Elizabeth Merritt

MA, Walden University, 2006

BS, University of Wyoming, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

August 2022

## Abstract

When the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, education had unexpected impacts, including the closure of schools and the disruption of learning for students. Students with disabilities experienced increased challenges related to these impacts. The problem was to understand the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities and identify future supports for this kind of transition to online learning. The conceptual framework for this research was the Schlossberg transition model and the variables of changing from one life event to another. The guiding research question pertained to challenges special education teachers and parents experienced during their transition to online learning. The basic qualitative research design examined the lived experiences of four teachers and two parents through an interview and a questionnaire. The data were analyzed for emerging ideas and patterns to code, compile, and develop into themes and subthemes. The analyzed results indicated that not all learning software was appropriate as planned to support special education student learning. Another finding was that constant communication between teachers and students had positive results. The implications for positive social change may be improved practices for possible transitions from future in-classroom to online learning to enhance student achievement.

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## Dedication

To my husband, my heart, my home, my dream come true; I love you so much! Joe Grandpre, here is to another 30 years. "I'm bigger" to my son, Alex, my daughter-in-law, Brittany, and my grandson, Eli; it is in writing forever! Kelly Bembry-Hennings, Lonell Hennings, Carol, and Steve Miller, thank you for your love, laughs, and tears over time. Thank you doesn't seem enough.

Thank you for everything; your help made this possible for my angel, Michelle Shay.

To my Mom and Dad. My dad did not get to see me earn this here, but he has been with me every step of the way since he had to leave.

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Special thanks go to friends Corey, Shawna, Dennis, and Michael James', Travis Burns, and Will Barnes for all your help. To RaeAnn Merry and Joy Fawcett my cheerleaders who kept me going. I want to acknowledge other family, friends, association members, and school district members who have supported me through this process to become a better version of me; I want to thank you for every day you have been part of my life.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

For the first time since the flu pandemic of 1918, often called the “Spanish Flu,” the United States of America closed kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade (K-12) schools due to a pandemic known as the Coronavirus or COVID-19 (Akin & Gözel, 2020; Maher, 2020; PBS News Hour & Wyoming PBS, 2020). The virus is airborne and passed from person to person through those exhaling airborne particles (CDC, 2021; Maher, 2020). When I started writing this paper, the numbers of those impacted by COVID-19 were over 31,666,000, with deaths of over 566,000 (CDC, 2020). The country's shutdown brought about concerns about teaching and the continued educational needs of students with disabilities in the public school system.

In March of 2020, Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon ordered the closing of all public gathering spaces, including schools within the State of Wyoming, to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 (Star-Tribune Staff, 2020). The first closures were the K-12 schools that would return to the classroom starting in March but extended to the end of the 2019-20 school year (CDC, 2020; Wyoming Department of Education, 2020b). During the first weeks of school closures, teachers worked to get either paper or electronic instruction materials ready and out to students to continue learning in the Wyoming communities. One group with different struggles during the transition was special education teachers and families supporting these students with disabilities. There were concerns about meeting the needs of students with disabilities while being cognizant of accessibility (Wyoming Special Education Programs Division, 2020a). With this study, I sought to understand better how pandemic-related changes to education impacted special education

teachers and the families they serve. Chapter 1 covers the background, problem statement, the purpose of the study, research question, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitation, limitation, significance, and summary.

### **Background**

Students with disabilities have individual educational plans (IEP) or individual learning plans (ILP) to outline learning at school. With these plans, different interventions are identified for the IEP or ILP, requiring assistive technology tools unique to a student's disability to target learning skills. It was assumed that most people had electronic devices for learning at home, but that was not the case due to costs or availability (Alhumaid et al., 2020). During the closure of schools because of the COVID-19 pandemic, educators within districts contacted the families of students with disabilities to determine home circumstances, the technology available, or family structure to assist the students working from home during quarantine to meet IEPs or ILPs minutes or interventions. Additionally, the families of students with disabilities inquired about how to provide these online services when their child had multiple educators providing specific interventions at school (Preston, 2020).

Over the years, technology has evolved and can support classroom learning, but some technology is not applied (Akay, 2020; Al Lily et al., 2020; Asim et al., 2020). Even with technology training provided to educators, integrating technology into the classroom was challenging to have students use or embrace it for learning. Teachers needed to make practical, intentional use of technology for all students, especially

students with disabilities (Akay, 2020; Al Lily et al., 2020; Asim et al., 2020). The school closures forced a transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and highlighted the challenges. In studies found during this time, researchers identified the costs of the internet and computers, electricity reliability of the internet, and technology for students with disabilities when they transitioned to online learning (Al Lily et al., 2020; Lambert & Dryer, 2018; Mohacsi, 2019; Petretto et al., 2020). The studies did not explore the challenges for special education teachers or parents.

Students who qualify for special education have IEPs or ILPs that consist of specific goals that focus on student performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Few studies focused on the IEP interventions for online learning for students with disabilities (Gupta et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020; Webber-Ritchey et al., 2021). A few researchers examined students with disabilities and their consistent routine of in-classroom schedules during the transition to online learning (Alhumaid et al., 2020; Prior, 2020). The research did not address the needs of students who required occupational, physical, and specialized speech therapy which is just a part of the services provided for special education students (Akay, 2020; Al Lily et al., 2020; Crouse et al., 2018; Lambert & Dryer, 2018; Petretto et al., 2020). During the closures, it was these individualized needs for students with disabilities that became the challenge when transitioning for teachers and parents from in-classroom to online learning and meeting these specialized services (Akay, 2020; Al Lily et al., 2020; Crouse et al., 2018; Lambert & Dryer, 2018; Petretto et al., 2020). The transition from in-classroom to online learning for special

education teachers and parents was needed to learn what worked for both providers of services for special education students.

### **Problem Statement**

The problem addressed in this study was the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming. Little was known about secondary teachers' and parents' experiences in Wyoming and the challenges of the quick transition to teaching students with disabilities in an online learning environment (see Table 1). In an essay by Koerner (2020), the relationship between the learner and the teacher is the center of successful teaching at any level of education (see Palmer, 2007). The relationship may be challenging to create and maintain with the sudden transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities. Kaden (2020) presented a case study that focused on a teacher with 32 students in a rural Alaska community. The shift from in-classroom to online during the COVID-19 pandemic was a forced challenge for teachers from traditional teaching models to online facilitators. Per Kaden's study, the forced move may have been a "catalyst to create a new, more effective hybrid" way of student learning (Kaden, 2020). Guidance from the State of Wyoming to school districts after the COVID-19 pandemic closing was the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) remained in full effect. Special education staff contacted families about "technology, computers, iPads, or equipment" (JP Denning, personal communication, March 23, 2020). The table provides the number of students enrolled in schools with disabilities.



**Table 1***Special Education Students in Wyoming, 2020\**

Levels	Pre-Kindergarten	Elementary Kindergarten - 5th	Middle School 6 <sup>th</sup> – 8 <sup>th</sup>	High School 9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup>	Other District Programs
Age 3	950				
Age 4	1266				
Age 5		899			
Age 6		1137			
Age 7		1170			
Age 8		1125			
Age 9		1070			
Age 10		1156			
Age 11			1122		
Age 12			1034		
Age 13			936		
Age 14				941	
Age 15				897	
Age 16				813	
Age 17				668	
Age 18				343	
Age 19 - 21					148
Totals	2216	6557	3092	3662	148
PreK - 12 Teachers in Wyoming**	70	520	330	300	Contracted

*Note.* \*From “*IDEA Section 618 Data Products: State-Level Data Files.*” (2021,

February 2). [Datasets - Child Count and Educational Environments]. IDEA Section 618 Data Products: State-Level Data Files; US Department of Education (ED).

(<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html>)

\*\*From “U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.” (2020, May). *Occupational Employment and*

*Wage Statistics* [Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics]. Occupational

Employment and Wage Statistics Query System.

(<https://data.bls.gov/oes/#/geoOcc/Multiple%20occupations%20for%20one%20geographical%20area>)

Table 1 provides information collected from the state-level data files. It identifies the settings students received their education during the year and information on the number of teachers employed during the COVID-19 pandemic and the grade levels taught (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Table 2 identifies the other specialty persons responsible for working with special education students and their job specialties that had to be transitioned online. The number of these professionals was smaller in these specialized areas. They had challenges adjusting to a significant number of students.

**Table 2**

*Number of Full-Time Direct Services Employee Positions in Wyoming*

Student Enrollment	1-500	501-1500	1501-3000	3001-8000	8001-14100
Nurse			Time charged as needed		
Interpreter			1 to 1 ratio as needed		
Social Workers/ Counselors	0.5 – 0.9	1.0 – 2.9	3 – 4.9	5.0 – 8.9	9.0 - 15
Speech Pathologists	Contracted	1.3 – 2.9	3 – 4.9	5.0 – 12.9	13.0 - 18
Additional Therapists (Occupational, physical, visual, audiology)	Contracted	0.7 – 1.5	1.6 – 2.9	3.0 – 8.8	8.9 – 15.6
Case Managers		0.4 – 0.9	1.0 – 2.4	2.5 – 6.0	6.1 – 8.9
Assistive Technology Specialists	Contracted	0.5	0.5 – 0.9	1.0	1.0
School Psychologists Behavioral Specialists	Contracted				
Transition/Job/ Community Living Coordinators	Contracted				

Transition/Job/ Community Living Paraprofessionals	As Required by IEP	As Required by IEP	Up to 3.9	4.0 – 7.9	8.0
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*Note.* Data used in the table were from the “Wyoming Department of Education.” (2021).  
*Special Education Programs.* Wyoming Department of Education.

(<https://edu.wyoming.gov/for-district-leadership/special-programs/> )

The district adopted a learning plan and posted it on the district website during the pandemic. The state special services offices said all specially designed instruction and related services would continue with no other direction (Wyoming Department of Education, 2020a). However, the implementation lacked teacher confidence which was not supported by technology in the classroom (OECD Education & Skills Today, 2020). Educators in the public schools seemed unprepared to transition to online and continue individualized instruction for students with disabilities, even with selected technology items available for some time (Asim et al., 2020; Hill, 2020). Educators had access to training for many types of technology in the classroom but missed the teaching component.

Other educators had concerns about students with disabilities and families not learning to use technology (Cagiltay et al., 2019). The challenges existed in meeting individual student IEPs or ILPs using online learning and the ability to adjust teaching for the students (Terada, 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020). The lack of contingency plans to deal with the forced educational challenges of moving from in-classroom to online learning during pandemics such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural disasters necessitates further research. More research is essential on transition challenges other than costs

associated with the internet and computer availability (Alea et al., 2020; Alhumaid et al., 2020; Lassoued et al., 2020). There are also recommendations for further studies on the issues of teachers not feeling prepared to teach students with disabilities online, the integration of technology in the classroom, and professional development choices provided by the school district to exhibit online learning skills (Al Lily et al., 2020; Anderson & Putman, 2020; Crouse et al., 2018). A few studies (e.g., Alea et al., 2020; Alhumaid et al., 2020; Das et al., 2020; Karademir et al., 2020; Lassoued et al., 2020) have examined the challenges of students and students with disabilities transitioning to online learning during the pandemic. However, these studies did not address the individualized needs of students with disabilities (Alhumaid et al., 2020; Kaden, 2020; Kinard & Mahaffey, 2020; Prior, 2020; Terada, 2020). The Schlossberg transition model (2011) conceptual framework explicitly focused on transitions in four stages, which was essential for future studies to understand the influence of intervention decisions (Crouse et al., 2018; Tremmel et al., 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures, schools slowed or stopped interventions for students with disabilities (Turner & Klein, 2021). Although researchers have investigated the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the research has not examined meeting the individualized education or learning plans (Crouse et al., 2018; Petretto et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020). While previous studies have described internet access issues, computers, electrical power, and the cost of internet access, few studies have examined challenges for secondary special education teachers and parents to provide services (Minkos & Gelbar, 2020; Prior, 2020; Tremmel et al.,

2020). Other researchers recommend learning about future teacher preparations and efforts with parents to integrate technology (Crouse et al., 2018; Meleo-Erwin et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020). Therefore, the defined synthesized gap for the proposed study was to identify secondary special education teachers' and parents' challenges in transitioning online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming. The specific gap for this research was the individualized needs of students with disabilities and the challenges of how teachers and parents supported the transition from in-classroom to online learning (Crouse et al., 2018; Petretto et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges of secondary special education teachers' and parents' during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities and identify future supports for this kind of transition to online learning. The COVID-19 pandemic closed schools in March of 2020, requiring educators to change from teaching in the classroom to online learning (Akin & Gözel, 2020; Maher, 2020; PBS News Hour & Wyoming PBS, 2020). However, it was evident that educators and supervisors did not feel adequately prepared for this transition, and special education students may have been left out (Eachempati & Ramnarayan, 2020; Hill, 2020; Petretto et al., 2020). School programs can strengthen students with disabilities' learning skills with better technology integration in the classroom for consistency. During the COVID-19 pandemic closure of schools, better integration for students with disabilities into an online learning environment would have

minimized any issues impacting online learning had the groundwork been in place. In classroom routines, using technology in the school reduces the stress of change from in-person to online learning during pandemics and disasters. Intentional technology integration into the special education classroom could have provided students with a foundation for using technology. Intentional opportunities to work with families using technology would have provided home rudiments for students with disabilities (Al Lily et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2020; Kinard & Mahaffey, 2020).

### **Research Questions**

The research question in a study provides a course for the researcher to stay centered on the cause and effect. Clearly stated overarching questions can develop more specific questions during analysis (Kross & Giust, 2019; Study Higher, 2020). The guiding research question for this study was: What challenges were experienced to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities by secondary special education teachers and parents to support the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming? Additional questions that were conducive to this basic qualitative research included the following three subquestions:

Subquestion 1 (SQ1): How do teachers and parents in Wyoming describe the transition experience from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Subquestion 2 (SQ2): What adjustments were made by special education teachers and parents in Wyoming with the instructional *supports* in place when the

transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Subquestion 3 (SQ3): What changes or *supports* would help special education teachers and parents in Wyoming transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the future like a pandemic?

The qualitative study used the Schlossberg transition model's four areas identified: (a) *situation*, (b) *self*, (c) *supports*, and (d) *strategies* (Schlossberg et al., 1995). These four areas of the model helped identify and classify the experiences of secondary special education teachers and parents to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) theory guided the research, which used semistructured interviews with open-ended questions for the participant to expand answers that provided information in the four areas (Schlossberg, 2011; Workman, 2011).

### **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The concept that grounded the study was Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) model, which examined adults' adjustment to inevitable or not predictable changes. Using the Schlossberg transition model, the concept involved the forced moving forward from one life event to another: in this case, the force moving from an in-classroom to an online setting. An example was the COVID-19 pandemic transition, an unexpected or forced transition (Schlossberg, 1981). The COVID-19 pandemic directly influenced or forced the transition variables of learning online, technology availability, in-service training, or

formal educational preparation. Those factors played a role in the student's online services in an academic setting. Schlossberg presented the “4 Ss,” which identified transition process events and nonevents as follows:

- The first “S” is the *situation* at the time of the event; the COVID-19 pandemic caused schools' closure.
- The second “S” is the *self*, the person's inner coping, which is how special service teachers and parents dealt with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic transition.
- The third “S” includes the *social support needed to transition for well-being*. Relating to pieces required to move to an online environment and the type of *support* the district had available for special service educators and the process.
- The last of the four “S” are *strategies* dealing with coping skills. Schlossberg (2011) identified three coping types: changing the *situation*, reframing the *situation*, and managing stress after the stressor has happened.

As an individual transitions from one status to another in their life (e.g., the process of obtaining and maintaining a job), the adaption process for an individual can vary depending on the person's access to resources and personal factors such as administrator supportiveness (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Other recent studies used Schlossberg's transition model to examine the effects of transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples such as Bradbury et al.'s (2020) research on Minnesota teachers' transition from in-person to online instruction, Adjei et al.'s (2021) research on higher education supports for student academics and cocurricular needs, Ning et al.'s (2021)



research on collegiate experiences with transitions from in-person to the virtual environment, and finally Peixoto et al.'s (2020) research on how psychologists in the positions of human resources managers dealt with adaptive processes during this change. These studies supported Schlossberg's transition model for this research. The study focused on special education teachers' and parents' experiences changing from in-classroom to online learning and adapting to teaching for student success.

I conducted interviews with a minimum of four teachers and two parents of students with disabilities who transitioned to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. These participants completed the questionnaire selection process, providing demographics and contact information. It was possible to schedule interviews until saturation was met. I used open coding and thematic analysis to analyze the results. Focusing on secondary special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities who transitioned to online schooling, their perspectives were consistent with Schlossberg et al.'s model. Individuals' transitions were affected by internal and external factors such as family involvement and school resources and how these factors impacted that transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

### **Nature of the Study**

The research question in this basic qualitative study incorporated the Schlossberg transition model using the COVID-19 pandemic and schools closing as the *situational* variable. The challenge participants had with transitioning from in-classroom to online learning was the *self* variable. The request from participants to the school district on implementing the individualized needs of students with disabilities relied on documents

from the United States Department of Education and state documents from the Wyoming Department of Education. The school district provided no actual guidelines that identified other variables of *support* and *strategies* (Laramie County School District 1, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2020; Wyoming Department of Education, 2019; Wyoming Special Education Programs Division, 2020b). The study aimed to produce real-world knowledge of the challenges for the participants during the transition to online learning. Participants solicited for the study were from within Wyoming. I was able to reach four teachers and two parents for semistructured interviews. I worked with my dissertation committee to ensure the questions aligned with the research, reviewed all feedback on interview protocols, and piloted the interview questions (see Castillo-Montoya, 2016). A reference entry for the research design was based on Schlossberg et al. (1995).

### **Definitions**

The following definitions were significant in applying them to this special education research to provide a common understanding (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The special education terms offered a general understanding of use in this research (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The following terms provided will assist the reader in this paper,

*COVID-19*: COVID-19 is the coronavirus disease, a variant of the novel coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2, identified towards the end of 2019 (Moderna U.S. Inc., 2021).

*Individual educational plan (IEP):* The IEP is a plan developed by a team of school professionals and student families working together on identified disabilities outlined by IDEA for behavior or learning goals (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

*Individual learning plan (ILP):* The ILP is a document developed to identify learning goals for the student in reading, writing, or math (REL Regional Education Laboratory Program, 2020).

*Parent:* The parent will be defined using the IDEAs definition of “a biological or adoptive parent of a child (Sec. 300.30 (a),” n.d.)”; foster parent, unless law or regulations prohibit a foster parent from acting as a parent; guardian authorized to act as child’s parent, or authorized to make educational decisions; a person acting in the place of a biological or adoptive parent which the child lives (including a grandparent, stepparent, or other relatives), or “legally responsible for the child’s welfare (Sec. 300.30 (a),” n.d.)”; a surrogate parent appointed by law according to § 300.519 or section 639(a)(5) of the Act (Sec. 300.30 (a),” n.d.).

*The situation variable:* The *situation* variable asks the question, “what is happening?” in this transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

*The self variable:* The *self* variable asks the question, “to whom is it happening?” referring to the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

*The support variable:* The *supported* variable asks, “what help is available?” during the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

*The strategies variable:* The *strategies* variable asks, “How does this person cope?” during the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

### **Assumptions**

In this basic qualitative study, I assumed that all respondents answered freely and honestly to their best. There were no attempts to control participants' responses or require their participation in the study. As the researcher, I interviewed multiple participants. I facilitated sharing personal experiences for identifying themes in the transition from in-classroom to online learning (see Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The assumptions for the study were opportunities to understand the participants' experiences during the transition from in-classroom to online and that they were forthcoming by protected confidentiality. I also assumed that all respondents had received some training with technology and how to utilize it to educate students with disabilities.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The delimitations levied upon this study were the Wyoming schools that granted permission to distribute the information and participants who provided information for an interview. The study did not include all private or all public schools in Wyoming. This study's results do not speak for all secondary special education teachers and parents. The study focused on the state of Wyoming, considered rural, and how special education teachers and parents experienced the COVID-19 pandemic transition. The study collected those experiences to understand the challenges the four special education teachers faced, and two parents took part in the study for Wyoming. The study only comprised secondary special education teachers who were teaching during the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic and the parents of students during that time. With the study being limited to participating schools in Wyoming, the results may

not be generalized to schools throughout the United States. Respondents have different levels of knowledge and experiences with the participants' challenges in meeting the individualized needs of students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic transition from in-classroom to online learning affecting their responses to the questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Goes & Simon, 2017). The interviews were open response questions that provided additional factors for further examination and consideration.

### **Limitations**

As a qualitative study, it was a concern that the sample size may be small due to the inability to find and recruit participants. An adequate sample size was essential to reach saturation by repeating ideas or themes (see Goes & Simon, 2017). Qualitative research intends not to find cause and effect but to understand and ascribe meaning to an event or occurrence from the participant's point of view (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The study examined the participants' perceptions of the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, the target participants were secondary special education teachers and parents. Other pieces of the transition included shifting the student from school to adult life, starting at age 16. Different individualized interventions for students, not just school-related, were shared in the semistructured interviews. In gathering the data with the semistructured interviews, it was essential to focus on the school education and no other outside services. These items are suggested for further research.

Positive and negative professional relationships can interfere with data collection or people willing to participate in the research. According to leadership in education, I

researched a timely topic, and colleagues asked if I needed help recruiting. Those I worked with could have been strongly encouraged to participate in this study, which could have caused resentment or other issues with the data collection process. Additional concerns were familiarity with those in the district. It was necessary to remember and follow the protocols to minimize those issues. I reminded participants that it was their choice to participate (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

An unusual bias dealing with choice and politics caused problems during the interview process, as some did not understand or agree with the school closures. There were heated conversations about masking, quarantining, and vaccines. During the interview, it was necessary to remind participants of the topic of the study and refer back to the topic questions to focus on the educational pieces of the research. There was a concern about personal bias and how that may interact with the study. I was aware and mindful of the purpose of the study as there were issues of differing opinions about off-topic comments that were unrelated to the study. When reviewing notes, I reflected on personal experiences to identify biases and checked participant meaning—not inferring personal bias from the participant experiences. I remained aware of the biases and objectively understood the participants' shared stories.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study was significant because of the implications for positive social change-initiated conversations with stakeholders to implement new instructional *strategies* to *support* transitions to online learning (Cagiltay et al., 2019). Furthermore, the study helped develop policy recommendations focusing on teachers and parents by identifying

steps to transition from in-classroom to online for students with disabilities (Turner & Klein, 2021). Using the data collected and finding themes informed how students with disabilities and special education teachers and parents advocated during times of change (Kamenetz, 2020). The findings focused on the professional development needed to address specific challenges with specific intervention recommendations.

### **Summary**

In Chapter 1, I presented the need to study the individualized requirements of students with disabilities and the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning in Wyoming. Additional information on issues dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic transition to online learning for students with disabilities with information from other research cited provided a starting place for the research questions in this qualitative study. The Schlossberg transition model was the conceptual framework for the study. I discussed how the four areas of (a) *situation*, (b) *self*, c) *social supports*, and (d) *strategies* applied to this study. Assumptions and limitations were explored, and the scope and delimitations were presented. Common terms were presented to assist with reading for common understanding. Chapter 2 is current literature related to special education and the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on schooling. The following areas are the introduction, literature search strategy, conceptual framework, literature review related to key variables and/or concepts, living and teaching in Wyoming, transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, perceptions of learning transition during the COVID-19 pandemic, transitions for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, individual

education plans and individual learning plans during the COVID-19 pandemic, and summary and conclusion.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Little was known about secondary teachers' and parents' experiences in Wyoming and the challenges of a quick transition to teaching students with disabilities in an online learning environment imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities and identify future supports for this kind of transition to online learning. The basic qualitative problem prompted a literature search for research-based information on how special education teachers and parents transition IEPs and ILPs to online learning. The literature reviewed for this study includes information on education in rural areas during the COVID-19 pandemic, living and teaching in Wyoming, state constitutional guidelines, and special education funding models. In other studies, researchers discovered that the transition to online during the COVID-19 pandemic dealt with access to the internet, devices, and costs associated with technology. Researchers had also studied educational groups' perceptions of learning transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic concerns from teachers and parents about skills in using technology, family support, and student self-motivation with technology. The studies about transitions for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic provided researchers with pieces needed for learning. The researchers determined that good constant communication between schools and other community service providers was essential to the transition for the students. The area closely related to this research was the IEP or ILP and the COVID-19 pandemic; these documents identify the individualized needs of students during the year.

For example, researchers found equity challenges in the transition to online regarding the provision of reasonable accommodations without lost student progress (Al Lily et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2020; Soudien, 2020). Chapter 2 includes the introduction, literature search strategy, and conceptual framework, literature review related to key variables and/or concepts are education in rural areas during the COVID-19 pandemic, living and teaching in Wyoming, transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, perceptions of learning transition during the COVID-19 pandemic, transitions for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, individual education plans and individual learning plans during the COVID-19 pandemic, education in rural areas during COVID-19, and summary and conclusion.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The keywords and databases searched in the literature review provided the framework for this basic qualitative research. The information was derived from concurrent online databases, peer-reviewed articles, bibliographies, research books, and journals. These gathered resources were from The Walden University Library, University of Wyoming Libraries, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, Google Scholar, Sage Premier, and dissertations via ProQuest. I examined sources relative to strategic tools utilized to advocate for research about the challenges of teachers' and parents' transition to online learning. The keywords used in searching these databases were *students with disabilities, COVID-19, teacher perceptions, high school, preparedness, transition theory, services for students with disabilities, new demands on teachers, new demands on teachers in U.S., education, technology integration, Schlossberg transition model, special*

*education, individual learning plans, individual education plans, 504, Wyoming special education, parent perceptions, reasons for moving to Wyoming, Wyoming Constitution, Wyoming Statues, and professional teaching standards board.* The terms were investigated individually and together to establish a current and systematic procedure on the topics and COVID-19. I gleaned information from existing studies to build the research.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The theories and/or concepts that ground this study included the Schlossberg transition model (Schlossberg et al., 1995), which examined adults' adjustment to inevitable or not predictable changes; this model was applicable because the COVID-19 pandemic transitions were unexpected or forced (Schlossberg, 1981). Using the Schlossberg transition model, the concept involves the forced moving forward from one life event to another: in this case, the force moving from an in-classroom to an online setting. The COVID-19 pandemic directly influenced or forced the transition variables of learning online, technology availability, in-service training, or formal educational preparation. Those factors play a role in the student's online services in an academic setting. Schlossberg presented the "4 Ss," which identify transition process events and nonevents as follows:

- The first "S" is the *situation* at the time of the event, the COVID-19 pandemic causing schools' closure.

- The second “S” is the *self*, the person's inner coping, which is how special service teachers and parents are dealing with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic transition.
- The third “S” includes the *social support* needed to transition. The person's well-being relates to the pieces required to move to an online environment and the type of support the district has available for special service educators and the process.
- The last “S” is *strategies* dealing with coping skills. Schlossberg (2011) identifies three coping types: changing the situation, reframing the situation, and managing stress after the stressor has happened.

As an individual transitions from one status to another in their life (e.g., the process of obtaining and maintaining a job), the adaption process for an individual can vary depending on the person's access to resources and personal factors such as administrator supportiveness (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The theory guided the researcher in examining the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents unprepared for the transition to online learning when schools closed for the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other recent studies have used Schlossberg's transition model to examine the effects of transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Examples such as Bradbury et al.'s (2020) research on Minnesota teachers' transition from in-person to online instruction explained that educators found real value in the enhanced change to education. Adjei et al.'s (2021) research on higher education supports student academics and co-curricular needs identified using Schlossberg et al. (1995); students can adapt and adjust. Ning et

al.'s (2021) research on collegiate experiences with transitions from in-person to the virtual environment found declines in school events, social events, and socialization. Peixoto et al.'s (2020) research on how psychologists in the positions of human resources managers dealt with adaptive processes during this change. Peixoto et al. (2020) state that Schlossberg's variables were helpful for people in the corporate world and did notice that it depended on the support provided for those processing the varying events due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These studies support Schlossberg's Transition Theory in this research. The study focused on special education teachers and parents and their experiences changing from in-classroom to online learning and adapting to teaching for student success.

I conducted interviews with a minimum of four teachers and two parents of students with disabilities who transitioned to online learning and continued interviewing participants if needed until saturation was met. I used open coding and thematic analysis to analyze the results. Focusing on secondary special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities transitioning to online insertion perspectives was consistent with Schlossberg et al.'s theory. It was about the individual's transition affected by internal and external factors such as family involvement and school resources and how that impacted the transition (Schlossberg et al., 1995).

### **Literature Review Related to Key Variables and/or Concepts.**

#### **Education in Rural Areas During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In examining literature about COVID-19 and the transition from in-classroom to online learning for special education, most early studies were outside the United States.

Dube's (2020) study examined the effects of COVID-19 on rural learners in South Africa. In Alea et al.'s (2020) research about educators in the Philippines adjusting to distance learning, teachers were ready to continue school. Still, there were problems for those offering distance learning. As school closures were happening, Belay's (2020) study in Ethiopia focused on how the pandemic impacted both rich and poor students and those living in rural and urban areas.

At the start of this research, studies worldwide focused on transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the pandemic. In these similar studies, there were concerns about unexpected changes from in-classroom to online learning. The problems focused on communication with students and stable internet for distance learning. There were challenges with the types of technology used for learning: tablets, phones, laptops, or anything else that could connect to the internet (Aguilera & Nightengale-Lee, 2020; Belay, 2020; Whalley & Barbour, 2020). The teachers in the studies also felt there were problems were using social media, emails, or other forms of communication for distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The connection between these rural areas in different countries and Wyoming seemed natural. Wyoming has low population numbers and vast open spaces where online learning would be an issue with the same challenges.

### **Living and Teaching in Wyoming**

Wyoming is the 44<sup>th</sup> state of the union and has many unique features, from the plains on the east side to the Teton mountains on the west side. The state is the least populated, with only two major cities identified as metropolitan. Casper is mainly known for the highest-paid industries like mining, quarrying, and gas and oil extraction.

Cheyenne became the capital due to the Union Pacific Railroad and cattle, leaving the rest of the state with 173 small towns with populations from 32,857 (Gillette and Laramie) to 0 (Buford). Even with the small population of the whole state, people come to Wyoming to experience four seasons. There are outdoor activities and wide-open spaces, thinking that small populations provide more opportunities for their children in school (Barroga, 2020; Gaille, 2019). Families or individuals often move to Wyoming because of the educational system. The advantages of public schools have a higher rate of per-pupil funding per the Wyoming constitution than neighboring states (Exchange, 2018; *Wyoming Const. Article 7 § 1-2, 1924 (P. 37)*).

In Wyoming statutes, Title 21 is the breakdown of how the education system will work in the state (W.S. 21, n.d.). Those interested in teaching or moving a family to Wyoming check out the schools, the type of schooling available for children, and the extracurricular activities in a rural state. People interested in teaching special education have seen Wyoming as a leader in funding for special education at 100% reimbursement. The reimbursement to the local district is from the state government (Blauser, 2021; W.S. 21-13-309(m)(v)(E)(II) n.d.). During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wyoming schools saw an influx of students with disabilities. Parents' felt the move to a smaller school with smaller class sizes would provide better interventions than their current schools (Kudelska, 2021).

As much of Wyoming is rural with two metropolitan cities, it is not easy to find people to teach in some areas, and now it is difficult with the new demands of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Wyoming, becoming a teacher requires the prospective person

to have a teaching degree or certification from a teaching program, an accredited college or university, or a national equivalent. The person then submits their transcripts to the Wyoming Professional Teaching Standards Board (PTSB) for a license to teach in Wyoming (Wyoming Professional Standards Board, 2018b). For special education, either a master's degree or an endorsement is required again from an accredited college or university, or a national equivalent recognized by PTSB for these areas: a generalist, behavioral and emotional disabilities, cognitive disabilities, deaf and hard of hearing, learning disability, physical and health disability, or visual disability (Special Education Guide, 2021; Wyoming Professional Standards Board, 2018a, 2018c). In Wyoming, there is an exception authorization when a teaching position can not be filled with a certificated person. The exception is for one year and can be used for three years while the person works on completing certification in that field (Special Education Guide, 2021; Wyoming Professional Teaching Standards Board, 2018d).

There are many responsibilities in the day-to-day work of a teacher—the duties ensure student safety and learning. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the traditional way of teaching from the in-classroom style to an online style that had not been the focus (Caroline, 2017; Nasr, 2020). For example, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused a change in how teachers and students interact during lectures and introduce new material to develop student learning (Kaden, 2020). According to Kaden (2020), the COVID-19 pandemic has changed many teachers' professional lives. Kaden's (2020) research was a case study of a male secondary teacher's instructional practices and workload in rural Alaska using qualitative and quantitative data. Kaden (2020) identified how the forced



move to online learning was a catalyst for future students' new teaching methods. Kaden (2020) wanted to learn about teacher experiences during the emergency online instructional move on changes to workload, providing equitable instruction for students, and successful delivery of materials. Kaden's (2020) study suggested further research on elementary or older students and how to support equitable learning outcomes for all. As a case study Kaden (2020) focused on one person and how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the experience of a teacher and their students.

### **Transition to Online Learning During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The United States has not had to deal with a pandemic since the 1918 flu, and COVID-19 has presented new continuing education issues (Akin & Gözel, 2020; Maher, 2020). The transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic produced a unique condition. Schools were closed to slow or stop the spread of the virus (Akin & Gözel, 2020; CDC, 2021; Maher, 2020). Since the 1918 flu, education has changed very little. The technology available in the classroom should encourage a transition to online learning that applies the Schlossberg transition model of a forced moved *situation* variable (Maher, 2020). Researchers worldwide studied the transition to online and found similarities in their studies, student's access to the internet, access to devices, and the cost of the internet (Alea et al., 2020; Dube, 2020; Giovannella et al., 2020).

Alea et al.'s (2020) research in the Philippines explored educators' understanding of the COVID-19 pandemic and their school's readiness for distance learning. The questionnaire was researcher-made, broken into four parts, and reviewed by distant learning education experts and health experts to ensure the questions were valid and

correct. The data was collected using Google forms for awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic and difficulties shifting from in-classroom to online learning (Alea et al., 2020). The four areas in Alea et al.'s (2020) research questionnaire focused on; (a) first was demographic information, (b) teachers' awareness of the COVID-19 pandemic, (c) how prepared were the teachers and schools for this transition to online learning, and (d) challenges of distance learning. The challenges were similar to other studies worldwide and in the United States (Aguilar, 2020; Asare et al., n.d.; Hodges et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Lemay et al., 2021).

Dube's (2020) qualitative study examined South Africa's effect using critical emancipatory research (CER). The theoretical work was to have everyone as part of the life-changing experiences like Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *situation* variable. Dube's study focused on two questions "what are the learning challenges faced by rural learners in South Africa" and "how can online learning be enhanced in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic" (Dube, 2020). Dube's (2020) research question focuses on rural areas. By comparison, Wyoming is a large state with great distances. Services may be challenging to provide for a student's IEP or ILP (Census History Staff U.S. Census Bureau, 2019; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Ferri et al.'s (2020) qualitative research concerns technology, pedagogy, and social challenges and how those occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic transition to online learning. The themes are not unique and are similar to other research (Al Lily et al., 2020; Burrows et al., 2020; Kilty et al., 2021; Kinard & Mahaffey, 2020).

Kim and Asbury (2020) researched the closing of schools in England during the COVID-19 pandemic and teachers' experiences during the first five to six weeks of the

closures. One of their themes was the uncertainty of how the transition from in-classroom to online would work (Das et al., 2020; Lemay et al., 2021; Nasr, 2020; Van Nuland et al., 2020). In college, the traditional teaching models are for in-classroom settings. The new task for educators was redesigning lessons created for in-classroom learning, the *self*-variable (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Finally, Kinard and Mahaffey (2020) did a mixed-methods study with 439 k-12 participants in 42 states, answering questions about their readiness to transition to online learning at the start of the COVID19 pandemic. Many participants thought they were left to learn for themselves and had a trial-and-error period with different technology tools (Barnes et al., 2020; Kilty et al., 2021; Nasr, 2020; Van Nuland et al., 2020).

Kinard and Mahaffey (2020) had comments from participants about the lack of notice, training, or adjustments for all involved in the transition to online learning. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *support variable* was the data voiced by the participants in the research gathered (Burrows et al., 2020; Das et al., 2020; Justis et al., 2020). Using the *support variable* from Schlossberg et al. (1995), it was essential to learn how or if *supports* were available for people during the transition and how they looked. Justis et al.'s (2020) research examined how the private school assisted educators in a positive transition culture and *support* when challenges occurred.

Van Nuland et al.'s (2020) research found issues affecting educators in online *support*, professional development for online learning, and the transitioning materials needed for the online learning experience. These studies focused on the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic closing of schools. The studies identified

general challenges of transition to online learning. They did not provide information on meeting the specific individualized needs of students with disabilities. Using the transition variables of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) theory, the data examined contributed to creating a framework for unexpected events forcing a move from in-classroom to online learning.

### **Perceptions of Learning Transition During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Both educators and families had concerns about transitioning students with disabilities to online learning. A parent shared concern about the move for her daughter and the impact on learning as the child works with 12 different teachers in a week due to her educational and physical needs (NBC News, n.d.; Preston, 2020). In some states, educators sent home worksheet packets to ensure that all students' schoolwork was available. Still, many parents across the country needed help (Garland, 2020). The factors connected to Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) research were the *situation* variable of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges of transitioning to online learning.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges to educators and families working together while schools closed (UNESCO, 2020). In applying Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) research, the *self* variable identified the difficulties in meeting the requirements of a child's IEP or ILP (J. R. Anderson et al., 2020; Baber, 2020; Carpenter & Dunn, 2021; Wang, 2020). Another issue was that before the schools closed because of the COVID-19 pandemic, parents were not actively seeking or engaging in daily information about their child's schoolwork (Adams & Todd, 2020; Wang, 2020). In a study by Ezra et al. (2021), parents juggled work and helping their children caused priority issues. The

communication between educators and families postulated the parents' positive or negative feelings about their child's transition to online learning (Ameis et al., 2020; Justis et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020).

A lack of preparation and professional development made some educators feel unprepared for the COVID-19 pandemic transition (Crouse et al., 2018). Educators felt the support from administrative, state, and federal levels outlining expectations helped transition students with disabilities. Educators in different areas also felt the workload and organizational time had increased when working with students online (Giovannella et al., 2020; Kaden, 2020). A few researchers presented information about the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic transition (Justis et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020). The above information offers several *support* variables for Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) theory.

While there seems to be little information about the change from in-classroom to online learning, several studies outlined coping methods to help transition during the COVID-19 pandemic providing *strategy* variables (Schlossberg et al., 1995). In Tremmel et al.'s (2020) research, a school district provided students with disabilities materials, equipment, and access to other resources to support progress on IEP outcomes. Administration and educators had contact logs to document any immediate follow-up dilemmas or advantages for future reference (Justis et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020). The research produced provides a framework to consider when examining the experiences of secondary special education teachers and parents to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming.

## **Transitions for Students with Disabilities During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

During the COVID-19 pandemic, there were many changes globally and in the United States. Each state handled the changes set forth using new rules to slow the spreading of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Wyoming, the governor closed the state following all federal and Center for Disease Control guidelines (Akin & Gözel, 2020; Maher, 2020; PBS News Hour & Wyoming PBS, 2020; Star-Tribune Staff, 2020; State of Wyoming, 2020). Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) situation variable, the “what is happening,” was answered with the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures. In the haste to transition and provide equal educational opportunities, educators prepared the required materials in different formats (S. E. Anderson & Putman, 2020; Battistin et al., 2021; Mellard et al., 2020). In Wyoming, schooling continued with a two-week shift from in-classroom to online learning. Educators must follow the federal laws for students with disabilities, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by providing services (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990; IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), 2019; Jameson et al., 2019).

Tremmel et al. (2020) wrote about a school district in Texas and the lessons they learned during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they continued to serve students with disabilities. The study was a rural school district with about 1600 students and 210 staff (Tremmel et al., 2020). Therefore, the experiences that Tremmel et al. (2020) shared could parallel experiences in Wyoming areas. Following Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) next factor of the *self*-variable or “to whom is it happening?” The *self* is the secondary special

education teachers and parents of students with disabilities in rural areas identified in Tremmel et al.'s (2020) research. Tremmel et al.'s (2020) themes were constant about the continual communication between staff, students, parents, and community organizations for special education students. Part of the communication with students and families is the paper packets created as some do not have or want to deal with technology. The school's responsibility was to ensure they provided multiple access types for instruction (Jameson et al., 2019; Lovitz et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020).

Educators were concerned with meeting the needs of students with disabilities due to IEP or ILP. The IEP or ILP interventions focus on learning and behaviors during traditional school days (Al-Ataby, 2020; Jeste et al., 2020; Kilty et al., 2021; Lemay et al., 2021). Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *support* variable "what help is available?" depended on the person and their specific needs. Das et al. (2020) learned that there were still issues with internet connections, tools to use, and socioeconomic issues with the shift to remote learning.

Lassoued et al.'s (2020) research found challenges hindering participants' online learning: either self-imposed obstacles or lack of motivation, causing barriers for students. Petretto et al.'s (2020) study brought attention to inequitable access to learning in three areas: availability of devices and internet connections, family use at home, and reasonable accommodation from specialized teachers. A student's learning depends on the family's use of technology and the available time allocated. Students with disabilities need extra help and structure during learning with specialized interventions. Petretto et al.'s (2020) opinion that Universal Design for Learning (UDL) may provide an online

framework for students with disabilities. Petretto et al. continue to discuss how schools can help determine what services are delivered to students with disabilities and their families. In Jeste et al.'s (2020) research, communication between schools and families was essential when identified skills or behaviors require work, as did Tremmel et al. (2020) in answering Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *support* variable.

Battistin et al.'s (2021) research followed the Robert Hollman Foundation (RHF) from Holland, which educates blind and visually impaired students. The school did not want a break in interventions for these students during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Robert Hollman Foundation developed a program, the Distance Support Project, so that interventions could continue during the closing of schools (Battistin et al., 2021). Parents involved in this project felt it was successful and supportive for students. However, those providing interventions in this project were unsure, causing a substantial impact on how to rethink their interactions (J. R. Anderson et al., 2020; Battistin et al., 2021; Bradbury et al., 2020; Carpenter & Dunn, 2021). Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *strategies* variable, "how does this person cope?" raised more concerns.

Gupta et al. (2020) wrote a letter from neurologists voicing their concerns about the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on students with disabilities and their families. The neurologist's concerns focused on the restricted access to health care and reduced rehabilitation with school interruptions. Following Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *strategies* variable, the "how does this person cope?" question was answered. During the COVID-19 pandemic closing of a school described how teachers worked with the families of students with disabilities. The concern was the effects on children with disabilities, which



created problems for the special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities and their perceptions of online support learning (Gupta et al., 2020).

### **Individual Education Plan and Individual Learning Plan During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In the United States, schooling provided a way for people to learn to read the bible, the virtues of family, and community standards. Education became a status symbol for male students (Chen, 2021; Lisa, 2020; Wright, 2019). Over time, education has progressed from religious to secular education today (Chen, 2021). A groundbreaking moment for people with disabilities was the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954, dealing with racial segregation (History.com Editors, 2021). The civil rights movement helped confirm that “separate but equal” was not equal (The Supreme Court of the United States, 1954).

In 1966 an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act used federal funds for students with disabilities (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1966). In 1975 the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was signed into law. Over time the amendments were rewritten and drafted into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), 2019). In 1982 a court ruled in the *Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley* that special education programs must be individualized for students to meet their unique needs (Tucker, 1983).

In 1997, amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act were added to guarantee meaningful, measurable goals or outcomes for students with

disabilities. It also required more involvement of the parents in developing the individualized education program (Americans with Disabilities Act, 1990; Sabino, 2020). Individual education plans or individual learning plans follow federal guidelines with specific goals for student performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), there are 13 disabilities identified, “autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment including blindness” (U.S. Department of Education (IDEA), 2017)

Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) *situation* variable was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students with disabilities, special education teachers, and families on daily traditional school routines. There were interventions to support students with disabilities during the traditional school day, including occupational, physical, and specialized speech therapy as part of their routine (Alhumaid et al., 2020; Preston, 2020; Prior, 2020). In an interview with NBC News, JoAnna Van Brusselen expressed concerns about not having access to the services her daughter needs for a stroke she suffered in utero (Preston, 2020). The occupational therapy after the stroke keeps Iolani's hand from sitting curled up on her chest. Since the closing of schools, JoAnna was concerned that Iolani would regress as she worked with two teachers, three instructional aides, and seven therapists (Preston, 2020; Smith, 2020).

Many people take part in the care and instruction of students, and they voiced the same concerns of parents about the COVID-19 pandemic slip. These students are

vulnerable to regression when services are modified or shifted when not ready (Frederick et al., 2020). Answering Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *self*-variable, the students with individual education plans or individual learning plans were affected by the closing of schools as it revised their identified services. These educators were laboring to make distance learning work for their students with disabilities (Frederick et al., 2020; Jameson et al., 2020; Smith, 2020).

There were unexpected challenges with closing schools and how to serve students with disabilities regarding the free appropriate public education (FAPE) part of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Frederick et al., 2020). Special education law relies on FAPE as it is the foundation for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. However, FAPE requires conforming to individual education plans for students (Jameson et al., 2020). Utilizing Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *support* variable, the families of students with disabilities took issue with how schools would adhere to their student's IEP according to federal law (Frederick et al., 2020; Jameson et al., 2020; Smith, 2020). Special education students filed lawsuits in some states as their IEP or ILP was jeopardized ascribable to school shutdowns. One example was the lawsuit about the education for students with disabilities not considered "life-sustaining." The IEP services changed from 32.5 hours in the classroom setting to the online interaction of 1.25 hours (Jameson et al., 2020; Wolfman-Arent, 2020).

Carpenter and Dunn's (2021) research collected around the United States found an inconsistent implementation of moving IEPs or ILPs online for students and families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition to online presents very different learning

concerns for students with disabilities and how their IEPs or ILPs are implemented. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *strategies* variable asks how the person copes with these transitions. Macy et al.'s (2018) study identified practices that *support* learning for students with disabilities, such as professional development, modeling diversity, assignment choice, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), providing equity in education.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The literature review revealed no identifiable specifics about how IEPs or ILPs satisfied the needs of students with disabilities during the urgent transition from in-classroom to online learning. Living and teaching in Wyoming have advantages for families and those with a child who has a disability. The State of Wyoming included a section on education for all students into its constitution with an allocated allocation of monies for special education. Obtaining work as a teacher in Wyoming can take a long time but is still manageable.

The responsibilities of a traditional classroom teacher have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic. Educators are recreating themselves to work in the online classroom. The necessary transition to online learning was not easy for all educators and families as it depended on the levels of knowledge, comfort, and access to technology. Living in some areas had difficulty with the internet regarding the cost, access, consistency, and technology available to connect.

The transition to online learning for students with disabilities caused unintentional learning gaps and disruptions in routines. During the transition, the concern was

providing instruction with the same educational opportunities for all students, even students with disabilities, from in-classroom to online learning. Concerns arose about fulfilling federal FAPE and IDEA laws and state laws that mandate student IEP or ILP growth. The lack of government officials' understanding of the federal laws and concerns about compliance for a students' education plans or individual learning plans. Lawsuits are filed on behalf of students with disabilities not receiving an education equal to their peers. Chapter 3 includes the introduction, research design, rationale, researcher role, methodology, instrumentation, recruitment procedures, participation, data collection, data analysis plan, trustworthiness issues, ethical procedures, and summary.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

This research design was of a basic qualitative nature, using participants' points of view as the foundation examined for the central idea (Creswell & Báez, 2020). The basic qualitative design informed my plan, articulation, and work process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities and identify future supports for transitions to online learning. The qualitative research design showed an interconnected and interrelated grounded study, not remote from the other parts. The aligning of the basic qualitative design used research to examine the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition. It was used to acquire data from interviews and questionnaires (see Appendices A and B). In Chapter 3, the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and trustworthiness issues are examined.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

This section includes a presentation of the research design and a basic qualitative study. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) explained that the main characteristic of basic qualitative research was the individual's construct of their world. There are three points of interest for basic qualitative research. The first was interpreting people's experiences, the second was how their world is constructed, and the third was the meaning attached to the experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). These three areas aligned with the

overarching question that examined special education teachers' and families' transitions from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The guiding research question was used to align the work throughout the study, guiding my understanding of the participants' perception of the COVID-19 pandemic event. The question provided a framework for other questions for the interview protocol, soliciting specific information on the topic. The questions for the research were open-ended, inviting more information from the participants. The guiding research question of this research pertained to challenges special education teachers and parents experienced during their transition to online learning in Wyoming during the COVID-19 pandemic. While collecting data from participants, three subquestions were asked following the guiding research question.

Research Question: What challenges were experienced to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities by secondary special education teachers and parents to support the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming?

SQ1: How did teachers and parents in Wyoming describe the transition experience from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

SQ2: What adjustments were made by special education teachers and parents in Wyoming with the instructional *supports* in place when the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic?

SQ3: What changes or *supports* would help special education teachers and parents in Wyoming transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the future like a pandemic?

The method and approach associated with this basic qualitative study examined the life experiences, thoughts, feelings, and concerns that influenced special education teachers and parents. The special education teachers' strategies focused on transitioning students' online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic while determining the best change. The participants' individual experiences attributed to the transition from in-classroom to online learning are included. When alignment throughout the structural elements of the study is present, there is a logical progression for the dissertation research (Miles, 2019).

Researchers had previously ascertained that educators and supervisors did not feel adequately prepared for the transition from in-classroom to online and had concerns about the switch for special education students (Eachempati & Ramnarayan, 2020; Hill, 2020; Petretto et al., 2020). School programs that use intentional technology integration can support the skills of students with disabilities' developing consistency (Peterson et al., 2020). Schools need intentional opportunities to use technology for students with disabilities (Al Lily et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2020; Kinard & Mahaffey, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic closure, issues during the transition minimized the application of technology.

The study used a qualitative research methodology with a basic qualitative study design. The characteristics of qualitative research are a natural setting, the researcher as a



critical instrument, multiple sources of data, inductive data analysis, participants' meaning, emergent design, theoretical or conceptual lens, interpretation of findings, and a holistic perspective (adminlp2m, 2020; Austin & Sutton, 2014; Maietta et al., 2021). The holistic perspective explained the interdependencies that worked together to transition students with disabilities to an online learning environment. The problem addressed in the current study was the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming. An efficient study was conducted using a basic qualitative research design (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Merriam and Grenier (2019) explained that qualitative research is learning "...how people understand and experience their world" (2019, p. 4) as the reason to collect lived experiences of participants, and for this study, meeting the individualized needs of students with disabilities.

Qualitative research occurs in the social, clinical, or interpersonal context where statistical or numeric data is insufficient to capture the experiences (Austin & Sutton, 2014). It was pertinent to this study to use basic qualitative research to understand the experiences of secondary special education teachers and parents. The study used their understanding of transition events during the COVID-19 pandemic, an emphasis on the perceptions of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Quantitative research was not appropriate for this study. There was no hypothesis or predictions about participants' perceptions of events around the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. As Bloomfield and Fisher (2019) explained, quantitative

research generates numerical data believing in a single truth or reality, frequently assessing a null hypothesis not used in this study.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities and identify future supports for this kind of transition to online learning. In this qualitative study, I used the Schlossberg transition model's four areas identified: (a) *situation*, (b) *self*, (c) *supports*, and (d) *strategies* (Schlossberg et al., 1995). The four Schlossberg (1995) variables questions were used to discover the experiences of special education teachers and parents to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming. I used those variables to create follow-up questions to understand better how the person felt. Schlossberg et al.'s theory guided the research by using semistructured interviews with open-ended questions for the participant to expand answers that provide information in the four areas (Schlossberg, 2011; Workman, 2011). There are three goals in undertaking a qualitative study: opinions, motivations, and the participant's understanding (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018).

### **Concept and Phenomenon of the Study**

This study was about the experiences of the transition from in-classroom to online learning for special education teachers and parents. In qualitative research, the concept is a systematic process whereby the researcher creates building blocks of a theory and the researcher's points (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Thompson, 2017). The phenomenon of the

study was the understanding of the subjective experience of the identified participants (Aspers & Corte, 2019; Thompson, 2017). The inciting issue of the study was the COVID-19 pandemic which was the phenomenon that caused the transition for teachers and families to online learning for their students with disabilities (Engelhard, 1991).

### **Research Tradition**

Tradition in research is a group of scholars agreeing about the nature of the universe and how they examine legitimate questions or problems and the techniques used to find solutions (Jacob, 1987). Different qualitative research traditions suggest various assumptions and ways of investigating measurement in social science research; the six inquiry traditions are ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative, case study, and basic. The qualitative traditions work best when researching the why and how by using open-ended questions in studying human nature and society (Chandra & Shang, 2019; Pratt et al., 2020).

Using a qualitative study improves a researcher's comprehension of the experience within the world, provides opportunities for detailed descriptions of differing perspectives, and shows disparity issues or implementation concerns, feelings, and knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As the qualitative researcher, I collected participants' perspectives using semi-structured interviews examining firsthand experiences (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interviews allowed an opportunity to ask follow-up questions, check for clarity, and summarize for accuracy (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The

questionnaires provided open-ended questions for participants' perceptions (Braun et al., 2020; Rahi et al., 2019).

### **Justification of Research Design**

The research design was the process used by the researcher in linking theories, questions, and methods. The intentional use of a basic qualitative research design examines the participant's experiences related to this study (J.W. Creswell et al., 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Jaakkola, 2020). It was a way to give others information about how the research was done in a responsible, pragmatic paper. Conducting research is creating new knowledge to answer questions or clarify theories. A conceptual article must explain how and why the research choices are determined (Jaakkola, 2020).

### ***Ethnography Study***

Ethnographic research is the systematic chronicling of people in their settings or groups. The researcher wants to engross themselves in cultural and environmental aspects (Roldán, 2013). These studies are associated with anthropological research as a prospective study done over time. The study is small-scale, watching and observing those being watched or studied. An ethnography study provides insight into a group's behaviors, actions, and viewpoints. The observer learns how to participate in the task by employing interviews or observations (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018; Strudwick, 2020). Malinowski is known as one of the founding fathers of ethnography and for the understanding of "the living right among the natives" (Roldán, 2013, p. 144). They were becoming an immersive experience to learn about the identified groups as ethnography tends to investigate the influences of a larger society on cultural groups. Explaining the

immersion into living with and learning to understand a chosen group. Ethnography works better with a prospective study over time than with retrospective research.

Ethnography is not feasible for this study. There are time expectations and time to build long, honest relationships with participants to share their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### ***Grounded Theory***

The grounded theory uses one of two approaches, inductive or deductive, written by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Inductive works from the specific to the general, using particular observations to make extensive generalizations (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). If three observations are similar about kids riding a bike and falling off, then the inductive process is that all kids fall off the bike when they ride (Bradford, 2017). Deductive works from the general to the specific such as all women are mothers, and Mary is a woman, she must be a mother. The deductive is a universal statement to a narrow conclusion (Bradford, 2017). The grounded theory data would be analyzed into themes, keywords, and phrases, grouped and reviewed; no hypothesis is used. At the end of the process, the data has provided the theory (Turner & Astin, 2021). As grounded theory starts with data collected and then fits into the inductive or deductive approaches, it was unsuitable for this study. This study began with questions using a conceptual framework of transition theory to understand an isolated event, a retrospective occurrence.

### ***Phenomenological Study***

In a phenomenological study, the researcher tries to understand consciousness such as a first-hand experience as the starting point, not the world of nature. The

phenomenological research is experientialist, which means that experiences are heavily relied on as knowledge rather than deductive or formal learning. A phenomenological study has a rationalist exploring time. It examines the hours, minutes, and seconds and their relation to the event (Heotis, 2020; Moustakas, 1994; The Living Philosophy, 2021). Time runs at the same speed no matter what happens in the human experience. The phenomenological was studying the first-person experience, like that of a student in class watching the clock never move for dismissal, only two minutes before the bell rings. Even though I worked to understand participants' experiences in this study, I was not trying to focus on the phenomenon's fundamental nature. Husserl's phenomenological methodology is explained in The Living Philosophy (2021); it was the phenomenon to which the removal of all filters and judgments was reduced to the rawest experience. This study was not looking for the most basic experience dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic but a retrospective understanding of experiences during a transition using the variables of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) methodology.

### ***Narrative Study***

A narrative is life history, presenting a situation or series of events. The narrative study focuses on the story or stories of an event in detail. It is usually a single individual's experience. The narrative study was about how people communicate with one another and looks to provide a meaning for the stories and how that can change people (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018; Nigar, 2020). A narrative study for a single case will not provide enough different experiences about the transition from in-classroom to online learning and the experiences or challenges of special education teachers and

parents. One incident will not provide the information to reach saturation about experiences or challenges concerning the transition from in-classroom to online learning for special education teachers and parents. Multiple interviews should provide a collection of experiences on a specific event that impacted people, providing a better opportunity to generalize the experience.

### ***Case Study Design***

Yin defined a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within a real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be evident.” The case study relies on triangulation data points, adding to the research already conducted (Soy, 1997). TA case study started with an experiment or observation of a current phenomenon about a person, group, or a single event to seek patterns or a cause of behavior (Yin, 2009). The case study design would not work for this research as a prospective view following over time and space. The basic qualitative analysis is a retrospective to examine the events during the transition when the COVID-19 pandemic caused many schools to close.

### ***Basic Qualitative Study***

A basic qualitative study was learning how people clarify their experiences. They see the world around them and the meaning attached to that understanding; it was also a retrospective view of these events. The “research problems become research questions based on prior research experience (Davis, 2021).” This study collected the experiences of special education teachers and parents. It reported their experiences of the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic to learn how this

group made sense of the events (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The basic qualitative study has been selected to study the participants' real-world experiences to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities.

For this research, the collected data focusing on an educational transition supports the use of a basic qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Basic qualitative studies use a collection of interviews, observations, and documents to analyze (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Nigar, 2020; Turner & Astin, 2021; Braun et al., 2020; Rahi et al., 2019). An electronic questionnaire recruited participants, collected thoughts and experiences of a transition during the COVID-19 pandemic, and conducted interviews with special education teachers and parents (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The practice of a basic qualitative study was to uncover and interpret participants' experiences so that the findings may apply to larger areas.

### **Characteristics of Qualitative Research**

Several qualitative research characteristics are identified, a natural setting visiting with people, and observing them in a natural context (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Nigar, 2020). The primary instrument is the researcher collecting their data from participants, observations, and documentation (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Turner & Astin, 2021). Multiple data sources are used in qualitative research and do not rely on one data source (adminlp2m, 2020). Qualitative researchers apply inductive data analysis by building categories, patterns, and themes (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Nigar, 2020). Other qualitative research characteristics and the primary reason for selecting this type of study are the participant's understanding or interpretation of experiences. The researcher's



responsibility is to interpret what participants tell is seen, heard, and understood clearly and coherently about the examined content (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

### **Role of the Researcher**

For this study, I took the part of a complete observer. As the complete observer, I do not have students nor participate in the individualized needs of students to transition from in-classroom to online learning (Mustapha, 2020). I had a position at one of the seven secondary buildings where I worked with the special services teachers.

Unfortunately, the turnover in these buildings was high. The advantage was it changed any interactions with possible participants that would have been an issue. The observer-as-participant for this research would not work as I had not participated in the individualized transition of students by working with secondary special education teachers and parents (Mustapha, 2020). As a participant-observer, it would be full participation while letting the group know research was conducted. I did not meet the participant category as I have no children of school-age nor classroom students to meet the requirements.

As the observer for this study, I provided a safe environment for participants to share experiences about the COVID-19 pandemic transition (Mustapha, 2020). As an employee of the district in the position of a teacher on special assignment for special services (TOSA), it was important to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the participants. I developed a relationship with them to feel safe in their environment and share their experiences (Mustapha, 2020). As a person who was not in the classroom but a content curator for special services, the only contact was for instructional materials

created in the district software. There was no teacher supervision with the role of TOSA for special services. As I am not a classroom teacher, I do not understand what happened during the special education transition to online. The interviews provided information on experiences with secondary special education teachers and parents during this time.

As the interviewer, it was essential for me to be an active listener and note-taker and have follow-up questions that clearly show my understanding of the experience of this event (McGrath et al., 2019). I provided the school district or district designee with a current caption of the study. As the researcher, I was also responsible for a written request to the district to conduct the study with random participants of secondary special education teachers and parents to interview. Once permission was obtained, the following information was shared: contact information and a request to distribute, sent invitations to participants, secured participant informed consent, conducted a field study, and performed semistructured interviews and audio recordings with field notes (Edwards & Holland, 2020).

### **Methodology**

The methodology clarifies the rationale of data in research as the kind needed or collected, the sampling design, collection methods, and the analysis (Jansen & Warren, 2020; Mignone, 2021). When a basic qualitative research method is selected, it is to help the researcher learn and understand the world around them by analyzing the written or spoken words of lived experiences of identified participants (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Participant criterion started with a questionnaire asking for people living in Wyoming during the COVID-19 pandemic, employed as a special education teacher, or a family

member with a child enrolled in school during the transition from in-classroom to online learning. The criterion was checked using the questionnaire questions and verbal affirmation during oral interviews (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Rahi et al., 2019). If people wanted to volunteer and provide more information for an interview, they provided a personal email, and then an email was sent to request a meeting (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

It was typical to have fewer participants for purposeful sampling in qualitative research. Information considerations with the smaller sample size provided in-depth experiences and complexity about the transition from in-classroom to online learning (S. E. Anderson & Putman, 2020; Khalil et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Parker et al., 2021). As a researcher, it was essential to achieve saturation or information redundancy by interviewing four teacher participants and two parents (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Once institutional permission was obtained from Walden and the local school district to conduct the study, an online questionnaire with research information was provided for participants through official emails or social media with criteria and contact specifications. Another recruitment option was to post on social media, such as Cheyenne Teachers Education Association Facebook, Wyoming Education Association Facebook, and other local Wyoming association Facebook pages providing contact information and a brief description of the research.

I submitted forms to get approval from IRB and, when it was appropriate, asked the school district for permission to start the study. Once permission was given, I started communication by sending a letter of introduction to building administrators. An email

request was sent to each high school and junior high school principal, requesting the sharing of the recruitment email to special education teachers at the secondary level. I posted on social media to recruit parents of special education students using the social media invitation. As I got volunteers who met the qualifications, I set up interviews for a time that worked for participants. The electronic questionnaire closed when data saturation had occurred or time had passed.

### **Population**

A population in qualitative research is defined as a group of individuals or entities with shared characteristics or attributes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018; Etikan & Babtope, 2019). This study was considered a finite population as the research was conducted in Wyoming. The targeted participants were secondary special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities. The information collected from this population was their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic transitions from in-classroom to online learning.

### **Justification of Sampling Strategy**

As a qualitative study identifying secondary special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities, the sampling was a non-random strategy (Etikan & Babtope, 2019). Using an online questionnaire that provided demographics and questions supported sampling for this basic qualitative study and how participants were selected. Etikan and Babtope (2019) explained that the sample size needs to represent the population identified to make accurate inferences. Guest et al.'s (2020) research addresses sample size for qualitative saturation. Qualitative research found that the new

information came in the first five or six interviews. Little new information was added to 20 participants (Guest et al., 2020). The number of participants was four teachers and two parents of students with disabilities (Guest et al., 2020).

### **Criteria for Selecting Participants**

When conducting a qualitative study, it was valuable to select participants who represented the elements of the research question (Sargeant, 2012). The questions of this study focused on participants' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic and the transition from in-classroom to online. They must live in Wyoming and had residency during the COVID-19 pandemic. The special education teachers worked in a Wyoming school during the pandemic. There was no other limitation as there were teachers at all levels in their teaching careers. The parents of children with disabilities at the secondary level were asked to participate in the study as they supported their students during the transition to online learning. The question was the challenge of secondary special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities; these participants were identified for this study. Another aspect was the transitions from in-classroom to online learning, so the earlier described participants needed to have participated in the process. The time element identified for the study is during the COVID-19 pandemic. The location element of this research question is Wyoming. Using these elements of the research question for participant selection provided data that appropriately addressed the study topic (Guest et al., 2020; Sargeant, 2012).

## **Instrumentation**

The instrument is the tool used by researchers to collect data on the study. The instrument was determined by the researcher and tied to the research. The instruments available for the basic qualitative study were interviews, tests, questionnaires, checklists, or observation of participants (Balucanag-Bitonio, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Teachers College, Columbia University, n.d.). A good research instrument is reliable and valid. It will gather relevant data to provide insight into participants' experiences. The instrument should have clear instructions on use or implementation (Balucanag-Bitoni, 2014; Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Teachers College, Columbia University, n.d.).

## **Data Collection Instruments and Source**

Interviews were part of the qualitative research used for many years as an instrument for data collection. The verbal interaction between interviewer and interviewee allows a rapport to build for follow-up and deeper questioning (Billups, 2019; Jacob & Furgerson, 2015; McGrath et al., 2019). Tests are another data collection method measuring variables or characteristics with at least one ordinal present (Bewick et al., 2003). Test data focused on frequencies, counts, or numbers in categories that dealt with statistical information.

Braun et al. (2020) explain that surveys were used in mixed-methods and quantitative research but were rarely considered qualitative studies. The qualitative survey consists of open-ended questions that provide rich information in their language for typed personal responses (Braun et al., 2020). Ricci et al. (2019) reviewed articles on qualitative methods that generated questionnaires to collect data. There were similar steps

in each article reviewed (a) review of literature, (b) concept elicitation, outcomes from participants that are spontaneous due to open-ended questions, (c) analysis of the qualitative data, (d) a debriefing or practice with new items that develop, and (e) interviews to elicit thoughts about the questionnaire items written on the topic (Ricci et al., 2019).

### **Interview Protocol**

The interview protocol used for this study followed the four phases described in Castillo-Montoya's (2016) research. The first two phases focused on how the questions aligned with the research and asked for participants' active feedback. The last two phases are feedback on the questions and practicing the interviews (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). The researcher wanted to understand the events, and the intentional questions supported participants in explaining their experiences during the events. The interview protocol provided consistency as the same information and questions were asked of each participant for more precise data collection (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

### **Questionnaire Protocol**

The questionnaire protocol was the study that collected data from prospective participants and was administered either in person, by phone, or electronically. It was the method used to deliver the questionnaire (Kross & Giust, 2019; Pozzo et al., 2019; Ricci et al., 2019). The questionnaire instrument had questions or other prompts that elicited responses that mixed open-ended or closed-ended questions. The questionnaire was essential to focus on the study's objective to collect accurate and complete information (Kross & Giust, 2019; Ricci et al., 2019).

### **Sufficiency of Data Collection Instruments**

The data collection instructions for this study included personal interviews. During the interview, a section on observations collected data on facial expressions, body movements, gestures, eye contact, touch, voice, and space or wait time between questions and answers (Melinda, 2020). The interview process allowed for more interactions and follow-up details from the interviewee. The interviews were recorded, allowed time to focus on the conversation, made quick notes, and wrote reflections when the interview was done (Bright, 2020). The interview and survey questions aimed to understand the interviewee's perceptions (Bright, 2020; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

Triangulation was analyzing data from different sources, people, and other resources (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I triangulated data using personal interviews, questionnaires, and state documents from the COVID-19 pandemic. The information informed people about how special education continued during the closing of schools (Merriam & Grenier, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Using the collected data allowed a comparison of the experiences provided and offered a thorough examination of themes, subthemes, and patterns to code, compile, and review (Bright, 2020; Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

### **Published Data Collection Instruments**

A published data collection instrument was not available for use as it needed to focus on this topic. In this basic qualitative study, the instruments were researcher-developed to follow the research and provide the best source of information on the topic, according to Merriam and Grenier (2019) and Merriam and Tisdell (2015). I used



interview questions asking specific questions about the individualized needs of students with disabilities as a retrospective experience when they transitioned from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming (Appendix A & B). Castillo-Montoya (2016) identified in phase one that the “interview questions align with research questions (p.812).” Creswell and Creswell (2017) discussed the audience’s knowledge of a topic that the researcher collected to understand the event. The research for this study was focused on specific content and required researcher-developed questions.

### **Researcher-Developed Instruments**

Using Nayak and Narayan (2019) and Braun et al. (2020), a survey and interview were associated with this study's research question. An online questionnaire was used for recruiting. Questions were placed in the online questionnaire to reflect on the experience and provide space if participants consented to be interviewed. Participants gave consent using the form provided. Zoom and phone calls were used for semi-structured interviews. DeJonckheere and Vaughn’s (2019) research suggests gathering information with semistructured interviews would provide valuable data.

An interview protocol was designed following the recommendations of Rahi et al. (2019) and Kross and Giust (2019). The protocol provided a standard for the interviews for consistency when interviewing the special education teachers and the parents of students with disabilities. It helped collect personally lived transition experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic school closures (Interview protocols in Appendix A & B). The interview questions were structured following Mirriam and Tisdell's (2015) continuum.

In Mirriram and Tisdell's (2015) continuum, highly structured, semistructured, and unstructured questions were formats. As this study used the semistructured form, interview questions were more or less structured, there was flexibility with the questions, and questions were not predetermined for wording order. The online questionnaire had space for personal information for a follow-up interview. A letter was to schedule interviews with participants. A letter of introduction was sent to school principals with information to be shared with potential participants.

The documents provided by the State of Wyoming Department of Education to school districts regarding procedures followed during the COVID-19 pandemic, along with the federal documents, state that all individuals with disabilities education act (IDEA) remained in full effect (CDC, 2020; Laramie County School District 1, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2020; Wyoming Department of Education, 2019). The published artifacts were documents from the United States Department of Education, Office of Special Education, which wrote federal guidelines (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The documents explained national law expectations working with special education students and their families during the pandemic. The district adopted learning plan, located on the district website, was submitted to the Wyoming Department of Education. It outlined that special education and related services would continue (Wyoming Department of Education, 2020a).

### **Instrument Development (Pilot Study)**

Pilot studies were necessary to check for clarity of questions and procedures to increase research quality. As I used a researcher-developed instrument, it was essential to

have a pilot study to ensure reliability and validity. The pilot study was the “testing out “of the specific instrument for this research study (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The pilot study was necessary to modify questions to check if procedures were clear and elicited responses that provided rich data (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The pilot study for the questionnaire and interviews was conducted with friends who are special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities. I called, texted, and emailed people and asked if they would participate in the pilot study. I provided them with the link to the Survey Monkey site where the questionnaire was located. Once they worked through the questionnaire, they filled out the information about contacting them for an interview; I then requested a time for the practice interview. I used the interview protocol and followed that process until completed. I then asked for feedback and corrected the questionnaire and interview process.

### **Establishment of Content Validity**

Four components were identified to verify the instrument's content validity used in a study: domain definition, domain representation, domain relevance, and test construction procedures' appropriateness (Almanasreh et al., 2019). Almanasreh et al.'s (2019) research identified two threats affecting the four elements. The first was construct-irrelevant content. Irrelevant data may come up in the data collection from participants. Still, the researcher must focus on the interpreted core concept (Almanasreh et al., 2019). Content under-representation happens when the instrument does not represent the content, and over-representation can threaten research like guided questioning

(Almanasreh et al., 2019). During the pilot study, these four areas helped minimize these threats to validity and kept the study focused.

### **Sufficiency of Data Collection Instruments**

The sufficiency of data collection instruments means the condition or quality of adequate tools used to collect information for research. It was compulsory for the researcher to check and critically appraise the instruments to ensure a relationship to the research (Hannes, 2011). FitzPatrick (2019) provided citations on instrumentation validity from a list of “writers such as Cronbach and Meehl, Messick, Kane, and others (p. 212).” FitzPatrick’s (2019) study provides information on unique validation procedures in each qualitative study. There are two ways to explain the validity of qualitative research questions; the first was constructivist epistemology, the lived experiences, in this case, the secondary special education teachers and the parents of students with disabilities. The second validity was the realist ontology; this is the truth a person believes. Some people do not think vaccines will help, and their fact is supported by other perceptions of that truth (Kross & Giust, 2019; Maxwell, 2012; Rahi et al., 2019). A current example is the COVID-19 shots.

### **Procedures For Pilot Studies**

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval number is 12-21-21-0029474, and the process began. Pilot studies conducted on a small scale as a preliminary study investigated the feasibility of the research, cost, and time (Hygnstrom, 2020; Lancaster & Thabane, 2019; Malmqvist et al., 2019; Shah et al., 2020). Pilot studies provide valuable information about the study either having problems or working flawlessly (Hygnstrom,

2020). The pilot study must verify that the questions correlated to the research (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Another justification for this pilot study was to ensure that all participants had clear instructions, procedures, and information.

The pilot study was nonrandomized as four friends were invited to participate using the practice questionnaire and then interviewed using the research questions. The specific friends are special education teachers and parents of students with disabilities who were asked to participate in the pilot study and informed that they are under no obligation (Lancaster & Thabane, 2019; Malmqvist et al., 2019). The recruitment was personal invitations through email, text messaging, and phone calls to answer the questionnaire and be interviewees, which narrowed the time limits for participants' involvement in the research (Malmqvist et al., 2019). All information on the pilot participants is stored in a secure folder as it does not provide results for the main study. The same ethical guidelines for the primary research were applied to the pilot study.

### **Content Validity and Data Collection Devices**

One of the methods for data collection was Survey Monkey, which filtered those prospective participants for the study. The questionnaire was shared through schools and social media, providing the link that searched for participants. The online service provided anonymity and helped collect data for open-ended questions similar to the interview questions (Kross & Giust, 2019; Rahi et al., 2020). The participants in the semistructured interviews provided consent for recording and transcription for accuracy (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The questionnaire and interviews provided information on experiences and their relation to Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) four factors (Aung et al.,

2021; Braun & Clarke, 2021; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The researcher-designed questions and sub-questions were used in the semi-structured interviews, a tool used in qualitative studies to gain insight into the participants' perspectives (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Referring to Merriam and Grenier (2019), the researcher must learn about the participants' experiences and perspectives on the world. A semistructured interview was a valuable tool. It allowed flexibility and follow-up questions for deeper understanding and clarification (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The focus of this study was the experiences of the key participants, and the semi-structured interview was appropriate to learn and understand the experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic events. Moreover, this research topic was the experiences of secondary special education teachers and parents to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

#### ***Pilot Study***

Before conducting the study, I applied to Walden's institutional review board (IRB) for approval to do research. The pilot study was conducted once IRB approval was received. I recruited two friends to take the survey in Survey Monkey to make sure connections were working and skips worked correctly to move the participant to the next question. I contacted four friends and asked if they would like to participate in the study's interviews for a final clean-up. I tested interview questions on four friends to ensure the questions were straightforward and that the follow-up questions were logical to the

conversation. Corrections were made for nonverbal cues such as nodding the head or hand gestures.

### ***Recruitment***

Once the investigation had IRB approval, a written request was sent to the district asking permission to solicit participants by sharing the SurveyMonkey link via emails and social media within Wyoming. I took on the part of a complete observer as I do not have students nor participate in the individualized needs of students to transition from in-classroom to online learning (Mustapha, 2020). I filled out a form for one district which introduced the research, also providing a link to the questionnaire. The letter provided detailed information about the study with a communicated purpose and was submitted to proper school district personnel. The data collection took two months to find participants willing to take part. What I thought would be an easy process was very difficult to find secondary special education teachers and parents willing to be interviewed. The final numbers were four special education teachers and two parents.

These steps support communication and cooperation between the researcher and the school in Wyoming when searching for participants. Most schools in the state have websites with email addresses for the school board, superintendent, and building principals to email a request and letter of introduction to the administrators in the school district. The district sent the email to all eligible participants from the administrative level email or department email. Using the consent by responding to the email, I had the email of those who volunteered to be part of the study. All participants received individualized letters and emails with the same contact and research information to ask questions before

the interviews to gain the participants' trust for their comfort and privacy (Edwards & Holland, 2020). The interview process was a private meeting that took 45 to 60 minutes or longer, depending on the interviewee's thoughts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The interviews were conducted conveniently for the participant using Zoom, Microsoft Teams, or phones with backup recordings.

### ***Data Collection***

Another reason for a pilot study was to check the clarity of the questions for participants. The interviewee needed to feel comfortable with the information shared when answering the questions. They had an opportunity to debrief when they reviewed the transcribed interview. As I conducted the research, it was meaningful to the interviewee to have an active listener who listened, asking follow-up questions about their sharing during the interview. The transcripts were reviewed to check their feelings about the interview process and if their answers were clear. A pilot study conducted with friends in special education at the elementary level was to ensure that questions were clear and understandable. It was also to make sure the questionnaire worked and was accessible. Minor corrections in verbiage with both the questions and electronic questionnaire were comprehensible.

The consistency of the questions allowed minimal variation from participant to participant between the questionnaire and interviews. During the pilot study, if there was a need to reword questions and alter follow-up questions for clarity, it was done during this time (Aung et al., 2021; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The semistructured interviews were done with individual participants to limit contact due to the COVID-19



pandemic and allowed more flexibility with meeting times. Meeting in a one-on-one environment also provided anonymity since it is such a small population in Wyoming, and a need for anonymity is essential (Aung et al., 2021; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019).

Experiences may differ depending on the participants of the identified group. Issues may be varied when providing care for students with disabilities. The experiences may be more than technology access or cost issues for installation and data rates described in other research for students in rural areas. Teachers had to be in special education at the secondary level working within Wyoming. The parent participants had to have a student in the special education program at the secondary level during the COVID-19 pandemic when the closing occurred, living in Wyoming. The criterion was confirmed when interviewing participants in good faith. This study was essential to interview four teacher participants and two parents to reach saturation or information redundancy (Braun & Clarke, 2021; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). If recruiting participants from the school district were difficult, other options included posting on social media. Statewide social media groups were available through Facebook, Instagram, and even Twitter to place social media invitations. If the participants chose to participate in a one-on-one interview, a \$20 gift card was offered. I provided contact information and a brief description of the research.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The online questionnaire was locked when participant interviews were completed and one month had passed from the start of the collection. The first thing done was the

organization of the interview recordings. I used an online software company that transcribed audio files, Temi (*Audio to Text Automatic Transcription Service & App / Temi.Com*, n.d.). Once the transcript was completed, I checked for accuracy and provided the participant with a copy to review. I reread the data and journaled about thoughts in each section, adding color-coded notes of further impressions of the interviews. Once the transcription was set, NVivo analyzed words, phrases, themes, and patterns. As the online questionnaire asked the participant to write out their thoughts on the questions, the process followed the color-coded note-taking in the journal using demographics for categories.

To triangulate the data, I used themes and categories from the data collected to examine this research's experiences of secondary special education teachers and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic transition. Conducting the initial open coding of the data, I identified word and phrase repetitions. I also used Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) four variables which helped sort and examine how their story was connected to the categories (Keenan et al., 2005). I used the color-coded journal notes to validate the data where self-reflection notes were kept. The notes related to the interviews to check if leading questions were used, bias was present, and trustworthiness was maintained. The second coding cycle was to identify patterns and themes again using the reflective journal and comments for rumination of the data. As this research is about participants' perceptions of the transition from in-classroom to online learning, any discrepancies that need further investigation were reported.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

In establishing trustworthiness with the participants, it was essential to understand the parts created during the research. Connelly (2016) shared the criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba, which are now accepted by many current qualitative researchers: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I used two methods to support credibility (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Triangulating research required multiple data sources, reducing bias to understand the participant's point of view. To provide another point for triangulation, I used documents from the state and district offices about moving forward during the transition to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. Another technique I used was member checking, which occurred when the recording was made into a transcript. The participant was asked to review the document to ensure their meaning or intent had not changed.

Transferability is the magnitude to which the results can benefit persons in other environments (Connelly, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This study retrospectively looked at transitioning from in-classroom to online during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, the setting was a rural state with two metropolitan cities. As Wyoming is considered rural, the findings may benefit other school districts. As other studies were conducted in rural settings worldwide, the research may aid others in these countries with similar populations or communities who made urgent transitions.

Dependability was the stability of the data over the time of the study. Part of being dependable for this study was the assumption of repeating the study with similar feelings or issues (Connelly, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2021). To

ensure dependability, providing the research steps taken in detail will support the repeating of the study. I recorded the interview to provide a transcription for the participant for review. Providing this checking process allowed the participant to clarify or check if their meaning or intent was evident during the interview (Aung et al., 2021; Connelly, 2016; DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019; McGrath et al., 2019).

Confirmability is the consistency of the findings in qualitative data, and saturation is met with repeated themes or topics (Connelly, 2016). Confirmability ensures that the researcher correctly interprets the results without bias in changing the data. The journal logs and transcripts helped focus the study and alleviate bias concerns in analyzing the data and verifying the selected participants' authenticity. I asked them if they were employed at the secondary level in Wyoming and if they worked with students with disabilities. I confirmed this question with parents of students with disabilities so that the information collected was true for data-rich details and descriptions (Connelly, 2016; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2021)

### **Ethical Procedures**

In this basic qualitative study, the researcher interacted with participants, which required assurances of privacy and confidentiality. Conducting the semistructured interviews placed the participant at “minimal risk” or “at-risk” (Burkholder et al., 2016). Minimal risk is focused on the harm or discomfort not being more significant to the participant than a typical day. The term “at-risk” was a very deplorable condition. It was essential to assure participants they would not be identified by name or information due to the unique population (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001).

The research procedures were outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that I provided the participants with all the needed information and protections for participating in the study. At the district selected, a research request form was submitted for approval. Once permission was obtained from IRB and the district, I sent a letter of introduction to administrators. I emailed building principals whose emails were on school websites of all four high schools and three junior highs. I requested that the administrators forward the emails to their special service people. Those who would like to participate followed the steps outlined for consent to participate in the study (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018).

When working with people, there is always some concern about trust, honesty, respect, and responsibility. I needed to trust that a reputation for confidentiality in past encounters was in good standing and allowed people to feel comfortable. I visited with them and created an environment of respect and constant reassurance that they would be kept anonymous. I have not been a classroom teacher for several years. I do not supervise or evaluate peers; no power relationships had to be discussed during the study.

There was a mix of data collected from electronic questionnaires and personal interviews across Wyoming. The confidential part of the interview was the numbering of participants and removing identifiable comments or statements from conversations (Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001). At the end of the questionnaire, participants entered their names and contact information for the interviews. Participants gave consent to the study when they moved to the next screen in SurveyMonkey. When the email was sent to schedule an interview, permission had been given when they answered the questionnaire.

They were under no obligation to continue if they were uncomfortable. All information collected is kept on a password-protected thumb drive used on a private computer with a password. Data collected in SurveyMonkey was uploaded to the thumb drive to be deleted and destroyed after five years.

For the confidentiality of participants when interviewing them, their names were placed in a journal with a coordinating identification number kept in a locked cabinet. The identification number used in all computer work is held on the password-protected thumb drive. Suppose there is concern about the data collected. In that case, the information is available to IRB or Walden University upon request to review. The recruiting emails were sent to principals in the district to share with teachers who met the requirements. On the schools' Facebook sights, I posted the social media invitation. I posted the social media invitation on the Wyoming Department of Education's Facebook page and the Wyoming parent group's Facebook sights. Sharing this information about the posts reduced concerns about being identified.

A post on social media was another option to recruit participants from the school district or within Wyoming. State-wide social media groups like Cheyenne Teachers Education Association Facebook, Wyoming Education Association Facebook, and other local Wyoming association Facebook pages are available. I provided a link to the Survey Monkey page for interested participants. The recruitment procedures offered another option for as much or as little interaction with participants as they wished to keep their anonymity. I followed up with participants by phone call and emailed for questions or comments approximately one week after they received the transcript to review. The

recruitment flyer provided similar information about the study and contact information for the researcher. A participant incentive of a \$20 gift card was offered for those selected who completed their participation in the study. The offer of payment was not substantial and is customary in most research requiring volunteers. It was also a way to thank participants for their time.

### **Summary**

The methodology used was basic qualitative research explained by Merriam and Grenier (2019) as understanding another person's experiences within the world. As this study was the participants' experiences, it provides insight into what happened to a select group of people during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed. The research design and rationale identified the natural setting, the researcher as a critical instrument, multiple data sources, indicative data analysis participant's meaning, emergent design, theoretical lens, interpretive, and the holistic aspect of research. The chapter has identified and explained the six types of qualitative research traditions and identified the researcher's role in this study.

The instrumentation tool was identified as a researcher-developed item unrelated to the published data collection instrument. The citations for the design of the data collection tool were provided and support the researcher-developed questionnaire and interview as a closer relation to the study. The interviews and questionnaire protocols align with research about participants' experiences adding validity to the study. The pilot study clarified the use of the instruments by verifying the correlation of questions used in the questionnaire and interview protocols. The final parts of this chapter discussed

trustworthiness issues about recruitment, ethical procedures for participant information, and how data collection occurred for this study. Chapter 4 contains the results learned in the study and an analysis of the data collected.



## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities and identify future supports for this kind of transition to online learning. I used semistructured interviews of four special education teachers and two parents of special education students from parts of the Wyoming educational system during the COVID-19 pandemic. The problem addressed in this study was the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming. The research design was of a basic qualitative nature, using participants' points of view as the foundation examined for the central idea (Creswell & Báez, 2020). The basic qualitative design informed my plan, articulation, and work process (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018). The qualitative research design showed an interconnected and interrelated grounded study, not remote from the other parts.

### **Pilot Study**

A pilot study was necessary to clarify questions and procedures to increase research quality. I used a researcher-developed instrument, and a pilot study helped to ensure reliability and validity. The pilot study was the “testing out “of the specific instrument for this research study (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The pilot study allowed minor changes to questions to check if procedures were clear and elicited responses that provided rich data (see Malmqvist et al., 2019). The pilot study for the questionnaire and

interviews were conducted with colleagues in education. I called, texted, and emailed close colleagues and asked if they would participate in the pilot study. I provided them with the link to the questionnaire on SurveyMonkey. Once they worked through the questionnaire, they filled out the information about contacting them for an interview; I then set a time for the practice interview. I used the interview protocol and followed that process until completed. I then asked for feedback and made grammatical corrections to the questionnaire and the interview process.

The pilot study was nonrandomized, as five colleagues were invited to participate, and three could complete the process from questionnaire to interview. The specific pilot testers were teachers who were asked to participate in the pilot study and were informed they were under no obligation (Lancaster & Thabane, 2019; Malmqvist et al., 2019). All pilot participants' information is stored on a thumb drive in a secure lock box. That information was not added to the final research study. The recruitment was personal invitations through email, text messaging, and phone calls to answer the questionnaire and be interviewees, which narrowed the time limits for participants' involvement in the research (Malmqvist et al., 2019). The same ethical guidelines for the primary research were applied and used for the pilot study.

### **Setting**

The setting for this study was Wyoming, as it is considered a rural state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). The parents of approximately 15,675 special education students were possible for the study (see Table 1). The number of special education teachers reported employed in 2020 was 1,220 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020a). The

special education teachers taught in March of 2020 when the schools closed and required the transition from in-school to online learning. During the closure, the parents of these students had to make adjustments with one or more children at home to support learning online.

### **Demographics**

Participants were required to meet specific criteria for this study. The teachers had to be special education teachers, and parents were required to have had special education students in school during the closing of schools in March of 202 in Wyoming due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Recruitment was done through social media and emails to building principals and shared with special education staff. Once the time was scheduled for the interview, I followed the protocol. The interview protocol let the participants know they could stop at any time, refuse to answer, or withdraw from the process without repercussions of any kind. Participants were given a number for confidentiality. As the social media invitation was posted for Wyoming teachers and parents, identifying information was removed from comments written in the open-ended items of the questionnaire.

### **Table 3**

#### *Participants*

Participant	Teacher/Parent
P1	Parent
P2	Parent
P3	Teacher
P4	Teacher
P5	Teacher
P6	Teacher
P7	Comments Questionnaire

## **Data Collection**

The data collection for this basic qualitative research started with a social media post to recruit participants on the Wyoming Education Association and the Wyoming Department of Education Facebook pages. The social media post was shared on different secondary schools' Facebook pages and Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming, Inc. The questionnaire provided the consent form and provided participants with open-ended research questions. At the end of the questionnaire, the participant could provide contact information to me for an interview. Once contact information was provided, an email was sent to set up an appointment for the interview. The interview was conducted using Zoom and an audio recorder for accuracy. The audio recording was sent to a transcription service. It then was reviewed, and corrections were made for spelling or missing words. Once the transcript was completed, I shared them with the participants for review. Once verified, the data was then uploaded into NVivo for coding.

## **Participants**

The social media invitations were posted on the Facebook sites of Parents Helping Parents of Wyoming and the Wyoming Department of Education. Other Facebook sites were the Wyoming Education Association, high schools, and junior highs in Wyoming. On the social media invitation, a link was provided to the SurveyMonkey questionnaire with open-ended research questions and a place for people to put information if they would be interviewed for the study. The interview process consisted of open-ended questions about the teacher and parent special education transition from in-classroom to online learning. The queries were written using Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition

model variables *situation, self, support, and strategies*. All participants were directed to the questionnaire, which had the consent form at the beginning, by clicking on the questions they had provided consent. I offered 45 minutes for each interview and used the protocol (see Appendix A & B) for either teachers or parents. Each person was reminded that I used Zoom and an audio recorder for the interview stated in the consent form.

Zoom was helpful for time constraints and COVID-19 concerns, making face-to-face interviews difficult. Once the interview was done, and the audio file was created, it was submitted to Temi, an online software company that transcribes (*Audio to Text Automatic Transcription Service & App / Temi.Com, n.d.*). I listened to the audio and worked through each transcript to check for accuracy. I added notes or comments to check for bias in understanding the information shared by participants.

### **Variations in Data Collection**

The data collection had variations from those described in the plan of Chapter 3. I had projected six special education teachers and six parents of special education students for the study. However, I could only recruit four special education teachers and two parents of special education students. The six participants provided information on the challenges of special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Chapter 3, it was also stated that the questionnaire would be open for one month but was open for just over two months and then closed.

## **Data Analysis**

Researchers use qualitative data analysis to develop the findings of descriptions and themes (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). I completed the interviews using the researcher's questions that supported the topic of study (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). I began running the data by looking for keywords and phrases; doing this adds to the trustworthiness of the findings (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). The federal and state government documents provided more information and context with the research questions to understand what was happening to special education teachers and parents (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I collected and then analyzed the data to check my understanding of the phenomena and the participants' perspectives (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). As I completed the data collection, I organized the data for analysis. The data organization allowed the tracking of an emerging understanding that focused on the process. During the collection from different participants and the preparation of data for analysis, the process established a structure that made it possible to understand the data. I then applied Creswell and Poth's (2016) steps to analyze and interpret the qualitative data. Once the data was prepared and organized, I coded the data, developed themes from the codes, and explored the themes to uncover findings. Before starting the open coding process, I listened and relistened to the audio-recorded interviews. Listening to the interviews a second and third time allowed for a better understanding of each participant's perceptions. I jotted down preliminary words associated with the research questions.

After reviewing the transcripts again, I started the open coding process to highlight words and phrases that answered the research question (RQ) and the

subquestions (SQs) to identify themes from the interviews and documents (Creswell & Poth, 2016). After highlighting the answers to the research questions in each transcript, I circled synonyms or similar phrases, looking for patterns. I highlighted any words or phrases that answered the RQ in pink, SQ1 in blue, SQ2 in green, and SQ3 in yellow for consistency of themes and categories. I made margin notes of tentative themes and categories as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2017). The purpose of coding the data was to capture emerging themes constant throughout the data (Merriam & Grenier, 2019).

The data analysis provided an understanding of the experiences and thoughts of special education teachers and parents in their own words about the transition from in-classroom to online learning. A table was made that allowed for a visual representation that could be manipulated into phrases, themes, and findings of perceptions about the transition from in-classroom to online learning. The themes on the table revealed the participants' perceptions that transpired from their experiences and challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown of schools, which caused education to move online. The questionnaire had open-ended questions, interviews, and documents collected from the state and federal education departments, allowing for thick, rich data. Detailed information to share with readers to understand their experiences during the process. I checked the credibility and trustworthiness by having participants review the findings. I verified the data I collected by triangulating the interviews and documents against each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The details help establish transferability (Morse, 2015). Lodico et al. (2010) explained that researchers must check the accuracy and credibility of data collection methods. I allowed participants to review the transcripts and

provide any feedback, allowing them to reflect and comment decreases the interpretation of data incorrectly (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Morse, 2015).

I could improve the validity of the data collected by dealing with discrepant data that did not fit dominant themes and patterns. If there had been any discrepant cases, I would have examined them in more detail to determine why they differed and note the stand-alone findings. The discrepant case would be coded and categorized separately. There were no discrepant cases registered during data collection.

### **Findings**

As I completed the data analysis, I identified, examined, and interpreted the patterns and themes. The process provided an opportunity to see how the patterns and themes helped answer the research questions (Lodico et al., 2010). In this section, I will share the patterns and themes that emerged from the data collection. I discovered two themes for SQ1 and two themes for SQ2 and SQ3. These five themes responded to the three questions and the problem that prompted this study. Below, I discuss the findings and give examples to support the collected data's results. I used pseudonyms to refer to the participants as I shared their perceptions and views.

The problem which prompted this study is the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming. The specific gap for this research is the individualized needs of students with disabilities and the challenges of how teachers and parents support the transition from in-classroom to online learning (Crouse et al., 2018; Petretto et al., 2020;



Tremmel et al., 2020). The research questions formed the basis for the interview (Appendix A & B).

The research question for this study was: What challenges were experienced to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities by secondary special education teachers' and parents' to support the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming? The additional subquestions that were conducive to this basic qualitative research:

SQ1 How do teachers and parents in Wyoming describe the transition experience from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

SQ2 What adjustments were made by special education teachers and parents in Wyoming with the instructional *supports* in place when the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic?

SQ3 What changes or *supports* would help special education teachers and parents in Wyoming transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the future like a pandemic?

The themes developed from the data responded to the research questions and the study's problem. I searched the transcribed interviews, field notes, and research journals for relevant data such as repeating similarities and phrases. I grouped words by exact matches and synonyms, which helped identify the phrases.

**Table 4***Themes and Theme Statements*

Research Questions	Theme	Theme Statements
<p><b>SQ1:</b> How do teachers and parents in Wyoming describe the transition experience from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?</p>	<p><b>SQ1a:</b> Dissatisfaction with closing procedures</p>	<p>SQ1a: Found it a little frustrating; it was very, very difficult; I was not happy with how the lockdown was handled; honestly, it sucked; it was rough.</p>
	<p><b>SQ1b:</b> To use Canvas or not to use Canvas</p>	<p>SQ1b: Make use of the email for families ... not comfortable with Canvas; [time] to allow teachers to get their online Canvas pages up; printing out pages and learning stuff and putting [it] in a packet; no interactive parts in Canvas.</p>
<p><b>SQ2:</b> What adjustments were made by special education teachers and parents in Wyoming with the instructional <i>supports</i> in place when the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic</p>	<p><b>SQ2a:</b> Lack of strategic accessible communication</p>	<p>SQ2a: Not knowing how long... just getting extended and extended; what [was] the school district going to be providing; there wasn't much of a plan; an email... wait and not to contact families yet; it was a lot of questions ... about our special ed kids.</p>
	<p><b>SQ2b:</b> "Let me count the ways..." the challenges and/or the lack of support</p>	<p>SQ2b: "Having to make my children be on the computer"; "are we gonna be able to accommodate"; issues with computer and internet; trial and error; behavioral needs; how to measure goals and meetings for IEPs.</p>
<p><b>SQ3:</b> What changes or supports would help special education teachers and parents in Wyoming transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the future like a pandemic?</p>	<p><b>SQ3:</b> The personal connection with active engagement</p>	<p>SQ3: The live format was much more engaging; just being able to visually see her para; para to meet with us...</p>

**Theme 1: Dissatisfaction with Closing Procedures**

Snow days have been built into the Wyoming school calendar for many years, meaning those days were used when the school could not open due to weather. Anything past those days would be added to the end of the school year or made into Saturday school to make up the seat time or personal teacher contact time (State of Wyoming Regulations, n.d.). The situation with COVID-19 was much different. The state regulations section had to make an emergency exception as there would be no way to make up the time out of school. The concerns voiced about nothing being in place and no emergency plans for others who took part in the study came up many times.

When the schools close in March of 2020, it was essential to understand what happened to the participants (Wyoming Department of Education, 2019b). Both special education teachers and parents felt “unprepared for the closing.” According to P1 and P2, it was an issue of “had to figure it out.” P1 commented, “I think that was just because nobody was prepared for this,” with P2’s comment of “just caught off guard and not prepared.” Part of the emergency plan was to provide paper packets to those who requested them, as some families did not want to deal with Canvas. Other concerns were that remote learning plans were not developed until the schools were closed.

P3 said, “I don’t feel like there was much of a plan,” and “it was a punt more than a plan.” P4 thought, “...it was somewhat chaotic. I felt there were mixed messages.” P5 explained, “we’re making this quick, fast shift over, and you got a week ... for moving from in-class in persona to online.” “There was no smooth transition,” P5 felt, “it was very haphazard.” And added that it was “not well thought out on any level.” P6 was told

to “set up a Canvas page with work for students.” Comments from the questionnaire “It varied considerably. Students with strong supports at home tended to keep up. Students whose mental and emotional wellbeing was affected by the closure did not do well, per [their] experience.” Another questionnaire comment about the closing, “Nothing. It was, call them, try to Zoom them if you can. ‘It is a Pandemic. We can only do what we can do.’ Did not agree with this approach.”

### **Theme 2: Lack of Strategic Accessible Communication**

After notices of closures from the federal and state level, each school district notified the parents of how the school proceeded. The school information was shared with families using the district website, a phone call system used for snow days. There were local news channels and other communication forms. Their buildings contacted the special education teachers, and each received direction from there. P1 said of their special education teacher and para, “they were both in contact with [both students] every day.” According to P1, having consistent communication with the special education teacher or para, just “talk to them and see another human face,” was helpful. P2 felt that the special education department was “much more responsive in terms of trying to help us.” The student being able to see the para provided “encouragement.” P2 was “talked through using Canvas and how we would go about the online portion.” P3 was told, “our district has this, so we’re gonna use this.” P5 said there were “a lot of questions about, well, what about our special ed kids.” Furthermore, P5 stated, “it was a lot of lack of answers.”

The teacher participants shared that they were ready to start contacting their special education families only to be told to wait. According to P6, the direction was “...

to call parents and see if they would be okay with their students doing an in-class time with me because of that need for hands-on” at the pandemic's start. P6 says,

“I didn't think that was a great idea. I mean, from the standpoint of [giving] them the support, and that's a great idea, but with the pandemic, um, actually having students coming into the school and be that close together was probably the worst idea ever.”

Another supervisor over the first supervisor told P6, “No, what were they thinking.” “And so, then we went back, had to go back and call all the parents, which of course, cause you know, some frustration with parents who were, you know, really accepting having their students come into the school.” P5 talked about IEPs and ILPs and their yearly reviews and three-year evaluations. The multidisciplinary evaluation team (MDT) could not be conducted as there were many questions about what would be legally accepted. Participants' concerns about accomplishing these meetings and what needed to happen to make these meetings possible were not answered. It took time, P5 said, “until we actually got some straight answers from admin and from like the state ... yes, you need to have these and [this is] how.”

### **Theme 3: To Canvas or Not To Canvas**

Schools in Wyoming were purchasing a web-based learning management system (LMS) called Canvas. Since the distance education task force was created, Canvas has been part of the Virtual Education Legislation (Wyoming Legislature, 2015). Canvas has become Wyoming's official LMS (Wyoming Department of Education, n.d.). The teachers interviewed for this study said Wyoming schools provided time to get Canvas

pages created and usable for students. Still, during this time, it was apparent that Canvas did not support particular aspects of student IEPs.

Even with each district having Canvas, it had not been fully implemented with the accommodations available for special education students during the regular school year. P3 supports this by stating, “different accommodations that we just hadn't accessed before.” P3 also shared about providing other resources for the students to use to support learning, “this is how you can get this to read aloud to you.” It was P5 that said, “well, these are the accommodations that we can provide since it’s not in person,” but it was P3’s comment, “we are to have our lessons on Canvas.”

Under Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), there are 14 recognized disabilities. There are also two classifications of students in each of these 14 areas: mild to moderate disabilities and severe/multiple disabilities (IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act), 2019; SpecialEduCareers.com, 2018; *Teaching Special Education*, n.d.). The part of this transition from in-classroom to online learning did not consider the needs of these students with disabilities. P1 shared that it was difficult “trying to figure out how to use all the programs we’re supposed to be using in the GenEd classroom was pretty hard.” These were not even the special education items the student would need to support their IEP. P2 shared that one child did not work for the other. P2 went on to share:

“the different types of educational methods, the different types of strategies, the familiarity with the product, all of that stuff, I was, we were just automatically

thrown into [this] with really very little experience. And so, yeah, it was, it was challenging.”

The teachers shared that they were to have the same expectation as classroom teachers and have lessons and learning materials in Canvas for student access. Again, special education teachers who had students with mild-to-moderate disabilities had different challenges than those teachers providing services to students with severe/multiple disabilities. All teacher participants stated they created paper/pencil packets even with Canvas material. P3 had some students find that online learning was working for them. P4 noted that they “[made] use of the email for families who were not comfortable with Canvas.” P3 and P5 had students that were wanting paper/pencil. P6’s class, students were not using Canvas but other learning programs and paper/pencil packets even with lessons in Canvas.

#### **Theme 4: The Challenges and/or the Lack of Support**

P1 “I don’t think any adjustments were made” for their students’ learning. P1 shared that “both [students] are a lot more anxious, and they have a hard time with transitions.” P1 felt “the expectations from the gen ed [general education] were just the same for every student across the board, whether they were getting support or not.” P2 explained that “reading comprehension and then their composition afterward” “I don’t feel like was modified” from the general education teacher. “We struggled. I mean, we would, we would spend several hours, you know, kept coming back to this same assignment and just struggled.” P2 “it was just kind of rigid.”

“There was a lot more support that [the student] was getting in person than online.” P2 shared that they asked a grandparent to assist with the learning online.

The teachers' lack of support and challenges were in P3, P4, and P5's attempts to have IEP/ILP meetings. P3 took issue with “holding IEP meetings,” “... progress notes,” and” gathered data and tracked progress.” There were those students “that weren't getting any instruction, let alone accommodations.” “There were a handful that, you know, if we're just lacking some basic needs, so we would bring them food and, and those kinds of things,” P4 frustration was “the sense of bureaucracy.” The back and forth of direction, “the lack of behavioral support,” and “a lack of direct contact was more, was more of a concern.” P5 echoed some of the above items while adding, “trying to get ahold of some of our parents.” “Meeting that really didn't do any good.” The struggles of community members, “helping the parent remember how to do a lot of these mathematical operations and problem-solving pieces.” One of the concerns was textbooks or using a software program to read the text online. P5 also shared, “how are we going to make sure this child is getting their service.” “The parent has to coordinate with the, you know, the speech-language therapist, the occupational therapist, the physical therapist, the counselor, the social worker in how to try to address these needs.” P5 said, “I know for several of my students [they kept] dropping off the radar,” as they could not reach the student. P6 had parents struggle stating, “what's the point” or “this is ridiculous.” P6 shared that provider were “at the mercy of the [student] on the other end of the computer connection,” as the student may have walked away.



### **Theme 5: Positive Connections, Engagement, and Recognition**

The information from the parent participants shows they were active members in their students' learning. P1 communicated with their special education teacher or para “in touch with them every day, whether it was [to] work on something, or just talk to them.” P1 felt “they could check-in and make sure they were able to do what they were supposed to do and to get the help that they need.” P1 “even just like a mental health check with them [students].” “They were really great about that.” P2 said, “the [Teacher] actually, and I just remember this, she was, she made videos for us to watch of her every day, some of her different speech-language exercises.”

The P3 had “several students realize that online learning was their jam!” Others, according to P3, made those connections when telling students, “Firefox can read this aloud to you better than I can.” And then, “accessing those a little be more and building some more independence.” P3 shared, “most kids that were able to wanted to meet daily.” P4 indicated, “I was making frequent contact with families, which was good.” P4 wanted to acknowledge that “parents and grandparents or guardians shall we say, kinda stepped up and became teachers themselves.” P4 said, “they were doing a large part of our job for us at that time.” P5 “The other thing I did a lot with several of my students was I set up standing appointments to sit down and talk with them.” P6 shared how they “went to a couple of houses just to, you know, meet the parents in the yard with a laptop and kind of go over how they do the lessons.”

### **Discrepant Cases**

Overall, the participants felt that transitioning from in-classroom to online learning was difficult during the COVID-19 pandemic. Discrepancies were not evident due to detailed and extended responses during data collection. During this process, I realized that the time between the schools closing and when I interviewed participants may have been too long. The questions may have solicited more details that would have been possible had the interviews taken place closer to that time.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Once all the data was collected and analyzed, it was triangulated by comparing data sets to verify the validity of the initial findings. The data was cross-checked with less noticeable results and potential bias by comparing the different data sources. The findings revealed that the participant's responses to the interview questions correspond to the questionnaire answers. While participants responded differently to both data collection forms, the emerging themes were still compared.

I conducted Zoom interviews, and participants were asked if they felt safe participating in the process after school hours. I recorded all interviews with a voice recorder and submitted them to the transcription service. Once the transcription was complete, I listened to the audio and checked its accuracy. I provided the participant with time to think and then answered the questions.

I listened to the participants' perceptions and beliefs clearly and allowed time to record thoughts about follow-up questions or if questions were answered. During this review, I noticed that I had failed to ask a probing question that may have provided even

more information and details to a question in one instance. I did notice that overall, the questions created allowed for in-depth responses, which covered the probing questions from the participants without being prompted. The developed interview process allowed participants to provide more valuable, rich answers.

Using the two forms of data, interviews, and the state guidelines for providing special education and services during the COVID-19 pandemic helped to understand the recurring themes (Wyoming Department of Education, 2020b). I analyzed the data by reading and color-coding answers. Then re-coded the data to the recurring themes. I provided a copy of the findings through email to participants for member checking to ensure I had accurately interpreted their perceptions. Participants had time to read and respond to the conclusions projected. Each had an opportunity to visit about the findings if they felt the need.

### **Summary**

In this section, I present the three study findings connected with the researches data and current literature: (a) teachers and parents in Wyoming describe the transitions experience from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, (b) the adjustments made by special education teachers and parents in Wyoming with the instructional supports in place when the transition from in-classroom to online learning occurred, and (c) the changes or supports that would help special education teachers and parents in Wyoming when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the future.

**Finding 1**

The first finding concerning participants in Wyoming and their experiences transitioning from in-classroom to online agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic closing was frustrating. Due to weather, school closing in the past has been part of the education regulations for years. Remediations were provided to make up seat time or teacher contact time when schools closed for the weather. There were emergency plans for the weather but no plan for a pandemic (Akin & Gözel, 2020; Maher, 2020). The parent participants shared the emergency plans in place now for transitions.

The teacher participants were more critical of their district's plan and concerned about the lack of guidance or no one person in a leadership position providing a plan for proceeding. As participants used terms of "mixed messages," "haphazard," and were told, "It is a Pandemic. We can only do what we can do," these statements identify feelings of not being prepared for the transition from in-classroom to online learning as well as the kind of communication occurring at this time (Aguilar, 2020; Asare et al., n.d.; Hodges et al., 2020; Kim & Asbury, 2020; Lemay et al., 2021).

**Finding 2**

The second finding indicated the adjustments that special education teachers and parents in Wyoming would be experiencing. The first go-to point for schools was relying on the Canvas software. Participants spoke about the varying abilities of computer skills, student ability, and the appropriateness of the learning management system (LMS) for all special education students. Even with time to prepare to meet students online, the participants identified difficulties.

Participant P2 summed it up as “the different types of educational methods, the different types of strategies, the familiarity with the product...” Canvas was the adjustment relied on to provide learning for all students. With the number of identified disabilities according to IDEA, the Canvas expectations for the mild/moderate students, people still had to be reminded of accommodations (Wyoming Department of Education, 2020b). There were supports provided, which according to P3, “we just hadn’t accessed before.” This has changed for P5, “it’s pretty much what I do now is make sure that kids know how to access like the assistive tech tools.” A new way of thinking is to make sure special education students have what they need that is appropriate to support learning.

### **Finding 3**

The third finding offers information about what changes or supports Wyoming special education teachers and parents found that supported the transition from in-classroom to online learning for future school closings. The information about communication and how participants shared their experiences was an interesting piece. P1 and P2 expressed that the positive interactions with their special education teachers and paraprofessionals were the most important for their students. The contact provided their students with someone to “talk to them and see another human face.” The school week contact supplied time for special education teachers and paras to check in with students to understand learning goals, provide encouragement, and even just a mental health check-in (Ameis et al., 2020; Justis et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020). P2 felt that the special education staff were “much more responsive in terms of trying to help us.” For the special education teachers, it was clear communication from leadership.

The teacher participants working with the mild/moderate students felt that communicating with them and making that contact helped some students. One point that a couple of the participants stated was the need for software that would work for special education students. P3 worried that “really no platform that was available to us had anything that was interactive.” The other point to come up was the lack of technology for all students. The need for one-to-one technology, internet access, and lack of reliable connections impeded learning (Alea et al., 2020; Dube, 2020; Giovannella et al., 2020). When the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools, a few places in Wyoming still needed the one-to-one technology.

### **Connection of Findings to Conceptual Framework**

I based the conceptual framework for this study on Schlossberg’s transition model (1981). The conceptual framework of Schlossberg’s transition model outlines the concept involved in the forced moving from one life event to another. Schlossberg (1981) identified the four transition variables (a) *situation*, (b) *self*, (c) *social support*, and (d) *strategies*. In this study, the *situation* was the forced transition between in-classroom to online learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The participants shared their frustration over how the closing occurred and how the schools' lockdown was handled identified in the first theme. The participants shared how unhappy they were with the lack of specific communication during the closure, and there were several persons providing different directives.

The next variable of Schlossberg et al.’s (1995) is *self*. In this study, the participants shared personal feelings. They felt transitioning from in-classroom to online

was difficult for them and their families. The *self* variable not only reflected what was happening to participants during the closure but, the lack of a plan for the school closing. There was a perception that caused anger about no one listening to them about their concern for students. For participants during this transition, they found they were spending more time working and trying to provide for their students in theme three.

The *social support* of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) transition permitted parent participants to share how they received support from their special education teachers and paraeducators during the closing ties to theme five. The parent participants felt they had better responses from these persons than any other. The *social support* they received was in the form of daily contact with either special education teachers or the para. They checked in with their student and family to provide a face to visit with them about schoolwork or even a mental health check-in to see how students were doing.

The final variable is the *strategies* of Schlossberg et al. (1995). The participants shared how they used and tried to accommodate students with disabilities using Canvas or paper/pencil. The participants also made house calls, phone calls, and zoom appointments to ensure students got support. These were themes three and four examples of how the participants could cope.

### **Conclusion**

I addressed the research question and three sub-questions by capturing the perceptions of special education teachers and parents in Wyoming to meet the needs of students with disabilities when transitioning from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. The three sub-questions related to the participant's perceptions

of events during the COVID-19 pandemic closing of schools in Wyoming. The research questions helped focus the study so that I could conduct valuable conversations with the participants about individual experiences during the transition (Kross & Giust, 2019; Study Higher, 2020). The interviews using the research questions allowed for a better understanding of the topic.

In Finding 1, the participants were upset and frustrated with schools closing due to the pandemic. There was concern that there would be no way to make up the time as there was with winter weather. There was also criticism of a lack of planning or direction. Directives were coming from several different areas on how services were provided and how participants from this study would proceed during the closure.

In Finding 2, I indicated that adjustments for special education teachers and parents in Wyoming relied on Canvas as the state learning management system (LMS) for all special education students. The adjustments were not supportive for all student learning as some families and students preferred paper/pencil to Canvas or had difficulty accessing and using Canvas. As the state LMS, content teachers had to be reminded that special education students still needed accommodations. In Canvas, some support was provided for students who needed assistance in reading. Still, the tools were not accessed in the classroom for students to know how to use them.

In Finding 3, regular communication between special education teachers and families is essential. Participants shared that check-in to see how the student is progressing and what support is needed became important. At times it was as simple as a call checking in and seeing how the student and family are doing or if help with an



assignment is necessary. It is also important to remember that students have different needs for different abilities. Canvas could not provide for these different abilities as there were no interactive parts for participants to work one-on-one with students. The other programs used by special education students were difficult to provide. The Canvas lessons were focused on instead of what was best for the student. I was able to identify these suggestions to support future transitions from in-classroom to online learning for special education teachers and parents.

I learned from participants that even with the unexpected transition from in-classroom to online learning due to COVID-19, there were opportunities to learn from other events that have delayed or closed schooling. I also discovered that participants would like precise direction and leadership decisions without multiple people trying to make decisions. Participants also provided insights not considered about different usable or appropriate LMS for special education students. Using LMS for special education students is essential to teaching students and families how to use the software and tools. Another item learned from this process was the importance of meeting with special education students regularly and making sure to keep that schedule. One item that continues to be an issue of concern is that technology is one-to-one, and there needs to be a way for connectivity consistency.

The current findings captured the special education teachers' and parents' perceptions of transitioning from in-classroom to online learning. The literature review will be used about special education in Wyoming and how transitions met the needs of special education teachers and parents during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will draw

information from the results and literature review to provide more details on suggestions that could be implemented to support transitions from in-classroom to online learning. In Chapter 5, the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations and implications, and then the conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities and identify future supports for this kind of transition to online learning. The study focused on Wyoming during the COVID-19 pandemic (see Akin & Gözel, 2020; Maher, 2020; PBS News Hour & Wyoming PBS, 2020). The investigation revealed frustration at how schools were closed, lack of strategic accessible communication, issues with the selected LMS as teachers used Canvas, and support students when there were difficulties with using the software or teaching the lesson. There was some good found in the way parents of special education students said their teachers worked to make connections and special education teachers wanted to recognize the work parents were asked to do to support their students. In Chapter 5, a summary of findings presented, including comparisons to Schlossberg et al.'s theory and the literature related to the transition experiences from in-classroom to online for special education teachers and parents. Limitations of the study, recommendations, implications for future research, and a conclusion.

### **Interpretation of the findings**

The interview questions were used to research the gap in the literature regarding the individualized needs of students with disabilities and the challenges of how teachers and parents supported that transition from in-classroom to online learning. The research question was: What challenges were experienced to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities by secondary special education teachers and parents to support

the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming? From the overarching questions, three subquestions were developed for the study. The interview questions developed were to provide in-depth data concerning participants' perceptions during the COVID-19 closing of schools. I explored what insights special education teachers and parents offered for possible improvements.

The research questions incorporated Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) variables associated with transitions: *situations*, *self*, *social supports*, and *strategies*. The first research was based on the first two variables: *situations* and *self*. The inciting issue was the COVID-19 pandemic which was the phenomenon that caused the transition for teachers and families to online learning for their students with disabilities (Engelhard, 1991). The *self* was how the special education teachers and parents felt about the challenges of the transition due to COVID-19. The following variable was *social support*—the person's well-being related to the transition to online and the assistance in place to learn. The last was *strategies* for changing, reframing, and managing stress after the event. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) theory describe how people deal with changes that occur, the adaption process, and how they depend on access to resources and supports that were in place at the time of the transition.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a unique situation in which schools were closed to slow or stop the spread of the virus (Akin & Gözel, 2020; CDC, 2021; Maher, 2020). The *situation's* urgency expedited the need for the transition to online learning (Maher, 2020; Schlossberg et al., 1995). The participants felt there were no emergency plans or few ideas about accomplishing the transition from in-classroom to online. Like

other studies (Das et al., 2020; Lemay et al., 2021; Nasr, 2020; Van Nuland et al., 2020), participants were uncertain about how the transition would work, and comments like “rough,” “frustrated,” “very difficult,” “not happy with how it was handled,” and “it was a drop of the hat” were used. Another *situational* issue was technology and connectivity, the same issues identified in this study and expressed in the previous studies. Special education teachers shared “that several students that did not have a phone or did not have a computer basically disappeared.” In further confirming comments from the questionnaire, “issues with technology if they had them,” “no access to tech. No internet,” and “connectivity issues – the digital divide – the largest and hardest to overcome.” During the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers worldwide studied the transition to online, and the similarities in these studies were students' access to the internet, access to devices, and the cost of the internet (Alea et al., 2020; Dube, 2020; Giovannella et al., 2020).

Another part of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) concept of the *situation* during the COVID-19 pandemic was the issue of school closures in rural Wyoming. In other studies, it was not just the aspects of technology that caused issues with shutdown; these issues were associated in a few of the studies with rural locals. It was this identification of rural that I focused on Wyoming. It is a large state covering 97,813 square miles with a population of 576,851 as of 2020 (Wyoming | Capital, Map, Population, History, & Facts | Britannica, n.d.). The state is the least populated, with only two significant cities identified as metropolitan, Casper, and Cheyenne. The rest of the state has 173 small towns with populations from 32,857 (Gillette and Laramie) to 0 (Buford) (Barroga, 2020;

Gaille, 2019). In Wyoming, the small population contributed to the distance between homes and schools, as well as winter weather interrupting or impacting services and student learning. Over the years, snow days had been built into the school calendar. Anything past those days would be added to the end of the school year or made into Saturday school for seat or teacher contact time (State of Wyoming Regulations, n.d.). The COVID-19 pandemic differed from the winter weather regulations for Wyoming schools, so another approach was needed to meet the student's educational goals. Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *situation* variable was a negative experience for special education teachers and parents.

The *self* variable of Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) theory was how the special education teachers and parents made adjustments. In this study, I was able to identify some of these inner coping items as participants were working to make adjustments to support student learning in multiple ways being, online, on paper/pencil, in textbooks, or in any other way (Jameson et al., 2019; Lovitz et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020). I learned that parents had the burden of purchasing P1 "a second laptop" as students would be online and worked to coordinate time schedules and collect manipulatives, textbooks, or other materials from teachers. Special education teachers collected educational materials to deliver to students and families to support learning as not all students and families wanted or could work online.

A few teachers made house calls and "meet the parents in the yard with a laptop" to go over materials. Another shared how they "would occasionally make home visits to stop in," Checking "if they're just lacking some basic needs, so we would bring them

food and those kinds of things, not because ... we were asked to by the school, but because we're good humans and we knew that they needed things." These concerns connected to Das et al.'s (2020) study, which identified concerns with socioeconomic issues. In the studies of Frederick et al. (2020), Jameson et al. (2020), and Smith (2020), it was these educators who were laboring to make distance learning work for their students with disabilities.

I identified some perceptions of the difficulties in meeting the requirements of a student's IEP or ILP using Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *self* variable research (Anderson et al., 2020; Baber, 2020; Carpenter & Dunn, 2021; Wang, 2020). One parent did not think adjustments were made, while the other felt P2 "a lot of things were allowed to let slide." P5 stated that "all of the in-person accommodations that were given to our students pretty much were put on hold. The participants did not feel students were getting "the same quality of education" that they received in-classroom. In the studies of Jameson et al. (2019), Lovitz et al. (2020), and Tremmel et al. (2020), it was the school's responsibility to provide multiple access types for instruction.

In the studies for Das et al. (2020), Lemay et al. (2021), Nasr (2020), and Van Nuland et al. (2020), they identified the uncertainty of how the transition from in-classroom to online would work. I was able to identify this uncertainty in the participants' perceptions of the transition of schooling, which is associated with Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) *social support* variable. According to participants, the social support for this transition was confusing as there were many questions about what would happen, how long, and what the schools would provide. In this study, sharing information was not an

issue for the parents. They felt they could get a hold of their special education teachers. The problem for teachers was the lack of non-specific direction from leadership as they moved to rely on the learning management system (LMS) Canvas for all education.

The teacher participants in this study said their buildings were to use Canvas to transition to online. Like Kinard and Mahaffey's (2020) study, teachers in this study felt they were left on their own to use Canvas and create learning content for students. Some of the teacher participants said there were pieces of training available in how to work in Canvas. The questionnaire showed concern about “lack of proficiency in your own skills,” “teaching style has been changed,” “teaching time has been changed,” and “teaching content has been adjusted.” These were new for teachers as the traditional teaching models are for in-classroom learning, and now teachers that had been working this way for many years were expected to change to an online style, which Kim and Asbury (2020) found in their study. The teaching time left “time for students to study on their own,” while the style had to “encourage students to study independently.” The adjustment becomes “online tutor” or student “self-learning.”

The expectation for teachers was to use Canvas to teach students. Van Nuland et al.'s (2020) study shares that professional development for online learning was needed, and in this study, the teacher participants felt there was no appropriate training for Canvas. There is a need for targeted training for special education teachers on how to teach either using Canvas or teaching in an online environment. Canvas is the LMS of choice in Wyoming, but in combination with Petrerro et al.'s (2020) opinion, using a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) may provide the needed framework for online



learning for students with disabilities. Tucker's (1983) paper about the 1982 court ruling in the Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley states that special education programs must be individualized for students to meet their unique needs. The teacher interviewees shared their preparation to provide equal educational opportunities using paper/pencil, emails, and the LMS Canvas. Like other studies (Jameson et al., 2019; Lovitz et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020), some students and families did not want to deal with technology and selected what would work for them working with their special education teacher.

Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) last variable is *strategies* dealing with coping skills. It was how the participants shared positive items from the COVID-19 transition from in-classroom to online that I felt was changing the situation. Parents interviewed felt the best communication was between their special education teachers and the paraprofessionals that worked with their students, similar to Tremmel et al.'s (2020) study. The parents said that the interactions with their students provided positive opportunities to check on student progress and support the student when needed. In some instances, it was the teaching of family members so they could provide support for students. Parents express dissatisfaction with the sporadic communication of others associated with their students' learning. The teacher participants wanted to acknowledge the parents' work, saying, "I think that families are not necessarily getting the credit that some of them deserve," noting the new roles as monitors, facilitators, and correcting negative student behavior. The last part of the variable *strategies* is reframing the situation and managing the stress. In this study, it was the comments from the parent participants that they felt better with

the transition. They have had to transition online several times since the initial COVID-19 pandemic, and they felt there was support, which worked for them. The special education teacher participants shared that there are plans in place for another closing, but there are still many issues about providing for students with special education needs.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The focus of this study was to obtain honest answers from participants; however, they may have provided the information they felt would benefit the study (Creswell & Poth, 2016). To prevent potential bias, I tried to ask questions that were not leading. I used an interview protocol and presented it the same to each participant. Each participant was sent their transcript to check their responses with an opportunity to make corrections or clarifications. The interview protocol helped keep bias to a minimum as it was the same presentation with each participant.

Other limitations were the study's location, participant demographics, and sample size. The study was done in Wyoming, identified as a rural state. All participants had to be secondary special education teachers and parents that lived in Wyoming during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample size was two parents of special education students and four special education teachers. The study location and participant numbers may limit the transferability to larger populations.

### **Recommendations**

This study focused on the transition experience with closing procedures and Canvas. The adjustments during the COVID-19 closer with communication and the lack of support and challenges. Finally, what changes or supports were available. I

determined that more research is needed based on the finding and the review of current literature.

This basic qualitative study about the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities should be duplicated for the elementary level. Future research is needed to learn what changes or supports are in place when school closes. What training is in place to support teacher and family use of Canvas in special education. Research is needed on the types of communication that worked best for student engagement and adjustments in services provided between in-classroom and online (Tremmel et al., 2020). Understanding special education teachers' concerns for different LMS and taking suggestions on interactive tools that would support student learning may provide a starting point for a transfer to larger populations.

Two particular concerns related but not part of this study were those older special education students those teachers were unable to contact and students that just disappeared. If there was no way to communicate with them or living situations were not supportive, students did not engage or did no work. Further studies are needed into what happened to these students during the closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations that can support a transition from in-classroom to online when a situation similar to the COVID-19 pandemic happens is targeted training on how to use an online forum to teach (Van Nuland et al., 2020). Schools and online technology should support special education teachers in creating a universal design for learning lessons that can be used in the classroom and online (Petterro et al., 2020). Teachers need to shift

from being the person in the front of the room to a facilitator of learning. They should allow students to take on the role of self directed learners. Ensure there is technology available for all special education students and that families know how to use it and support engagement with the programs available. It is also important for students' families to have multiple ways of providing those resources, such as the alternative technology tools used in school (Jameson et al., 2019; Lovitz et al., 2020; Tremmel et al., 2020).

### **Implications**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities and identify future supports for this kind of transition to online learning. The collection of data and the research questions, how do teachers and parents describe the transition experience from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic? What adjustments were made by special education teachers and parents with the instructional supports in place when the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic? What changes or *supports* would help special education teachers and parents transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the future like a pandemic? The findings can explain the participants' perceptions during the closing of schools during COVID-19. Participants provided suggestions of what worked for them during this time and expressed concerns about what they felt was missing. The study size was limited to

Wyoming, considered a rural state even with two large cities. The information from this study can provide insight into what to look at for improvements.

### **Positive Social Change**

The study was to learn about the perceptions of special education teachers and parents during the transition. Since this study, there have been other variants of COVID-19 that may cause another occasion for schools to shut down to slow the spread of the virus. Positive social change is possible by using the information from this study to implement new policies with communication, LMS software applicable to special education student needs, technology limitations, and looking for more interactive options for students can provide a positive resource for all students and teachers. Changes that can work for students with special needs are beneficial for all students.

### **Conceptual Implications**

The basic qualitative study examined the challenges of secondary special education teachers and parents during the transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities. The findings allowed special education teachers and parents to explain what worked for them and their students during the transition. I used Schlossberg et al.'s transition model that "focuses on life events entailing change" (Schlossberg et al., 1995, p. 18). It was the change occurring when schools closed their doors and transitioned to an online learning environment that I used Schlossberg et al.'s (1995) model. I was able to understand better the parent and special education teacher participants' perceptions of the transition and understand it was not just one or two items that were many aspects of concern. All the participants expressed their feelings about the

haphazard transition. The parents and teacher participants did their best to work within the school closure situation. Supports for online learning were not considered before the pandemic, but all participants provided strategies that did work and strategies for future consideration of transitions.

### **Conclusion**

The study was designed to explore the perceptions of two parents and four special education teachers and their transition from in-classroom to online learning. Parents expressed their views about Canvas and the technical problems they had to overcome, but the parents spoke highly of the special education teachers and how their interaction and support were helpful. The concerns from teachers about the administration not understanding the different aspects of special education and the expectation that one software would meet all students' needs were shared. The study will demonstrate the importance of working to meet these individualized needs of students. The study results may inform leaders of the importance of having special education providers share their concerns to help look for and provide support in the future.

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## Appendix A: Teacher Interview Protocol Form

Participant Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time started: \_\_\_\_\_ Time ended: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview conducted via: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introductory Statement**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_, thank you for volunteering to participate in my research study. I want to ensure your privacy, are you in a location where you are comfortable conducting this interview? (If yes, continue. If not, ask to reschedule the interview). As a reminder, I will be recording the interview to ensure I capture your exact words. With your permission, may I start the recording? Thank you.

**START RECORDING**

I am Liz Merritt, Ph. D. student at Walden University conducting an interview with participant number \_\_\_\_\_.

I have confirmed that you met the participant requirements based on your responses to the online questionnaire. I am interviewing secondary special education teachers for my study. I understand that there were challenges to meeting IEP or ILP services when the transition from in-classroom to online learning occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020. I will be asking questions about your experiences and perceptions. What I am trying to understand are the events and how accommodations were done. I hope you feel comfortable providing your candid perceptions concerning your experiences and instructional adjustments to support student academic achievement. Please remember that there is no “correct” response, but I request your honest thoughts. As a reminder, your identity will remain confidential by using a pseudonym. Also, your participation is voluntary, and you may stop your participation at any time and refuse to respond to any questions that you do not wish to answer. Since this is a research study to gain your perceptions, I will not express opinions concerning what you provide. I provide you with the research questions, but I may ask follow-up or clarification questions.

Before beginning, I would like to understand more about your educational experience, the number of students you assist, and any guidance before or during the emergency transition, and professional development to assist with instructional adjustments.

- (1) What subjects do you teach or co-teach?
- (2) What is the average number of students in each class?
- 3) Can you share the school emergency plan for transitions to online learning?
- 4) Was there professional development provided before or during the transition of your content online?

**Guiding Research Question**

The guiding research question is “What challenges were experienced to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities by secondary special education teachers and parents to support the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming?”

**S.Q. 1** How do teachers and parents describe the transition experience from in-classroom

Conceptual Framework	Questions	Probes
<i>Situation</i> Variable (What is happening?)	Can you describe what happened in March 2020?	What did this mean to you?
<i>Self</i> -Variable (To whom is it happening?)	Can you describe what happened to you during the transition from in-classroom to online learning?	Please describe your feelings and provide examples.
<i>Support</i> Variable (What help is available?)	Can you describe what supports or services were provided or given during this transition?	Is there anything that stood out you would like to share?
<i>Strategies</i> Variable (How does the person cope?)	Can you describe how you felt about the transition from in-classroom to online?	Can you share what resources you did use?

to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**S.Q. 2** What adjustments were made by special education teachers and parents with the instructional supports in place when the transition from in-classroom to online learning

Conceptual Framework	Questions	Probes
<i>Situation</i> Variable (What is happening?)	Can you explain the adjustments made during the transition from in-classroom to online?	How did those adjustments work?
<i>Self</i> -Variable (To whom is it happening?)	What adjustments are made for student IEP or ILP?	How do you see this happening?
<i>Support</i> Variable (What help is available?)	How are the adjustments being done for IEP or ILP online?	Tell me about the guidance provided?
<i>Strategies</i> Variable (How does the person cope?)	Can you describe how you believe these adjustments worked?	What challenges does this create?

for students with disabilities occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**S.Q. 3** What challenges and supports are lacking for special education teachers and parents in their transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Conceptual Framework	Questions	Probes
<i>Situation</i> Variable (What is happening?)	What were the challenges or lack of support during the transition?	Can you provide more details?
<i>Self-Variable</i> (To whom is it happening?)	How did this affect the challenges or supports lacking for students with IEPs or ILPs?	How did this impact students?
<i>Support</i> Variable (What help is available?)	What help was available for the challenges or supports for students with disabilities?	What would you like to see moving forward?
<i>Strategies</i> Variable (How does the person cope?)	What were you able to do for students with disabilities during this time?	How do you see this working moving forward?

3) Is there a school emergency plan for transitions to online learning?

4) Is there professional development provided for transitioning content online?

#### **Concluding Statement**

Thank you so much for participating in this interview. Your perceptions have provided me insight into special education transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will email a transcript of our conversation for your review. If you have any questions about the process or results, you may reach out to me by email or phone. Do you have any additional questions for me? I appreciate the time you have taken to assist me. I will be in touch soon.

STOP RECORDING

## Appendix B: Parent or Guardian Interview Protocol Form

Participant Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time started: \_\_\_\_\_ Time ended: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview conducted via: \_\_\_\_\_

**Introductory Statement**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_, thank you for volunteering to participate in my research study. I want to ensure your privacy. Are you in a location where you are comfortable conducting this interview? (If yes, continue. If no, ask to reschedule the interview). As a reminder, I will be recording the interview to ensure I capture your exact words. With your permission, may I start the recording? Thank you.

**START RECORDING**

I am Liz Merritt, Ph. D. student at Walden University conducting an interview with participant number \_\_\_\_\_.

I have confirmed that you met the participant requirements based on your responses to the online questionnaire. I am interviewing secondary special education parents/guardians for my study. I understand that there were challenges to meeting IEP or ILP services when the transition from in-classroom to online learning occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020. I will be asking questions about your experiences and perceptions. What I am trying to understand are the events and how accommodations were done. I hope you feel comfortable providing your candid perceptions concerning your experiences and instructional adjustments to support student academic achievement. Please remember that there is no “correct” response, but I request your honest thoughts. As a reminder, your identity will remain confidential by using a pseudonym. Also, your participation is voluntary, and you may stop your participation at any time and refuse to respond to any questions that you do not wish to answer. Since this is a research study to gain your perceptions, I will not express opinions concerning what you provide. I provide you with the research questions, but I may ask follow-up or clarification questions.

Before beginning, I would like to understand more about your educational experience, the number of students you assist, and any guidance for you and your family before, during, or after the emergency transition to assist with instructional adjustments.

(1) Number of children in your home?

(2) Number of adults providing support for child/children with disabilities.

**Guiding Research Question**

The guiding research question is “What challenges were experienced to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities by secondary special education teachers and parents to support the transition from in-classroom to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic in Wyoming?”

**S.Q. 1** How do teachers and parents describe the transition experience from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Conceptual Framework	Questions	Probes
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<i>Situation</i> Variable (What is happening?)	Can you describe what happened in March 2020?	What did this mean to you?
<i>Self</i> Variable (To whom is it happening?)	Can you describe what happened to you during the transition from in-classroom to online learning?	Please describe your feelings and provide examples.
<i>Support</i> Variable (What help is available?)	Can you describe what supports or services were provided or given during this transition?	Is there anything that stood out you would like to share?
<i>Strategies</i> Variable (How does the person cope?)	Can you describe how you felt about the transition from in-classroom to online?	Can you share what resources you did use if any?

**S.Q. 2** What adjustments were made by special education teachers and parents with the instructional supports in place when the transition from in-classroom to online learning

Conceptual Framework	Questions	Probes
<i>Situation</i> Variable (What is happening?)	Can you explain the adjustments you made during the transition from in-classroom to online?	How did those adjustments work?
<i>Self</i> -Variable (To whom is it happening?)	What adjustments are made for your child with IEP or ILP?	Can you provide an example of one process and how that worked?
<i>Support</i> Variable (What help is available?)	How did the adjustments provide for the IEP or ILP online?	How do you see this happening?
<i>Strategies</i> Variable (How does the person cope?)	Can you describe how the adjustments worked?	What challenges does this create?

for students with disabilities occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**S.Q. 3** What are the challenges and supports lacking for special education teachers and parents in their transition from in-classroom to online learning for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Conceptual Framework	Questions	Probes
<i>Situation</i> Variable (What is happening?)	What were the challenges or lack of support during the transition?	Can you provide more details?
<i>Self</i> -Variable (To whom is it happening?)	What were the challenges or supports lacking for your child with IEPs or ILPs?	How did this impact your child?
<i>Support</i> Variable (What help is available?)	What help was available for the challenges or supports for your child with disabilities?	What would you like to see moving forward?
<i>Strategies</i> Variable (How does the person cope?)	What were you able to do for your child with disabilities during this time?	How do you see this working moving forward?

3) Has your school shared information on a school plan for emergency transitions to online learning?

4) Were there additional interactions provided for transitioning your child online?

#### **Concluding Statement**

Thank you so much for participating in this interview. Your perceptions have provided me insight into special education transitions during the COVID-19 pandemic. I will email a transcript of our conversation for your review. If you have any questions about the process or results, you may reach out to me by email or phone. Do you have any additional questions for me? I appreciate the time you have taken to assist me. I will be in touch soon.

STOP RECORDING