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Transition Education Designees' Perceptions of Implementing Effective Transition Services for High School Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Cynthia Kososki

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2024

Abstract

Transition Education Designees' Perceptions of Implementing Effective Transition
Services for High School Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder

by

Cynthia Kososki

MA, Concordia University, 2015

BS, Baylor University, 2003

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

This project study focused on the inconsistencies in transition planning for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) by teachers serving as transition education designees (TEDs) in a specific local region of a southern state. Guided by Schlossberg's transition theory, the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the perceptions of teachers serving as TEDs in a southern state regarding the challenges and resources needed for transitioning students with ASD in that region. The research questions addressed in this study included the TED's perceptions of implementing effective transition services for students with ASD and the perceived challenges they face when implementing such services. The project study design employed a basic qualitative design approach and involved a sample of 12 education professionals who had been appointed as the TED for the local education agency in the specific region. Data were collected through semi structured interviews conducted with participants. The data were analyzed using open coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis. Results from these analyses indicated that a collaborative approach to professional development between relevant identified stakeholders has the strongest impact on transition program planning and success. Students with ASD can benefit when TEDs can identify their areas of need, collaborate with parents and employers, and combine this information to enhance their ability to implement effective, consistent transition services. Positive social change is apparent as effective, consistent transition programs for students with ASD are implemented and measured through employment success and postsecondary outcomes data.

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Section 1: The Problem

Transition services for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in a southern state are defined as a coordinated set of activities designed to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school into postschool activities. These activities encompass postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation (Texas Education Agency, 2022). Transition services are tailored to meet the individual needs, preferences, and interests of each student. They include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other postschool objectives, and, when appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

However, transition service for students aged 18 to 22 with ASD lack consistency across local education agencies (LEAs), mainly due to a lack of guidance on effective components for developing and managing school-based program. The current transition education designees (TEDs), in collaboration with researchers, can provide valuable insight to develop effective components of transition programs that best support students with ASD. While the literature has highlighted many effective transition programs, there remains a lack of consistency in their implementation and specific supports for students with ASD.

The Local Problem

The problem addressed in this study is the inconsistent planning of transition services for students with ASD by high school teachers serving as TEDs within a specific local region of a southern state. In this region, there has been an identified lack of consistency in planning of transition services for students with ASD by teachers identified as TEDs.

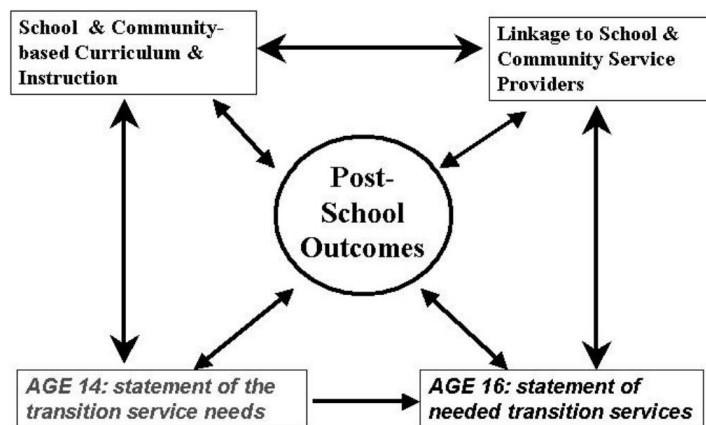
Transition services for students with ASD have been an evolving aspect of education for several decades, spanning from the national level to the local level. The legislative history of transition services can be traced back to the late 1970s and early 1980s, marked by the publication of numerous studies focusing on postschool outcomes of students with disabilities. The aim of this early research and data collection was to determine the success of youth with disabilities after leaving a supported high school environment. Findings from these studies conducted in the 1980s proved that transition for students with disabilities posed a significant challenge (Hasazi et al., 1985). Consequently, transition planning for students with disabilities gained national attention and became a national priority.

In the early 1980s, Will proposed a program to bridge school and work programs in order to support the transition process. Halpern expanded the transition model in 1985 to incorporate residential, employment, and social interpersonal networks. Between 1989 and 1996, funding was allocated to establish a committee responsible for interviewing youth to determine transition needs, implementing a system of change, and providing

financial support to states in their efforts to support students with disabilities in transitioning from high school to post high school environments successfully. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) included a provision for transition services in 1990, and, in 1992, the Rehabilitation Act was amended to include the same definition of transition as IDEA. Legislative changes continued throughout the 1990s, with the passing of the School-to-Work Opportunities Act in 1994, that required the inclusion of all students. The age requirement for schools to initiate transition planning for students with disabilities was initially set at age 16 and subsequently lowered to age 14. Figure 1 shows an overview of transitioning planning for students with disabilities.

Figure 1

Transitioning Planning for Students With Disabilities Overview



In Texas, the Autism Supplement was adopted into the state education code in 2007 to provide additional support for students with ASD, requiring that LEAs offer transition planning, referred to as futures planning, as early as determined by the Annual Review and Dismissal Committee.

Effective transition programs for students with ASD, specifically those between the ages of 18 and 22, consist of various elements and components. These elements are designed to support the students enrolled in transition programs to acquire skills beyond academics that are needed for success in employment and other postsecondary opportunities. In the identified local region of the southern state under study, transition programs are led by TEDs and include academic skills relevant to employment, task-based skills training, and behavioral skills support. However, improvement for transition programs that support students with ASD requires updated research and input from TEDs on the success, challenges, and necessary resources for transitioning students with ASD.

Rationale

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate TED's perceptions of the successes, challenges, and resources needed for transitioning students with ASD in one region of a southern state. The evolution of transition services for students with ASD is not mirrored by the necessary training and support for the individuals tasked with planning and implementing transition services for students with ASD.

Students with ASD require a set of coordinated activities as part of their comprehensive transition service plans, mandated through IDEA. These plans are expected to be implemented by knowledgeable and well-trained school practitioners (Alverson et al., 2019). A local transition specialist for students with ASD in the identified region of this study reported that some hurdles faced by LEAs in this region include the absence of a blueprint for effective programming, a shortage of

knowledgeable staff to implement programs, and an overall lack of resources for planning consistent transition services for students with ASD.

According to a regional special education liaison, also serving as a special education director in this region, transition services for students with ASD continues to be an area in which LEAs in this one region are asked to improve. The liaison shared that there is no indication that the number of incidents of noncompliance across the state is declining as state monitoring efforts continue. In addition, the regional special education director in this region reported that many local schools have expressed the desire to implement consistent transition planning but face numerous roadblocks.

Definition of Terms

Autism spectrum disorder: Characterized by persistent deficits in social communication and social interaction across multiple contexts; deficits in social-emotional reciprocity; reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; failure to initiate or respond to social interactions; deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction; deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships; difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; and/or absence of interests (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Employability skills: Skills that directly relate to the preparation of young adults for employment, including general skills necessary to obtain or retain employment (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Futures planning: Planning for the future regardless of the age of the child, providing an outline of the necessary requirements to reach goals that will enable the child to function in the present and upcoming school settings, as well as in postsecondary settings (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Individualized Education Program: A written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised by the admission, review, and dismissal committee, of which parents are active members (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Interagency collaboration: The coordination between LEAs and other adult agencies to promote students' pursuit of successful outcomes during the transition process (Blalock et al., 2003).

Local education agency (LEA): A public board of education or other public authority legally constituted within a state for either administrative control or direction of, or to perform a service function for, public elementary schools or secondary schools in a city, county, township, school district, or other political subdivision of a state, or for a combination of school districts or counties that is recognized in a state as an administrative agency for its public elementary schools or secondary schools. Public school districts, open enrollment charter schools, and regional education service centers are specific examples of LEAs (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Postsecondary: The time frame after high school, referring to students who have completed the requirements for a high school diploma or its equivalent (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Transition assessment: An ongoing process of collecting information on the student's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future living, learning, and working environments. This process begins at age 14 or earlier and continues until the student graduates or exits high school (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Transition education designees: An employee in a district or charter school designated as the primary contact for transition and employment services for students with disabilities in special education programs (Texas Education Agency, 2021).

Transition plan: The focus of the transition plan is to help students with disabilities, beginning no later than their 16th birthday, make the transition from school to postschool by improving areas of postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Transition services: A coordinated set of activities designed within a results-oriented process focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to postschool activities. This includes postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult

services, independent living, or community participation (Texas Education Agency, 2022).

Significance of the Study

This study addressed a gap in practice related to consistent, effective planning by TEDs for students with ASD who qualify for transition services and supports, ensuring success in postsecondary settings. Existing research has highlighted the need to identify factors predicting postsecondary employment outcomes for students in process of transitioning out of high school (Wong et al., 2021). However, the gap in practice is evident in the inconsistency of planning transition services for students with ASD by TEDs in one local region of a southern state. Research has shown that closing this gap for TEDs and enhancing their knowledge of transition programming could improve the implementation of supports and increase the effectiveness of public-school transition programs (Shattuck et al., 2020).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) indicated that adolescents diagnosed with ASD had higher rates of unemployment and lowered participation in postsecondary education, exhibited an increased need for living support, and had decreased opportunities for community and social activities. Thus, this study may bring about positive social change through gaining knowledge of the components of transition services for students with ASD from the individuals who are currently responsible for the implementation of transition services for students with ASD. I also aimed to identify the needed support for TEDs in one region of a southern state to be able to successfully

implement consistent transition services for students with ASD. In this study, I identified areas of growth and the ability of TEDs to implement consistent transition services for students with ASD. Identifying the needed knowledge surrounding the implementation of consistent transition services can greatly benefit students with ASD who are transitioning to adulthood as measured through postsecondary outcomes data through regional and state performance plans.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate TEDs' perceptions of the successes, challenges, and resources needed for transitioning students with ASD in one region of a southern state. The following questions were posed to gain a better understanding of how the teachers serving as TEDs for LEAs perceived the implementation of effective transition services for students with ASD and the challenges they face when implementing these services. The research questions (RQs) guiding this study were as follows:

RQ1: What are the TEDs' perceptions of how to implement effective transition services for students with ASD?

RQ2: What challenges do TEDs face in implementing transition services for students with ASD?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that supported this research study is Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory. Initially developed in 1981, it examined how humans adapt to transition (Schlossberg, 1981). Schlossberg's transition theory encompasses understanding transitions, coping with transitions, and applying skills in work life transitions. This framework provides essential concepts for establishing programs that support students with ASD in their preparation for the transition from high school to postsecondary settings.

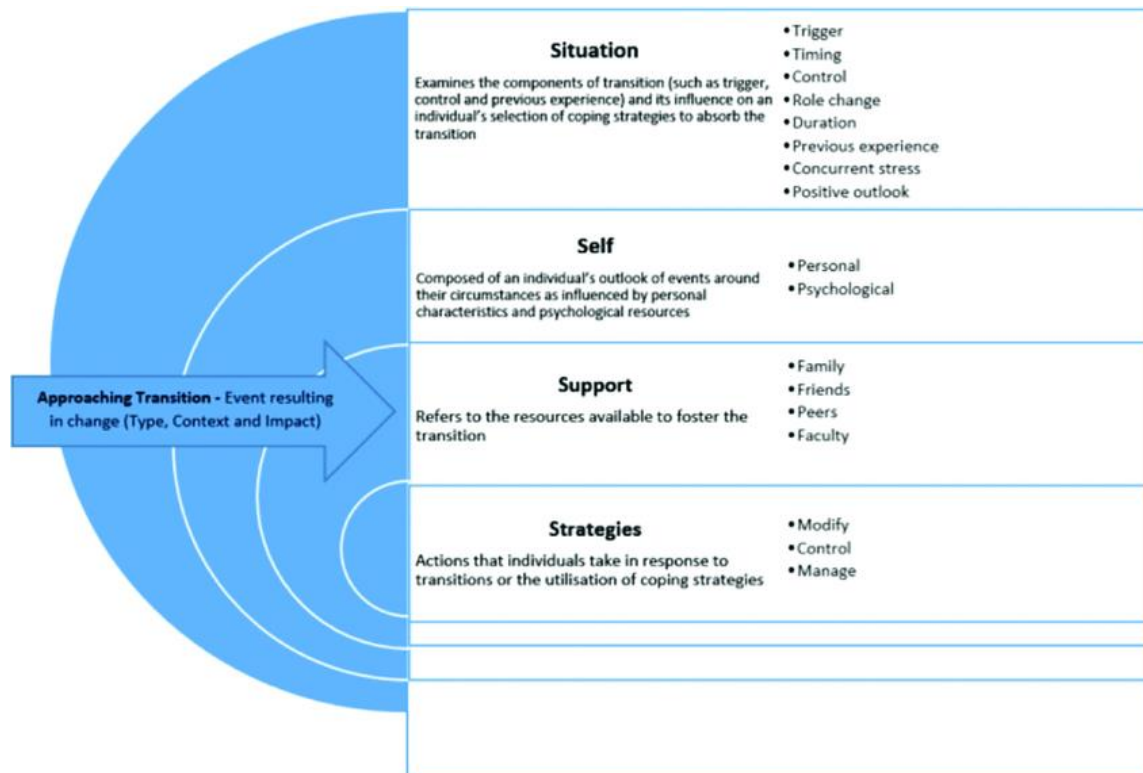
Schlossberg's transition model (Schlossberg, 1981) offers insight into the various types of transitions individuals may undergo and the challenges during these transition periods. Her theory characterizes transition and different forms of transitions, outlines of the transition process, and factors that influence transition. Schlossberg's theory, therefore, directly related to students with ASD navigating the transition from high school to postsecondary experiences.

This framework bridges the understanding that students with ASD require specialized transition supports to adapt to the changes occurring after high school. Schlossberg's theory supports the need for effective consistent transition programming with specific supports in place for students with ASD. According to Schlossberg, the four variables, as seen in Figure 2, significantly impact an individual's ability to cope during a transition: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2011). While students with

ASD may experience transition differently, their ability to deal with these transitions depends on these four variables.

Figure 2

Overview of Schlossberg's Four Variables That Affect Transition



Adapted from “Adjusting to University: Perceptions of First-Year Health Professions Students,” by B. S. Malau-Aduli, M. D. Adu, F. Alele, K. Jones, A. Drovandi, M. Mylrea, K. Sfera, S. Ross, and E. Jennings, 2021, *PLOS ONE*, 16(5).

<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0251634>

Students with ASD transitioning from high school to postsecondary programs encounter substantial changes that can influence new relationships, behaviors, and self-perceptions. As these students transition to adulthood and experience the changes outlined in this theory, they require increased support to identify and achieve goals, as outlined in their individual education transition plan. Thus, to facilitate a successful transition after high school, TEDs, along with LEAs, must understand the essential components needed to create and implement effective programs that prepare students with ASD for these changes.

Schlossberg's (1981) model not only serves as a theoretical foundation for understanding transitions but also provides grounded theoretical knowledge that can inform the development of the project study derived from this research. The challenges identified by Schlossberg are not the change themselves, but how these changes alter one's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions. This insight is crucial for shaping transition programs for students with ASD.

The focus of Schlossberg's (1981) theory on transition lays the groundwork for local transition programs and provides guidance for LEAs, which could provide support for TEDs and help bridge the gap for students with ASD enrolled in supported transition programs. A deepened understanding of this theory can equip TEDs with the knowledge needed to provide students with ASD in the transition period from high school into postsecondary settings with consistency in the needed skills. This, in turn, can enhance the success of students with ASD after graduation from high school.

Critiques of Schlossberg's Model

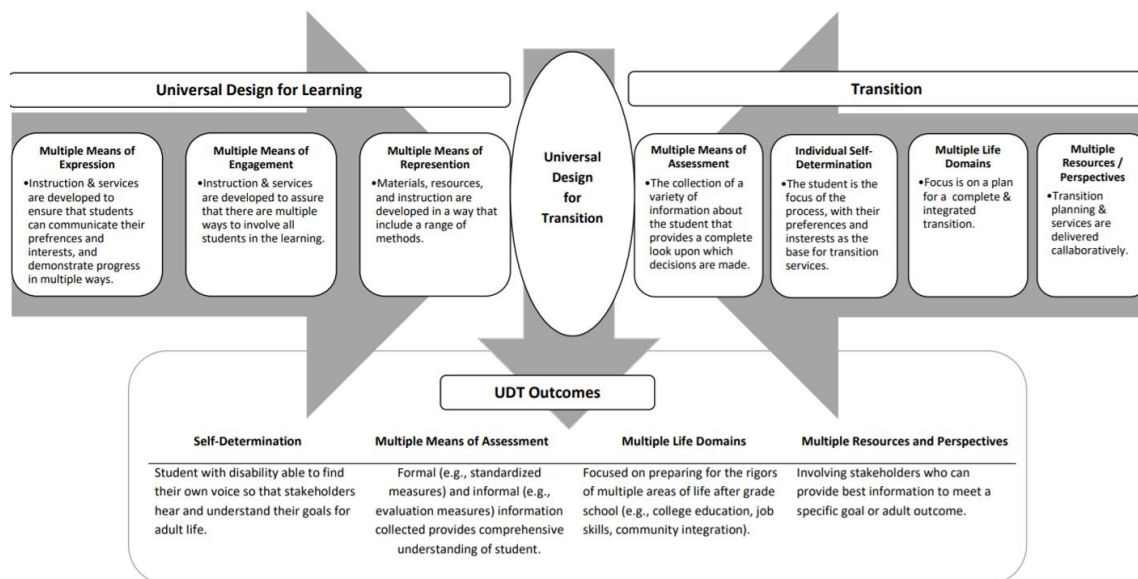
Critiques of Schlossberg have noted that her model does not adequately capture the complexity of students with ASD transition needs in relation to academics and the unique transition planning required as they move through their educational experiences (LaRon & Bruno, 2018). It has been noted that the model lacks specificity and only provides broad categories that are not linked directly to educational experiences (LaRon & Bruno, 2018). This has led to a lack of guidance for practical application or intervention support for educators to apply the theory to students with ASD participating in transition programs at the secondary level. Despite criticism, Schlossberg's transition theory remains a valuable framework for understanding transitions. As research expands, other models have been proposed, offering different perspectives, potentially addressing some limitations in the educational area of Schlossberg's model.

For instance, researchers LaRon and Bruno explored beyond the focus of person-centered transition models and sought to tie the process of transition to the academia framework of universal design for learning (UDL). In 2018, LaRon and Bruno published a conceptual framework, as seen in Figure 3, that combined the components of the universal design for learning with the elements of person-centered transition planning to develop the universal design for transition. The universal design for transition framework's goal was to focus on preparing individuals with disabilities for life after school, while also providing them access to academic content (LaRon & Bruno, 2018).

The universal design for transition expanded the concepts of barrier free academics to include transition education services provided to students with disabilities.

Figure 3

Universal Design for Transition Conceptual Framework



From “Universal Design for Transition: A Conceptual Framework for Blending Academics and Transition Instruction,” by S. A. LaRon and L. Bruno, 2018, *Journal of Special Education Apprenticeship*, 7(3). <https://doi.org/10.58729/2167-3454.1075>

Another critique of Schlossberg lies in the inability to use her model to measure the success of transition and the quantify individuals’ perceptions of transition in the various stages. Researchers Ryan et al. (2011) implemented Schlossberg’s 4s model in their study with veterans as they transitioned from active duty to becoming civilians but noted the need for a high level of individualization of the model for each participant. The study also highlighted lack of ability to use the model to measure success of the

individuals throughout their transition (Ryan et al., 2011). While the 4s could guide instructors on mentoring the individuals through transition, Ryan et al. were unable to evaluate the benefit of implementation based on the elements of the Schlossberg's model.

Review of the Broader Problem

In expanding my search to gain greater knowledge and depth into the consistent and effective implementation of transition programs for students with ASD, I used the online search engine ERIC proving to be the most effective through Walden University. My search terms included, but were not limited to, *transition*, *transition plans*, *transition education designees*, *autism*, *postsecondary outcomes*, and *disability*. Multiple searches revealed three major themes.

The first overarching theme focused on the needs of students with ASD when transitioning from secondary to postsecondary settings, including their transition needs, transition plans, and transition supports. The second theme highlighted the imperative need for improved collaboration to ensure successful transition support for students with ASD. The third overarching theme underscored the needs of educators responsible for implementing transition assessments, developing transition plans, and delivering transition services for students with ASD.

Planning and implementing transition services for students with ASD constitute a federally mandated component of a student with an identified disability's education. Transition services, as defined by IDEA, involve a coordinated set of activities aimed at improving postsecondary outcomes for individuals with disabilities, with a specific focus

on postsecondary education or training, employment, and independent living skills.

Despite being federally mandated, education research reports have revealed that young adults with disabilities are not receiving adequate supports in this area of critical need.

These individuals are less likely to engage in postsecondary education, employment, or training compared to their peers without disabilities and are less likely to graduate from postsecondary school (Ju et al., 2017).

Students With ASD and Transition Support Needs

The uniqueness of each individual with ASD poses challenges to effective transition planning. Studies have consistently shown that students with ASD possess specific transition planning needs that are not being met (Hatfield et al., 2018). Research data have revealed concerning trends, indicating that students with developmental disabilities are less likely than their peers without disabilities to attend 4-year colleges or secure an employment in the community, and they are more likely to be unemployed, get fired from their job, or quit their job within 8 years of leaving high school (Hoyle et al., 2020).

Ressa (2021) discovered that certain special education programs and transition plans lack the design necessary to support the students' acquisition of the essential knowledge and skills for a successful transition from grade to grade and into postsecondary life. Autism specific recommendations for transition planning have often been generalized from general education, nondisabled peers, disregarding the specific and unique needs of students with ASD when generalizing skills into a postsecondary setting.

Numerous research studies have consistently indicated that existing transition programs are not currently meeting the unique needs of students with ASD as they transition into postsecondary settings. However, to best prepare students with ASD for life, it is necessary to equip them with the ability to be independent in vocational and daily living skills, allowing them to successfully navigate the transitional period of their life (Chen & Yakubova, 2019). Moreover, Hatfield et al. (2018) identified the most critical factor for success in transition to a postsecondary setting for students with ASD is having a plan with clear goals and a defined structure in place. Many students eligible for transition services in their secondary settings still lack this federally and state mandated plan. Even when a plan is in place, it is often developed without complete information about the student's interests, abilities, or understanding of or accounting for accommodations at a secondary level and what those accommodations will look like at a postsecondary level depending on the students' next step in their postsecondary journey. Hence, comprehensive transition plans play a pivotal role for students with disabilities, due to their unique characteristics and accommodation needs, which are essential for a successful transition from high school to independent living, education, and employment settings (Mask & DePountis, 2018).

Students with ASD are legally required to participate in various assessments to evaluate their skills, strengths, weakness, likes, and dislikes, typically around age 14 or earlier in school. However, data from these assessments often fail to provide enough practical information to initiate vocational intervention for the student (Brendle et al.,

2018a). Effective transition planning for students with disabilities, including those with ASD, requires transition and vocational assessments that are individualized to the needs of the student along with their strengths, preferences, and interests. Brendle et al. (2018b) reported limited research availability on assessment types and utilization of results, particularly for small and rural schools to incorporate into transition planning, especially for students with intellectual disabilities.

Despite the federal guidelines listing the requirements for transition planning for student with ASD, there is little research and guidance on collaborative strategies needed for successful transition between schools, communities, and service personnel. Students with ASD have inherent deficits related to their diagnosis that have led to a high rate of unemployment. Both core and secondary deficits of ASD necessitate additional support for these individuals to gain and maintain employment. Researchers have emphasized the need for support for individuals with ASD during the transition from school to postsecondary opportunities due to specific deficits related to ASD (Ashburner et al., 2018). Nasamran et al. (2017) outlined the data showing when students with ASD participate in postsecondary activities, such as continued education and supported employment, the students experience an overall increase in independence, contribution to society, and quality of life.

The compilation of published studies has shown that programs with specially designed services to support students with ASD in the transition from high school to their next steps can be highly effective when tailored to support the specific needs of these

students. Further research has shown that transition programs should maintain consistency in developing settings with a strengths-based approach that focuses on students' interests and level of competence (Bross & Travers, 2017). Thus, consistency of effective programs across the local region when implementing transition programs for students with ASD can improve the overall success of students with ASD as they transition from high school into their next steps of life. Successful and effective programs implemented with consistency must take in account the core deficits students with ASD have in relation to disability.

Transition Planning Collaboration

Understanding stakeholders' roles in transition support for students with ASD is a reoccurring theme in the literature. Current estimates project that nearly one million youth with ASD will enter adulthood in the next decade (Shattuck et al., 2020). For successful transition from high school to postsecondary employment or education for youth with disabilities, transition teams engaged in students' transition service programming must collaborate effectively. Factors identified through research conducted by Test and Fowler (2018) include work-based learning experiences, family involvement, interagency collaboration, and inclusion in general education.

With an increasing emphasis on transition planning, interagency collaboration, and importance on improving positive outcomes for student with ASD both in-school and post-school, LEAs and adult agencies have started to hire professionals whose sole priority is to specialize in secondary transition. These transition specialists typically work

with school-based transition personnel and adult agency professionals by taking a leadership role in many transition activities. Plotner et al. (2020) noted an inconsistency and a lack of clarity among the roles of transition specialists, resulting in poor collaboration. Insufficient transition collaboration and limited research on collaborative practices in transition planning remains problematic. The literature consistently underscores the importance of interagency collaboration across special education and other transition stakeholder agencies (Raines & Talapatra, 2019).

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) services are one piece of interagency collaboration, designed to help youth and adults with disabilities in accessing and maintaining employment. However, research documenting patterns of VR service use among high school students on the autism spectrum and the effectiveness of these services is limited (Roux et al., 2021). Post-school, students and parents have reported challenges in accessing services outlined in their transition plans due to inadequate planning, overburdened service agencies, and insufficient accountability for adult service providers. Reports also highlight a failure to include appropriate skill-building and insufficient interagency and community relationships, limiting efforts to gain and maintain employment. Diverse stakeholder perspectives illuminate the need for implementation efforts to target the provider, and organizational and policy level changes to enhance transition outcomes for individuals with ASD (Snell-Rood et al., 2020).

Educator Support and Training Needs

Special education teachers play an essential and vital role in preparing secondary students with ASD for adult life by involving them in transition-related education, such as facilitating student involvement in planning and implementing instructional goals, acquiring and applying self-determination, academic, living, social, and occupational skills across school and community environments, and selecting appropriate accommodations that maximize student potential. Findings from Theobald et al. (2021) research emphasize the importance of teachers for long term outcomes of students with disabilities in areas such as graduation, college attendance, and later employment outcomes. May et al. (2018) assert that, for teachers to support positive outcomes for students with disabilities, specific transition competencies be addressed during pre-service personnel preparation.

Evidence from a study conducted by Mazzotti et al. (2018) reveals that, despite overwhelming evidence that youth with disabilities lag behind their typically developing peers without disabilities in terms of post-secondary success, states have not responded by expanding pre-service personnel preparation requirements in secondary transition areas. Despite the growing number of students with ASD, research studies in the area of transition support for students with ASD report a lack of growth in teacher service programs to align with student need. Research indicates that school and post-secondary outcomes for students with disabilities including those with ASD, improve significantly when teachers integrate transition instruction into their daily routines (Lingo et al., 2018).

Lombardi et al. (2020) also concluded that students who received consistent transition support interventions showed significant gains in this area compared to their peers who did not receive intervention. Despite evidence highlighting the necessity of incorporating transition elements into consistent daily instructional routines, there is a noticeable lack of research regarding the specific training and supports needed for educators to implement transition supports into daily routines. The absence of research guidance for training teachers in utilizing tools and methods for planning effective transition plans for students with ASD poses a significant challenge. Without proper training, these students are at the risk of lagging behind their typically developing peers in the area of post-secondary goals and employment.

Teachers require additional tools and strategies, particularly those facilitating the connections between practices and current instruction (Bartholomew & Griffin, 2018). Results from the study conducted by Brendle et al. (2018b) reported that teachers tasked with transitioning planning for students with intellectual disabilities expressed the need for training in this area in order to improve outcomes for these students. According to research by Roux et al. (2021), intentionally providing more job-related services for students on the autism spectrum and clearer guidance defining effective transition practice could enhance transition programming and employment outcomes. Both educators and researchers have identified a pressing need for greater training and support in the area of transition planning for students with ASD. Cavendish and Connor (2018) explained that teachers face barriers in successfully implementing transition plans for

students with ASD, including the need for training and preparation. Southward and Davis (2020) found that LEAs must train teachers and other school professionals in transition planning, irrespective of the student's future post-school settings. Many studies have demonstrated that targeted professional development improves the educators' abilities and skills to develop and implement successful transition programs for students with ASD. Research showed that when there is a disconnect between state and local policies and initiated professional development, there is a negative impact on professional practice (Martin et al., 2019). Mazzotti et al. (2018) stresses the importance of state education agencies systematically implementing professional development representing best practice. Delivering quality professional development to local districts, increases the likelihood that transition personnel will implement programs and practices with fidelity, sustaining implementation over time. Teachers often cite a lack of time and shortage of appropriate curricula as reasons for the insufficient implementation of transition education in their classrooms (Lingo et al., 2018). Scheef and Mahfouz (2020), on the contrary found in their research that some educators report a lack time to familiarize themselves with the abundance of transition-specific materials available, leading to feeling overwhelmed. Lack of time for independent learning is a trend among educators in modern-day education, as shown by research studies. Findings show a positive relationship between well-designed professional development and educator practice (Cornelius et al., 2020), suggesting that professional development can positively impact

transition programs for students with ASD by removing barriers associated with lack of time for individual educator learning experiences.

Teachers and faculty must carefully consider how they advocate for students transitioning from secondary education into post-secondary programs. Not only have teachers reported a lack of knowledge and a need for training in the area of transition planning for students with ASD, but parents have also acknowledged the need for greater educator training in this area. Ju et al. (2017) provide data indicating that parents identified a barrier to successful transition planning for their child with a diagnosed developmental disability was the lack of knowledge in completing an effective transition assessment. Their findings concluded that LEAs needed to develop better programming to assist teachers in gaining the knowledge and skills needed for effective transition planning (Ju et al., 2017). Parent concerns with educator knowledge in the area of transition and the ability to support students with disabilities through post-secondary planning and transition support were noted. Wilt and Morningstar (2018) found that parents feel educators were unprepared to communicate with families of students with disabilities during the transition planning phase. As states and local districts endeavor to build their capacity to support the transition service needs of students with disabilities in their communities, targeted professional development can supplement the teacher preparation that teachers receive (Mazzotti et al., 2018).

Implications

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore TED's perceptions of how to implement effective transition services and the challenges they encounter when implementing these services for students with ASD in a specific region of a southern state. Through in-depth interviews with TEDs in the local region in the southern state, I sought to gain understanding into perceptions and challenges faced by the TEDs currently working with students with ASD transitioning from secondary to postsecondary setting within LEAs. The data collected shed light on the current resources available to help the TEDs effectively support these students as they transition from secondary to a postsecondary setting. Furthermore, I identified the gap in resources and trainings needed for TEDs to do their jobs effectively, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the future needs required to prepare TEDs in supporting students with ASD during this transitional period.

A possible project arising from this basic qualitative study could be locally developed professional development sessions provided by the regional education service center that support the TEDs in the one region of the southern state. Using the data collected from the TEDs, the professional development sessions can be individualized to the identified needs of this specific position with the LEA. The data could also inform alternative support options such as online professional development for TEDs who are supporting students with ASD, transition resources for TEDs who are supporting students with ASD, or other options that can be explored with the analyzation of the data.

One significant barrier to implementing effective post-secondary education transition services stems partly from the disconnection between state resource programs and LEAs (Roux et al., 2018). The study by Roux et al. (2018) emphasizes that bridging the gap between these entities and increasing the knowledge of LEAs providing transition programming could improve the implementation of greater supports and the increase in the effectiveness of public-school transition programs. Collaborative efforts between LEAs and the regional education service centers across the state working together to provide training to support the development of highly qualified TEDs supporting effective transition programs for students with ASD can close this gap in practice.

Training for TEDs, facilitated at the local and regional level, can be designed in a modality effective for adult learners, encompassing follow up support to ensure the fidelity of implementation. Students with ASD can greatly benefit from highly effective transition education programs that are implemented with consistency, fidelity, and managed by highly qualified highly trained TEDs.

Summary

Section 1 of this project study addressed a problem in a local region in a southern state where educators, designated as a TED within their respective LEA, are required to develop and implement transition services for students with ASD as they progress from secondary education to post-secondary settings. In this project study, I examined the perceptions and challenges of providing effective services for students with ASD as they transition between these settings and what challenges the TEDs face as they implement

these services. Within Section 1, I provided a rationale, emphasizing the significance of addressing the identified gap in practice, highlighting the potential positive social change resulting from the study. I also included a definition of terms, underscored the significance of the study, and outlined the predicted implications of the study. Additionally, Section 1 included the conceptual framework that guided this project study and literature review incorporating relevant research articles.

Section 2 provides in depth details about the research design and approach. The section meticulously details the recruitment of participants, the implemented data collection strategy, and the adopted data analysis procedure. Following the methodological discussion, the study's data results are unveiled, culminating in the presentation of the research-informed project.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

Research Design

In this basic qualitative study, I aimed to explore the perceptions of TEDs regarding the implementation of consistent and effective transition service programs for students with ASD. I recruited 12 participating TEDs who met the criteria of being employed at a LEA in the specified region of the southern in this study and were serving at least one student with ASD at the time of the study. Semi structured interviews were conducted with 12 TEDs using a researcher-developed interview protocol. All interviewees were adults, and stringent measures were implemented to maintain confidentiality. Interviews were conducted via Zoom or in person based on the participant's preferences, with assigned numbers used to mask identities and maintain confidentiality.

A semi structured interview protocol, detailed in Appendix B, was developed to collect open-ended data, aligning with the study's objective of capturing diverse perspectives on consistently implementing effective transition programming for students with ASD. I used a combination of open coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis for the data analysis process. This comprehensive approach helped to provide an unbiased and thorough report of the collected data. Coding converts the qualitative interview data into quantifiable data that can be analyzed to inform the project. NVivo software and manual coding were used to analyze the transcripts of the recorded interviews. Open

coding allowed me to categorize the data into general groups. While axial coding further aggregated the data into specific categories. Themes derived from axial coding results were then used to guide the project study this research.

Potential barriers to this study included the experience level of TEDs participating in this study and the small sample size of TEDs recruited for this study. A potential challenge to collecting data from TEDs during this study was lack of experience and current knowledge of transition requirements for students with ASD due to their short time serving in this role. Due to the absence of specific qualifications for this position in the local setting, the level of input from the participating TEDs varied in depth and experience. The small number of TEDs represented may pose barriers for generalizing this study beyond the immediate site location.

Quantitative Versus Qualitative Research

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used as research methods. When determining the best method to collect data based on my problem, purpose, and RQs, a qualitative approach was chosen as the most appropriate research methodology.

Qualitative research involves interviews, which are fluid events that allow an effective interviewer to probe for more detailed and complete responses from interviewees (Boon, 2020). Qualitative research involves researchers collecting data in face-to-face situations by interacting with selected persons in a natural setting such as a school, home, or community (Range, 2018). Quantitative research methods and designs typically study and evaluate numerical data (Range, 2018). Because I did not evaluate numerical data but

instead sought to understand the perceptions of a group of individuals on a specific issue, a qualitative approach was the most suitable method of data collection aligned with this project study.

Justification for Basic Study Design

A basic qualitative study was chosen for this project study because it best fits the nature of the project. This research study followed a grounded research design. Chun Tie et al. (2019) explained grounded theory in research studies as a way that data are constructed to discover themes. Grounded theory analysis formulates a theory around a single data set, therefore allowing the researcher to discover themes directly from the data that has been collected. Tomaszewski et al. (2020) indicated that there are four main types of qualitative methods, including case studies, ethnography, narrative inquiry, and phenomenology. After considering different types of qualitative research designs and methods, I decided that the basic qualitative study design was most appropriate and aligned with my planned research for this project study. A basic qualitative research study was the most logical choice because it targets a very specific group of participants. A basic qualitative research study also allows participants to share their own firsthand experiences as TEDs serving students with ASD in transition programs.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

Procedures for Gaining Access to Participants

The participants invited to participate in this study were employed as TEDs by LEAs within one region of a southern state. Participants were identified by their LEA or

school district as the TED. The regional education service where I am employed has a comprehensive, publicly available list of educators serving as the TEDs for all the LEAs in this region of a southern state. I obtained permission from the regional special education director to access this list via the education service region 12 transition education specialist. Approval was received from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to contact the current TEDs via email, with an attached flier, to request voluntary participation in the research study. Emails were sent to all TEDs in the local region, with the IRB approved interest flier attached. Interested TEDs contacted me for more information, using my student Walden email account.

Criteria for Selecting Participants

The qualifications for participation in the study included serving as the current TED for a LEA in the local region of the southern state and currently serving at least one student with ASD at the time of the study.

Number of Participants

For a basic qualitative research design, the number of participants can vary. Several factors need to be considered when determining the number of participants, such as the length of the interview questions, the scope of the study, and the heterogeneity of the population being interviewed (Baker & Edwards, 2017). In this research study, the aim was to interview 12 to 15 participants, which is a typical number for this type of inquiry. Ultimately, the study included 12 participants.

Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

I have been employed for 5 years at the regional education service center that provides support for LEAs in this region of a southern state. In my current role, I support educators, parents, and the community in the region in the areas of ASD, low incidence disabilities, crisis prevention intervention, and alternative state assessment. My relationship with the current TEDs is professional, and my role is to provide support in the areas of ASD, low incidence disabilities, crisis prevention intervention, and alternative state assessment as needed by the TEDs and other educators, administrators, parents, and community members. I serve in a nonregulatory capacity and focus on providing support only. Due to the nonregulatory nature of my professional position, the TEDs, who were the focus of this study, were free to share answers to the interview questions without concern of the impact on their current role in their district. The relationship remained professional throughout the TEDs' participation in the study.

To ensure the protection of participants throughout the study, communication primarily took place through email or other printed forms to allow participants the opportunity review communication as needed. The initial contact with participants began with an introductory email approved by the Walden University IRB, along with an attached informational flier. Once interviews were scheduled, participants had the option to meet in person or via Zoom to ensure their comfort in participating in the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the consent form with the participant before proceeding and allowed time for questions or clarification. After the interview,

each participant was emailed a transcript of their interview, providing them the opportunity to review their interview for any discrepancies and make any changes or corrections if necessary. Upon completion of this process, each participant was given a \$25 gift card to Bitty & Beau's as a token of appreciation for their participation.

Ethical Protection

Walden University IRB, with approval #07-31-23-1011001, permitted the study to move forward. Interviews were conducted in accordance with the approved plan to ensure ethical protection. Before the start of the interview, I obtained recorded oral consent from the participants informing them that the information gathered from the interviews may be used to guide the development of a future project study. Participants were informed that they had the option to withdraw from the research at any time without any consequences.

To ensure the security of the data, all information was stored on password protected devices with dual factor authentication login requirements. In order to protect participants' confidentiality, their names were replaced with numbers. Additionally, the data were stored in separate locations to protect any personal identifying information. It is important to note that all information obtained through the interviews will be kept confidential.

Data Collection

In-Depth Interviews

The interview protocol used in this study was researcher-developed. Researcher-developed interview protocols involve creating study-specific questions for interviews instead of using preestablished questionnaires or survey instruments (Chenail, 2011). Given the specific nature of the TED role and the unique characteristics of students with ASD, a researcher-developed interview protocol was deemed most suitable for this research study. The interview protocol consisted of semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B). Probing questions were included when necessary to encourage the interviewee to provide more detailed information. TEDs were given the option to participate in the interview either in person or via Zoom. While in-person interviews were encouraged, the Zoom platform was used if a participant specifically requested a virtual setting. In-person interviews were recorded using Otter on my iPhone, while interviews conducted via Zoom were recorded on the Zoom platform, and transcripts were generated from the Zoom recordings. Table 1 demonstrates the connection between the interview questions and the RQs posed in this project study.

Table 1*Research Questions' Relationship to Interview Questions*

RQ1: What are the TEDs' perceptions of how to implement effective transition services for students with ASD?	Interview question
	In your experience, what are the most common barriers or obstacles that students with autism face during the transition process?
	What strategies or approaches have you found to be successful in fostering independence and self-advocacy skills in students with autism during the transition period?
	Can you share any examples of innovative or creative approaches you have used to engage students with autism in your transition program?
	How do you evaluate and measure the effectiveness of your transition programs for students with autism?
RQ2: What challenges do TEDs' face in implementing transition services for students with ASD?	
	What are some of the key challenges you have encountered when developing transition programs for students with autism?
	How do you individualize transition plans for students with autism based on their unique strengths, challenges, and aspirations?
	What resources, tools, or training do you find most helpful in supporting the development of transition programs for students with autism?
	Can you share any specific examples of difficulties you have faced in providing appropriate accommodations and supports for students with autism in their transition programs?

The TEDs participating in the study were given choice of location for the in-person interview. The interview could take place at the school where they were employed, the regional education service center, or at a mutually agreed-upon location in the community. The specific interview times, locations, and formats were agreed upon through email correspondence. Each interview was allocated an hour.

In total, 12 TEDs participated in the in-depth interviews. Eleven of the TEDs were interviewed in person, while one TED opted for a virtual interview via Zoom. At the beginning of each interview, the nature of the study, as well as the risks and benefits associated with participants, were reviewed with each TED. Oral consent was obtained before proceeding with the interview. The in-person interviews were recorded using the Otter app on my password-protected iPhone to generate transcripts. The one virtual interview conducted via Zoom was also recorded to obtain the transcript for the participant who chose the virtual option.

The transcripts of the interviews were then sent to the participants for their review. Participants had the opportunity to identify any discrepancies and request changes or request a new interview if needed. All interviewees approved the transcripts in their original formats. To protect participant identities, audio recordings and transcripts were assigned a number rather than using personal identifiers. The data files were stored on a password protected computer and in password protected cloud storage with dual-factor authentication login requirements. The transcripts were subsequently uploaded to Nvivo for data analysis.

Role of the Researcher

Since 2018, I have been employed by a regional education service center in a southern state as an education specialist focusing on ASD, low incidence disabilities, and alternative state assessment. In my current nonregulatory role, I provide professional development, technical assistance, and support to the region in the areas of autism, low incidence disabilities, crisis prevention intervention, and alternative state assessment.

As a researcher, my role was to gain an understanding of the TEDs' perceptions on the success, challenges, and resources needed for transitioning students with ASD. It is important to note that the interviews were conducted outside of working hours to ensure that participants could freely share their perceptions and challenges regarding transition services for students with ASD. The nonregulatory role that I served professionally allowed TEDs to share their thoughts openly.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the semi-structured interviews with the 12 participating TEDs were analyzed using a combination of open coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis. NVivo software was employed to assist in analyzing the data. The data coding was conducted in two cycles. The first coding cycle involved open coding and was followed up by axial coding. The data were finalized into themes to develop the collaborative professional development project to support TEDs in consistently implementing effective transition programs for students with ASD.

After interviews with the 12 TEDs were completed and approved by the TEDs as correct and accurate accounts of their interviews, I began analyzing the data collected from the interviews using open coding. I started with an inductive approach to coding the interview data. I did not have a preset code book, but instead allowed the codes to arise directly from the interview transcripts that were uploaded into the NVivo software. I continued using open coding during this process. Open coding helped to group the data into related categories, resulting in the identification of 18 initial codes.

Subsequently, axial coding was employed to establish connections between the codes. A deductive approach was incorporated alongside axial coding, which involves applying a predefined set of codes to the qualitative data. Hierarchical codes were created based on the two RQs guiding the study. Axial coding provided the opportunity for the data to be compiled into specific categories (Qureshi & Ünlü, 2020). I began to see that codes overlapped, but in some instances the codes were used in a positive context as an effective indicator for transition programming as aligned with RQ1, and in some instances the code was used in a negative context for an indicator of a need or reason for failure in transition programming, aligned with RQ2. I used this information to organize my codes into two separate categories based on positive and negative indicators where the code could possibly fall under both categories. I reexamined my interviews and coded the interviews again based on the new coding categories. Table 2 and Table 3 provide an overview of the codes divided into the two categories.

Table 2*Factors of Success in Effective Transition Program Planning for Students With ASD*

Identified open code	Number of times identified in interviews
Collaboration	34
Community-based instruction	9
Confidence	2
Employability	17
Independence	11
Job coach training	3
Parents	18
Real life experiences	5
Sexuality/relationships	1
Social skills	11
Workplace readiness	8

Table 3*Challenges in Effective Transition Program Planning for Students With ASD*

Identified open code	Number of times identified in interviews
Administration	9
Collaboration	17
Extensive support needs	7
Funding	3
Intrinsic motivation	4
Low expectations	4
Parents	11
Support	8
Training	9

Emergent themes from the data played a crucial role in shaping the decisions for the final project outlined in Chapter 3. Several key themes emerged from the analysis of the interview data:

1. Collaboration emerged as an overall indicator of developing and sustaining effective transition programming for students with ASD and the biggest identified challenge that TEDs face when developing, implementing, and sustaining consistent effective transition planning for students with ASD.
2. Parent/guardian support was another prominent theme that appeared in both the identified categories of successes and challenges for consistent and effective transition programming for students with ASD.
3. Employability skills was another largely identified theme that emerged from the data analysis. TEDs recognized the importance of equipping students with ASD with necessary skills to enhance their employability and transition into workplace successfully.
4. Need for support and training: The data revealed a notable need for support from administration and training for effective transition programs for students with ASD. TEDs emphasize the important of receiving adequate support to address the unique needs of students with ASD during transition process.

These three emergent themes, collaboration, parents/guardians, and employability, along with the identified need for training and support, informed the development of the 3-day

collaborative professional development project to support the current needs of TEDs in one local region of a southern state.

Evidence of Quality and Data Analysis Procedures

To ensure quality data collection and quality data analysis procedure in this basic qualitative study, several steps were taken:

1. Data collection interviews were recorded using Otter for in person interviews and Zoom for virtual interviews to avoid human error and ensure accurate representation of participants' responses.
2. Interview transcripts were sent to the participants for review to allow for member checking and any errors could be corrected, this step enhances credibility and trustworthiness of the data.
3. Follow up interviews were offered to the participants, but none were requested. At the completion of the interview process, the option was made available to ensure completeness and richness of data.
4. NVivo Software was used for coding and analyzing data to avoid human accounting errors in the coding process and enhances the accuracy and reliability of the analysis.

Discrepant Cases

Discrepant cases are pieces of data that do not align with the majority of the collected data or cases that seem to contradict what was presupposed or predicted

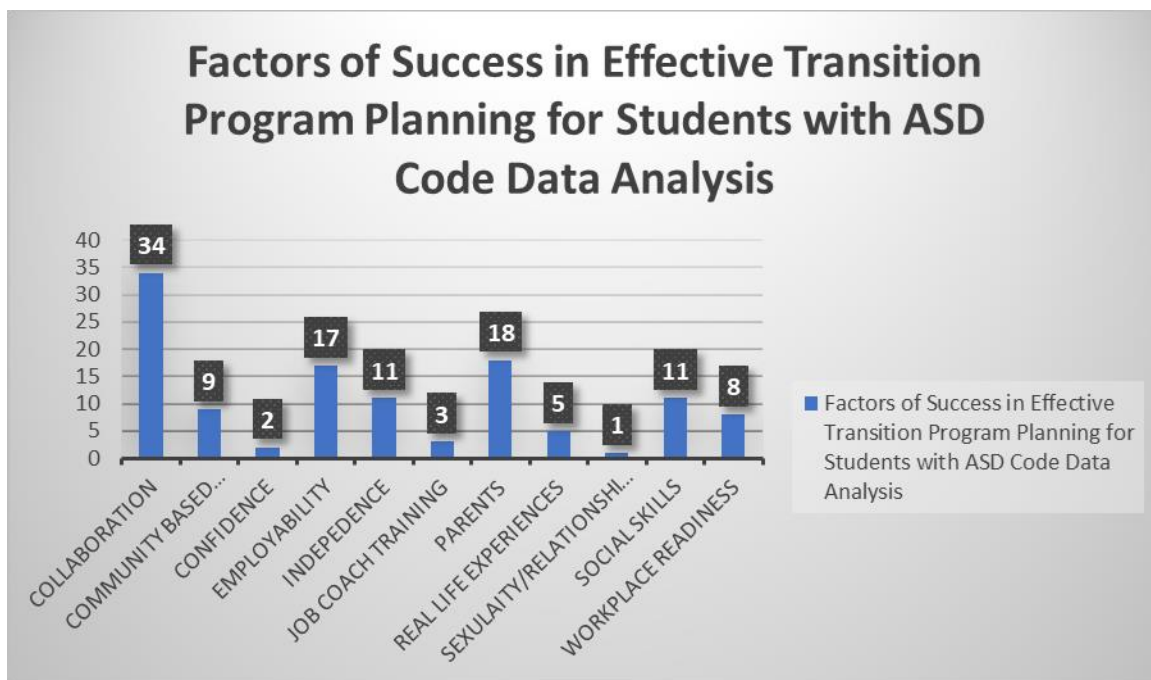
(Collins & Stockton, 2018). Examining discrepant data is an important part of research as it can help identify unexpected issues, limitations in the study, or gaps in research.

During the data analysis, a few pieces of data were coded that did not align with many of the other codes produced from the interviews. Although these may be considered discrepant pieces for this research study, they are important to note for identifying gaps in research when addressing the needs of students with ASD.

For example, sexuality and relationships emerged as a potential discrepant case when considering factors of success in effective transition program planning for students with ASD. This code did not have strong data to support the need for inclusion in the project developed from this research study but could be an important factor to consider for further research. The comparison of sexuality and relationships as a small indicator for success in effective transition program planning can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4

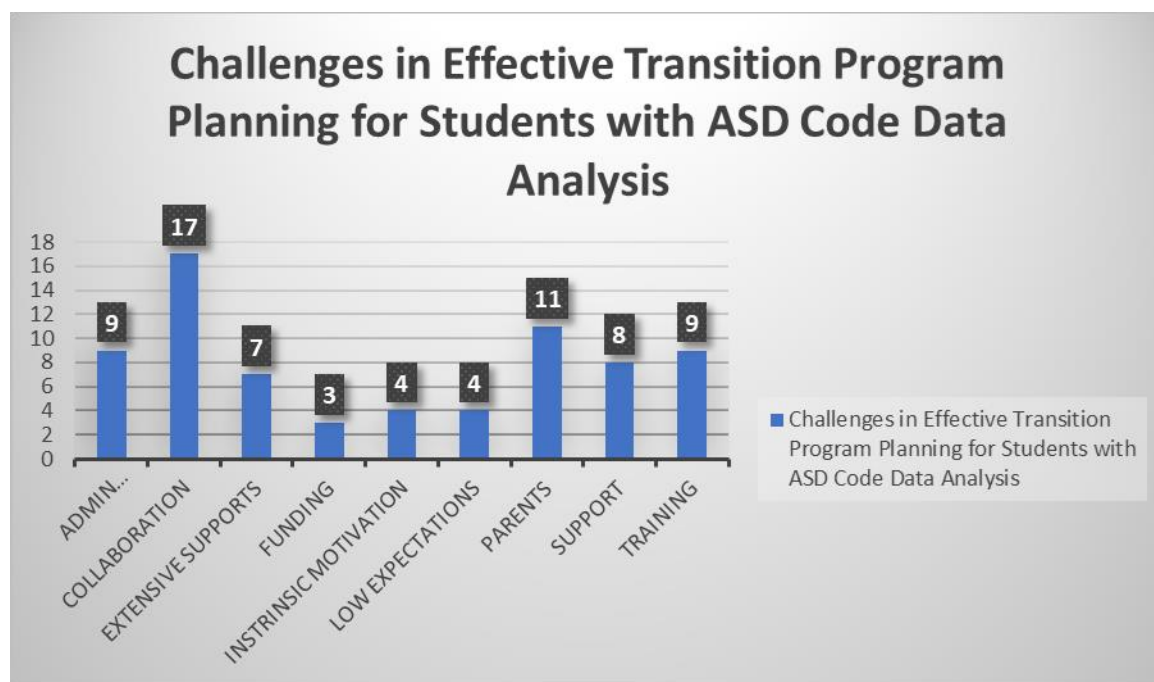
Factors of Success in Effective Transition Planning for Students With ASD



Another discrepant case is funding, which was mentioned only three times in the 12 interviews with TEDs when considering challenges in effective transition program planning for students with ASD. This finding highlights the small potential significance of funding and suggests the need for further investigation. Figure 5 presents a comparison of the role of funding as a factor.

Figure 5

Challenges in Effective Transition Program Planning for Students With ASD



Conclusion

This qualitative study was designed to explore TED's perceptions of success, challenges, and resources needed for transitioning students with ASD aged 18 to 22 in a specific region of a southern state. The sample for this study was 12 educational professionals currently employed by a local educational agency as the TED and serving as least one student with ASD. Data was collected through researcher designed open ended interviews either in person or via Zoom. All interviewees chose to be interviewed in person except for one, which participated via Zoom. All interview transcripts were reviewed and approved by the TEDs before data analysis was completed.

Data analysis was conducted both inductively and deductively using both human coding and computer software coding. All data was masked and kept on password protected devices with dual factor authentication software to ensure confidentiality and protection for participants. Based on the findings of this research project study, a need for a collaborative approach for professional development for TEDs, students with ASD, families, and employers would meet the need of building successful effective transition programs for students with ASD. Findings related to both RQ1 and RQ2 indicate that both strengths and weaknesses of current transition programs center around the need for collaboration between important stakeholders that have the greatest impact on the lives of students with ASD as they transition into post-secondary settings.

Section 2 described the project study's qualitative research design and approach, as well as criteria for participant selection, data collection instrument, the role of the researcher, researcher's experiences and biases, data analysis, evidence of quality and procedure to ensure credibility, discrepant cases, and limitations. In Section 3, the project study that was developed due to these findings is discussed. Section 3 will address the rationale, literature review, project description, project evaluation plan, and project implications.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate TED's perceptions of the successes, challenges, and resources needed for transitioning students with ASD aged 18 to 22 in a specific local region of a southern state. IRB approval was obtained to proceed with the study, and permission was granted to collaborate with my professional place of employment to disseminate recruitment information. Through open-ended interviews with 12 TEDs who worked within the local region and served at least one student with ASD, I collected data on the successes, challenges, and the current and the needed resources for transitioning students with ASD into postsecondary settings.

Data analysis revealed that certain factors were viewed as both contributing factors to successful programming and challenges when implementing transition programs for students with ASD. The primary factors identified by TEDs in a local region of a southern state included collaboration with stakeholders and family involvement as crucial for effective programming. A secondary stand-alone challenge for the development of successful transition programs for students with ASD was identified as training. A tertiary stand-alone success factor for transition programs for students with ASD was identified as employability.

Based on the analysis of this data, I developed a 3-day professional development training session that combines learning and collaboration for multiple stakeholders including TEDs, students with ASD, parents and/or guardians, and potential employers of

transition age students with ASD. This training aims to meet the needs and pinpointed challenges identified by the TEDs as they develop and implement transition programs in their local LEAs. It also seeks to address the gaps in resources identified by the research and includes the identified strengths in current practice as identified through the research study. In this section, I describe the project's objectives, rationale, the current relevant literature, the evaluation process, and possible implications.

Rationale

The problem addressed by this study was the inconsistent planning of transition services for students with ASD by educators serving as TEDs in a specific local region of a southern state. The research data revealed that collaboration among stakeholders, including parents/guardians and employers, posed a challenge in implementing effective transition programs for students with ASD. While this was identified as a challenge, it was also identified as an indicator of success for students. When in place, collaboration with parents/guardians and stakeholders led to the success for students with ASD in postsecondary settings. One of the main goals of effective transition programs, as identified by TEDs, was to help students secure employment upon program completion. However, finding suitable employment placements for students with ASD during their enrollment in transition programs proved to be challenging. Additionally, TEDs highlighted a lack of adequate training as another challenge they faced in planning, developing, and implementing effective transition programs for students with ASD. The

identified training needs were based on the areas of challenges identified, which informed the research based professional development project study.

The data underscore the importance of collaborative training for key stakeholders involved in transitioning students with ASD from secondary settings to employment settings. A comprehensive professional development training that includes TEDs, students with ASD, families, and employers will meet the needs identified in the research and build on the success factors revealed by the data. I developed a 3-day collaborative professional development training that will be implemented over a 3-week period.

The first collaborative day addresses student needs in the transition process. The second day concentrates on enhancing family knowledge and support. Finally, the third day involves fostering collaborative relationships with community employment sites and employers' understanding of ASD and workplace supports. The training will take place over the summer, prior to the start of the school year, for the students with ASD who are beginning their transition program.

The training sessions will be held at the local education service center and will be led by the local autism specialist and transition specialist. By adopting the collaborative professional development approach, this project will meet the needs apparent in the study as identified by the data.

Review of the Literature

I conducted a thorough review of the literature to examine the current research on effective transition programs for students with ASD. The literature primarily focused on

four major themes: the professional development needs of educational professionals and TEDs, student focused planning for students with ASD in transition settings, parent collaboration with educational staff and TEDs, and overall collaboration with all stakeholders, including employment sites, in transition support programs. All these themes are interconnected, and when implemented consistently with fidelity, they can have positive impact on employability rates of students with ASD through effective school-based programs.

Professional Development

Professional development, training, and support have been identified as crucial need and indicator of success by TEDs in the development and implementation of effective transition programs for students with ASD. Given the constantly evolving change in education law, differing needs of students, new discoveries in research of evidence-based practices to support students with ASD, and the ever-changing availability of employment opportunities, it is essential to provide TEDs with ongoing training and professional development. This can enable them to offer the best support for students and families.

Several studies have emphasized the need for more training for TEDs. Wilkinson (2020) found that more training in transition is necessary to enhance postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Furthermore, professional development is important for transition coordinators as it facilitates collaboration among students, their families, and external agencies, ultimately influencing the overall impact on the transition

experience and outcomes for students with disabilities (Wilkinson, 2020). Trainor et al. (2020) reported that there should be stronger requirements for professionals to ensure that educators and other professionals possess the capacity and commitment to implement effective practices for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, Ahmad and Thressiakutty (2020) revealed that training improves the knowledge of special educators, better equipping them to prepare students with intellectual disabilities for independent community living and successful transition from school to sustained employment. Smith's (2019) research also aligned with other studies, supporting the idea that teachers who are trained are more successful in helping students with disabilities have successful postsecondary outcomes. Smith noted that adequately prepared teachers can provide better opportunities for students' futures.

A limited number of research articles have directly addressed the need for specialized training for transition coordinators, despite the documented complexity and significance of their role. For example, Kester et al. (2019) reported that competencies required for transition education professionals involved in transition services differ significantly from those of school-based special education teachers, indicating a need for specialized training. While the importance of transition support for autistic students has been well-established, research has revealed a concerning gap between awareness and action, with vast differences in the quality and availability of support across schools and even within them (Webster et al., 2022). Webster et al. (2022) continued to explain their research founded that strategies implemented by educators may not adequately provide

autistic students with the necessary supports to reduce their anxiety and build their sense of self-determination during transitions, thus emphasizing the need for continued training and professional development for transition educators.

During the data collection phase, many TEDs expressed the need for professional development. TEDs reported their limited attendance at professional development sessions was attributed to two main factors: lack of administrative support for time off to attend training and the scarcity of available training opportunities. This project addresses the need for accessible training opportunities. The success reported from this project study or future research could influence the requirements for training, compelling administrators to provide training for TEDs and addressing other gap identified by the TEDs.

Student Centered Planning

Decades of research has consistently proven that student centered planning has had a positive effect on goals and achievement for students with ASD. Burke et al. (2020) found that collaboration between students and teachers is valuable in enabling students with ASD to self-direct their learning process, set meaningful goals in their transition plans, and actively pursue them in their transition programs. It can be as simple as conversing with students. Glover (2019) found that conversing with students about their personal lives, beliefs, hardships, and aspirations benefited the student and the high school institution. Furthermore, Lott (2021) reported that when educators personalize their transition practices to relate to each student's Individualized Education Program

goals, the specific life skills needed to experience successful postsecondary outcomes for each individual student with ASD, and include cultural responsiveness, there are greater positive postsecondary outcomes related to long term employment.

To align and personalize student goals, plans, and programs, research has supported the needs for transition assessments as part of effective transition programs. For instance, Scheef and Mahfouz (2020) shared that transition assessments are considered the foundation of transition planning and that through this process TEDs can understand student strengths, preferences, interests, and needs that should be reflected in transition planning for students with ASD.

More research has supported the need for transition planning during adolescence to facilitate and support the skills to attain postsecondary success for students with ASD, in-line with an individual's desires, goals, and potential (Elias et al., 2023). Research extends beyond schools and students and recognizes the need to include parents. Specifically, Elias et al. (2023) reported that communication between schools and families, establishing a transition team and involvement of parents and students in planning for transitions had a positive impact on the student's transition to school.

Parent Collaboration

Results founded in this study, along with numerous other research studies, provided evidence that parent collaboration before, during, and after the transition period for students with ASD from high school into postsecondary settings is an important factor for success. Parent participation for all students in special education, especially students

with ASD, plays an important role in predicting employment outcomes (Wong et al., 2021). Parent and family factors include household income, parental education, family expectations, parental involvement with their child, and job placement services (Ruble et al., 2019). A continued trend in current research for effective transition programs has been the inclusion and collaboration with parents and families. Evidence from Wong et al. (2020) revealed that family involvement in the transition process is associated with positive postsecondary outcomes, but it is often neglected in daily practices in transition programs for students with ASD. Wong et al.'s research upholds the need for change in this area and the necessity for professional development to guarantee change and optimized outcomes for students with ASD.

Parent expectations were identified as a research-based predictor of postschool employment (Mazzotti et al., 2021). Butler (2021) also supported this idea, proving that increased communication and coordination with parents and other relevant stakeholders had a positive effect on the transition for students with disabilities as reported by general and special educators. Madaus et al. (2023) highlighted the critical role families play in supporting students with ASD successful transitions across educational stages and beyond.

The opposite is also supported through research. The lack of parent involvement can have negative effects on the postsecondary outcomes and the overall quality of life for students with ASD. Taylor et al. (2021) found that lack parent involvement during transition periods leads to limited access to VR services and job training programs and

can significantly limit an individual with ASD's ability to participate meaningfully in the workforce. This reduction in financial security, decreased opportunity for social interactions, and diminished sense of self-worth can individually and collectively have a profound impact on an individual's quality of life, social integration, and overall well-being. Therefore, ensuring equitable access to essential services through parent collaboration in transition programs via professional development with TEDs is crucial for students with ASD.

Mazzotti et al. (2021) identified four new predictor categories for postsecondary success: goal setting, parent expectations, travel skills, and youth autonomy/decision-making. Brady et al. (2021) also examined transition supports for students with ASD in a categorical format. One of the main identified categories included ethics of care through family empowerment and family priorities. Family empowerment is a crucial aspect of successful transition planning, which includes providing families with access to local community connections and support networks that have knowledge and experience in effective transition practices (Brady et al., 2021). Another researched categorical breakdown of components in transition programs that generated positive postsecondary success for students with ASD included supported workplaces, functional independence, and family advocacy (Yamamoto & Alverson, 2022).

Involving students, parents, and educators in collaborative decision-making processes is crucial for cultivating a well-rounded and engaged partnership in transition planning (Alalet, 2022). Parent and student participation in Individualized Education

Program transition planning meetings is a fundamental element of federal special education policy and efforts to support youth in achieving educational and postschool outcomes. Davenport et al. (2022) reported that students' participation along with family collaboration in transition planning has a positive relationship with achieving positive post high school outcomes. In addition, Alalet (2022) reported that this shared ownership of responsibility fosters greater commitment to postsecondary goals and ultimately leads to successful implementation, further demonstrating that families and students, rather than solely school personnel, play a pivotal role in driving the implementation of postsecondary plans. The research also aligns with the continued idea that they often require support in the form of coaching or guidance to navigate the complexities of the process (Alalet, 2022).

The need for the inclusion of families, parents, and guardians is a strong theme throughout past and present research in the area of transition programs for students with ASD with many studies concluding that this element is left out of professional development training for TEDs and special educators. Accardo et al. (2020) found in their study that educators reported significant challenges in building rapport with parents, citing inadequate preparation and a lack of training opportunities for developing parental collaboration skills within their pre-service programs. With an embedded family component in professional development for TEDs for collaborative transition planning, this gap in practice could be mitigated.

Collaborative decision-making, which integrates the perspectives of students with ASD and families, enables TEDs to create a more comprehensive, coordinated, and effective transition plan and program to address individual needs (Burke et al., 2022).

Collaboration With Employment Sites

Collaboration with employment sites and potential employers emerge as another important theme in the current literature and research in the field. Transition for students with exceptionalities, including those with ASD, is a critical phase that necessitates connections to the workplace, postsecondary education, and community involvement, highlighting the need for ongoing research (Trainor et al., 2020). Research by Scheef and Mahfouz (2020) emphasize the importance of equipping local businesses and organizations with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively support employees with disabilities, thereby facilitating successful job placements and fostering inclusive work environments. They suggest achieving this through workshops, training sessions, and ongoing coaching opportunities led by transition coordinators (Scheef & Mahfouz, 2020).

Establishing partnerships with job sites and providing work-based learning experiences for students with disabilities and providing them with valuable opportunities to gain real-world experience during enrollment in transition programs overseen by TEDs will develop their skills to better ensure long-term employment. Harvey et al. (2020) reported that collaborative work-based learning sites that accommodate students with disabilities, identify students' strengths, interests, needs, and help develop on site job

skills contribute to better preparing them for the workforce. Furthermore, research highlights the positive effects of collaborating with job sites where students with ASD can work alongside other employees with ASD. Flower et al. (2019) highlighted that training autistic individuals on-site by another autistic individual facilitated their integration into the organization. The overall results emphasized the benefits of including an onsite vocational training component in employment programs targeted towards autistic individuals (Flower et al., 2019). This is an important consideration for TEDs when developing and implementing the job site component of successful transition programming for students with ASD.

Project Description

The 3-day professional development session combines collaboration between important stakeholder groups identified as the key components to effective transition for students with ASD. The professional development session will be held over the course of three weeks with one session per week.

Day 1 of the training will focus on the knowledge and collaboration of the TEDs and the students with ASD enrolled in their transition program. On the morning of first day of training, the TEDs will be provided with knowledge on how to collaborate with students with ASD during the transition process. This collaboration has been identified as a crucial indicator of successful transition. TED's will be trained on utilizing resources to engage students in developing their student-centered transition plans, thus enhancing the effectiveness of the transition programs. In the afternoon session of the professional

development, TEDs will have the opportunity to meet students enrolled in their transition program who have ASD, allowing them the opportunity to immediately apply the knowledge they have acquired during the training. These meetings will take place in the same location as the professional development, with the support of the autism and transition specialist who conducted the training. The supported environment provided for implementation of the knowledge is a key factor that will increase the success of the interventions.

Day 2 of the training will focus on the knowledge and collaboration of TEDs and the parents/guardians of the students with ASD in their transition program. On the morning of the second day of training, which will occur during the following week, TEDs will receive training on how to collaborate with families or guardians of the students with ASD regarding the transition process and family planning. This has been identified as an indicator of successful transition. TEDs will be trained on resources to be used to collaborate with families and guardians for planning transition for their child to increase the effectiveness of student-centered transition program outcomes. In the afternoon section of the professional development session, the TEDs will have the opportunity to meet with the families or guardians of the students enrolled in their transition program who have ASD, allowing them to immediately implement the knowledge they have gained during the training. Similar to the previous session, these meetings will occur in the same location as the morning professional development session, with the support of

the autism and transition specialist. The supported implementation of the training will increase the success of the interventions.

Day 3 of the training will focus on the knowledge and collaboration of TEDs and the potential employers of the students with ASD in their transition program. On the morning of third day of the training, which will take place in the following week, TEDs will be given training on how to effectively collaborate with employment sites for students with ASD, as this has been identified as a crucial factor in successful transition. TEDs will be trained on how to have collaborative conversations with employers and facilitate the transfer school accommodations into workplace accommodations. In the afternoon session of the professional development, TEDs will have the opportunity meet with employers in order to immediately implementing the knowledge they have gained during training if the employer is available. If employers are unavailable, meeting will be scheduled prior to the school year beginning and responsibility is up to the TED to ensure the meeting is completed prior to the beginning of the school year commencing. These meetings will occur on site at job locations so TEDs can model for employers the workplace accommodations and build strong collaborative relationships with employers. At the TED's request, the autism specialist or transition specialist will attend this collaborative meeting if available.

Needed Supports

The completion of this project requires various resources and supports. First, it relies on the research conducted through the study. Additionally, it relies on the creation

of the collaborative professional development opportunity for TEDs and other stakeholders involved in successful transition programs for students with ASD. Providing necessary materials and a suitable space for collaboration during the professional development sessions is essential to ensure the fidelity of the meetings between stakeholders. Support from the regional transition specialist is also needed to ensure the success of the project study. Furthermore, assistance from local VR counselors may be necessary to help TEDs in find employment sites for students.

Existing Support

The TEDs themselves are an important existing support in the success of the project study. They are the driving force behind the research and development of the project. The greater the number of TEDs participating in the collaborative professional development, the greater impact can be made on positive social change for students with ASD. The regional workforce solutions office is another significant partner and stakeholder that continuously engages in collaboration, offering resources and support for families and students. Throughout the implementation of the project, they will continue to share their resources and contributions to foster ongoing positive social change for students with ASD both during and beyond participation in transition programs.

The professional development session will utilize current research-based materials that are available, including research-based student-centered transition assessments, student interest inventories, and parent/family surveys. Additionally, resources will also

be shared based on the most current guidance on interventions for students with ASD (Steinbrenner et al., 2020).

Potential Barriers and Solutions

Potential barriers could include parental buy in and involvement, as well as language barriers. These barriers have been identified both in the data from this study and in the literature. To address the issue of parental buy-in, training for TEDs on effective ways to collaborate with parents will be included in the information meeting and on the second day of training. Additionally, the regional education center will provide translator services during the second day of the professional development session in order to overcome this barrier.

Another barrier is the availability of workplace sites for students with ASD. To remove this barrier, the local workforce commission that serves students with ASD in the area has agreed to collaborate and share worksites that have experiences working with students with disabilities. Furthermore, TEDs will receive training on how to have productive conversations with employers regarding working with employees with disabilities and implementing evidence-based practices in the workplace.

The data also revealed that administration at local LEAs can be a barrier. To address this barrier, the informational meeting for TEDs about the collaborative professional development session will include discussions on how successful transition programs and the employability of students with ASD after graduation can have a positive impact on state performance plan data for the school. TEDs will be able to

connect their work to schoolwide data, enabling administrators to recognize the need for training in this area and gain buy-in for their participation in the project.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

I will contact the TEDs in the local region of the southern state upon the approval for my project study by Walden University. I will conduct an informational meeting about the collaborative transition program professional development. I will explain how the project was developed and grounded in research, incorporating input from local TEDs and relevant literature. I will also discuss cost, time commitments, and ongoing support. A proposed timeline can be found in Table 4.

Table 4*Implementation Timetable*

Timeline	Action step/tasks
April 2024	Informational meeting held with TEDs to review scope and sequence with TEDs. Information distributed for TEDs to share with other stakeholders.
May 2024	TEDs participation in collaborative professional development is confirmed.
July 2024 – Week 2	Day 1 of collaborative professional development is held at the education service center by the ESC autism and transition specialist with participating TEDs.
July 2024 – Week 3	Day 2 of collaborative professional development is held at the education service center by the ESC autism and transition specialist with participating TEDs.
July 2024 – Week 4	Day 3 of collaborative professional development is held at the education service center by the ESC autism and transition specialist with participating TEDs.
August 2024 – May 2025	Monthly check in meeting with each participating TEDs to review progress on implementation of collaborative transition program goals developed during July professional development sessions.
May 2025	TEDs, stakeholders, parents/guardians, employers, administrators, and other interested parties year end evaluation meeting

Roles and Responsibilities

As the researcher, my role is to develop the collaborative professional development session for effective transition programs. I am responsible for collaborating with the local transition specialist to secure appropriate embedded resources for the professional development. Additionally, I am responsible for ensuring that current TEDs are aware of the training opportunity and that there is space available at the local education service center to host the training. During the information meeting I will provide TEDs with necessary information to share with administrators, parents/guardians, and potential employers of students with ASD in the LEAs transition programs to facilitate future collaboration during the 3-day professional development. Throughout the school year, it is my responsibility along with the transition specialist, to conduct monthly check-ins with the TEDs who attended the professional development, to follow up on needs and complete the monthly evaluation of the transition program.

TEDs will be responsible for attending the informational meeting about the newly developed, research based, 3-day collaborative professional development session for effective transition programs for students with ASD. TEDs are responsible for scheduling the time to attend the three-days of professional development over the course of the summer. They are also responsible for sharing information from the informational meeting with administrators to obtain permission to attend the training. Once enrolled in the professional development session, TEDs are responsible for arranging meetings with students, parents/guardians, and employers at the work placement sites. They are

responsible for reaching out and asking for help if they are having difficulty scheduling meetings with any of the listed stakeholders and need guidance or assistance scheduling meetings or finding places of employment for students.

Project Evaluation Plan

To assess the effectiveness of this project, I will employ both summative and formative evaluative methods. The primary goal of the project is to enhance the knowledge of TEDs to enable them implement effective transition programs for students with ASD. To evaluate if the project meets that goal, TEDs will be provided with a survey at the beginning of each day of the collaborative professional development training. This survey will assess their knowledge and level of comfort in collaborating with students, parents/guardians, and employers during the transition of students with ASD in their programs.

At the end of the professional development session, TEDs will be given the same survey. This will allow us to determine whether the information shared and the experiences during the professional development session had a positive impact on their knowledge and confidence in implementing effective transition program in their local setting.

This type of evaluation is crucial as TEDs are the key implementers of the transition programs and have firsthand experience in working with students with ASD during the transition stage. The survey will include an open-ended feedback portion to collect appropriate data to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development

session for the TEDs growth of knowledge. A copy of this survey can be found in Appendix A at the end of the project.

The second goal of this project is to enhance the effectiveness of transition programs for students with ASD. This will be evaluated by assessing the employment outcomes of students with ASD enrolled in transition programs in the local LEAs. The next evaluation piece of this project will include surveying the number of students with ASD who have current employment at the beginning of the transition program and the number of students who do not have current employment who are enrolled in the participating TEDs' transition programs. On a monthly basis, TEDs will be provided with a quantifiable survey to monitor the effectiveness of the transition program. This data will be analyzed and an increase in employment will show that the collaborative professional development session had a positive impact on the development of effective transition planning for students with ASD. A copy of this survey can be found in Appendix A. This type of evaluation aligns with the data that LEAs report to the state for state performance plans. It will enable comparisons to be made between the effectiveness of implementing this project at a local level and the potential expansion of the project to a statewide level.

Project Implications

The project holds the potential for significant positive social change, both at the local level and with the possibility of expansion statewide and even nationally. The immediate implications will be seen among local stakeholders, and there is potential for the project to expand across greater geographical areas for other stakeholders.

Notably, this collaborative professional development is the first of its kind in the local region of the state, developed based on input gathered directly from local TEDs. The collaborative professional development will meet the top three needs identified by the TEDs while also incorporating the top three success factors identified by the TEDs.

The collaborative professional development session is the first of its kind in the local region of the state to be developed from local TEDs' input and to be designed, developed, and implemented directly from the input gathered by the TEDs. The collaborative professional development will meet the top three needs identified by the TEDs while also incorporating the top three success factors identified by the TEDs.

The project study can create endless positive change, not only within the local region of the southern state but also beyond. The collaborative professional development model can be easily replicated across the state and even across the nation, utilizing a trainer-of-trainer format. Furthermore, it can seamlessly integrate with existing state systems, frameworks, regional laws, regulations, and available resources. The impact cannot be limited.

Through the implementation of this project, I anticipate an increased number of students with ASD transitioning into adulthood with long term employment. Greater employability among adults with disabilities leads to greater independence and better quality of life.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

This research demonstrates several strengths, particularly in terms of its applicability to students with various disabilities. The strategies put in place for students with ASD have proven to be effective for students with other disabilities as well. Because many transition programs in the local area serve students with other disabilities besides ASD, knowledge gained by TEDs through this this project focused on students with ASD can transfer to all students participating in their transition program. TEDs who serve students with other disabilities can use the same methods and strategies for all students enrolled in their transition program.

Another strength to this project lies in the ease of replication. The professional development training offered can be applicable beyond the local region and could easily be implemented statewide. The professional development training does not require hands on materials to produce for the training making the sharing of digital resources quick and easy. Staff is available at the educational service centers in all of the local regions across the southern state in this study to provide the training. The low cost associated with reproducing the training materials ensures accessibility and affordability.

However, an inherent limitation of this project is that it is optional nature. Only TEDs who seek to enhance their practice in designing and implementing effective transition programs for students with ASD will attend the professional development training. Furthermore, due to the optional nature of the professional development

training, LEAs may not allow TEDs time off to attend or provide compensation for them to attend during the summer.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

An alternative way to address the problem is through a change in certification requirements for TEDs. Currently, training requirements are minimal and lack the needed information and guidance to design and implement effective programs, creating the need for more in-depth continued professional, like the one developed through this study. Continued professional development is often optional and met with the barrier of time and administrator approval. A change in mandates or requirements from a state educational level for higher expectations of learning requirements for TEDs could mitigate the problem of lack of knowledge of the needed components and resources to develop and implement effective transition programs for students with ASD.

Another alternative approach to in person professional development would be online modules and self-paced learning to meet the needs of TEDs and the time constraints of current educators. At the completion of the modules, coaching could be provided from the regional education service center in alignment with the content of the modules and support given as the TED or educator creating and implementing the transition program moves to the next steps of setting the meetings with the students, parents/guardians, and potential employers.

Another way to define the problem is instead of a lack of consistency in planning and implementing effective transition programs for students with ASD, stating there is

lack of support for a well-designed program, which affects the overall outcome and success of the program. The data collected in this study showed that administrators and parents were factors in the overall effectiveness of transition programs for students with ASD. The professional development designed from the data collected in this research study could be expanded to include administrators for LEAs who feel that administrators are a barrier to the success of their transition program.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Several positive discoveries were made through this project study. All stakeholders including TEDs, parents, employers, and other related educational professionals have a common goal of increasing employability for students with ASD. As a researcher, my original hypothesis changed through my interviews. I discovered through the interviewing process that it was not a lack of resources that the TEDs sought as a topic of professional development. TEDs expressed they had the resources needed. The predominant need that doubled as the main success factor for effective transition programs for students with ASD was collaboration with parents/guardians and employers in the community.

The main commonality amongst the TEDs, apparent through the research, was the awareness that resources were available to support the needs of TEDs. The disconnect came when the TEDs did not know how to connect to other stakeholders and use the resources to collaborate to create successful employment opportunities for students with ASD. Learning this information made it very clear that the needed project result would be

to fill the gap. A professional development session based on collaboration methods with embedded time for supported collaboration with stakeholders to close the gap that was not being met in current practice.

Through interviewing professionals who are connected to the work daily, I was able to identify how TEDs define successful and effective transition programs. Then I was able to use the criteria for success that they set to determine the exact breakdown of why students with ASD are not experiencing more employment opportunities in transition programs. With the use of their criteria for success in combination with the data they provided, I was able to find the gaps and barriers to successful transition programs for students with ASD and develop a professional development session to meet the need identified needs to increase the success of transition programs in the future. To ensure the solution to the problem genuinely addresses student needs and maximizes the impact, leaders must actively collaborate with those closest to the program development and the students. Meeting with the education professionals who are directly shaping the work ensures the creation and implementation of programs that bridge the gaps and significantly impact students with ASD, ensuring a positive impact on social change for all.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

As an educator, I recognize the importance of relevant professional development opportunities. There is no lack of professional opportunities available in the field, but they are not often developed by or based on research directly from the individuals who

are working with the student populations that the professional development sessions are designed to positively impact. This project was developed directly from the input of TEDs in the local region where the project will be implemented. The project was designed in such a way that it can easily be duplicated across the state and meet the needs of all TEDs statewide. The project is easily adaptable to withstand changes in time and federal and state laws and mandate changes and updates and can be updated to incorporate newly developed resources as they become available.

The number of students with ASD continues to increase significantly every year. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that in 2 years, there has been an increase from one in 44 children diagnosed to one in 36 children each year being diagnosed with ASD (CDC, 2023). This project is not only needed to address immediate needs as identified by TEDs to improve the current practice of developing and implementing effective transition programs for students with ASD, collaborative professional development for TEDs and other stakeholders will become increasingly more important in the future. This project and its expansion through continued research and growth, both geographical and in research, can have a great impact on social change for students with ASD, families, employers, and society.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

This qualitative project study has to potential to generate positive social change at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. Numerous individuals may be impacted by the research and project development completed in this study.

TEDs can benefit from having access to collaborative professional development that was developed based on their input regarding the specific needs of their local region. Students with ASD can experience the benefit as their TED receives training in the development of effective transition programs tailored to their individualized identified needs. Employers can also benefit from collaborative support when employing young adults with ASD. Families can receive additional supports, including resources and increased school supports, through the collaborative nature of the project study.

At the organizational level, positive change can occur through the development of effective transition programs that enables the creation of employable students with ASD. Employable students with ASD who are young adults with ASD who become young adults with ASD create positive societal change as they have a higher quality of life, contribute to the workforce, and have an overall positive impact on the world.

Future studies could replicate similar design incorporating families and employers. Data collected from families and employers would strengthen these components of the collaborative professional development model. Including information from families and guardians in future research could result in the extension of professional development sessions guided by the data collected from the parents and guardian of students with ASD. Similarly, data gathered from the employers could inform the development of additional professional development sessions that address gaps and identified needs specific to employers. This model could ensure all gaps and needs are being met on an individual basis in all settings, not limited to the transition programs.

Conclusion

This project study identified the gap in developing, planning, and implementing effective transition programs for students with ASD by TEDs in a specific local region of a southern state. The study was designed to gather information on the missing resources or information needed to create and implement effective transition programs for students with ASD. I gathered data from the TEDs to identify criteria for successful, effective transition programs in the local region of the southern state. The data collected in this study informed a collaborative professional development project to bridge the identified knowledge gap. The project consisted of a 3-day face-to-face professional development training session that incorporated dedicated professional learning time for TEDs, as well as supported collaborative meetings involving students, parents/guardians, and potential employers. This comprehensive approach aimed to meet the needs for necessary resources, stakeholder collaboration, parent/guardian education, and establishing connections with employers, all within a supportive and collaborative environment facilitated by the local education service center and relevant supporting staff.

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Appendix A: The Project

Students	Parents/Guardians	Employers	
<h1>Transition Programs for Students with ASD</h1> <h2>COLLABORATION</h2> <p>A Presentation by: Cynthia Kososki Summer 2024</p>			

 <p>AUTISM</p>	<h1>WELCOME</h1>
<p><i>Cynthia Kososki</i> Autism Education Specialist</p>	

The “Why” Behind the Training

Students with ASD will benefit when TEDs can identify areas of growth and enhance their ability to implement effective, consistent transition services.

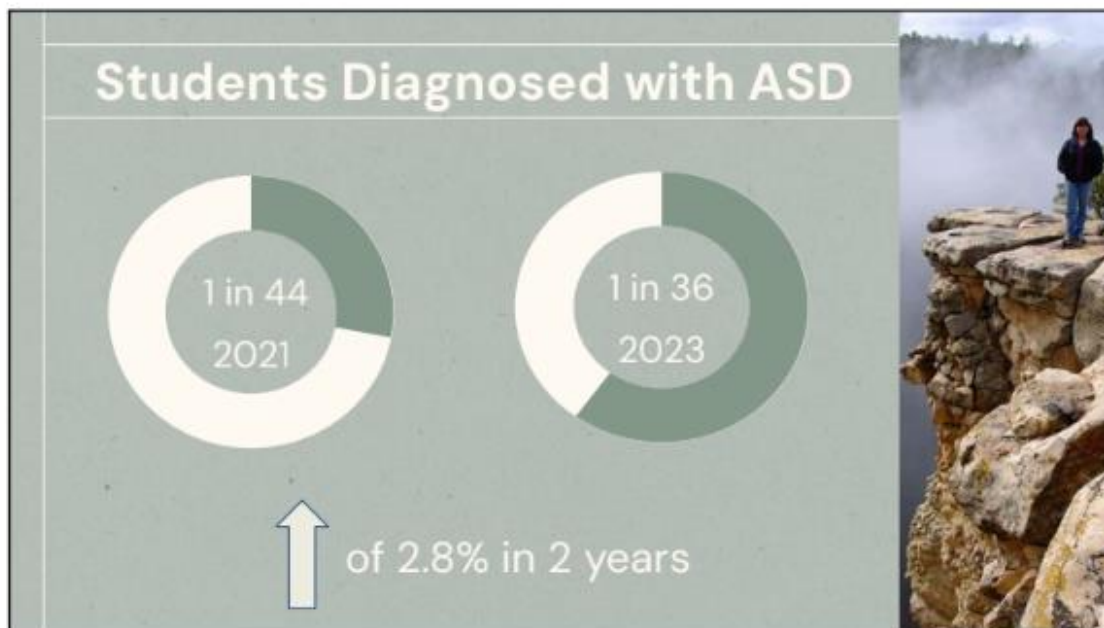
Positive social change will occur as effective, consistent transition programs for students with ASD are implemented through the collaboration of key stakeholders!



Goals for Collaborative Training

for Transition Programs for Students with ASD

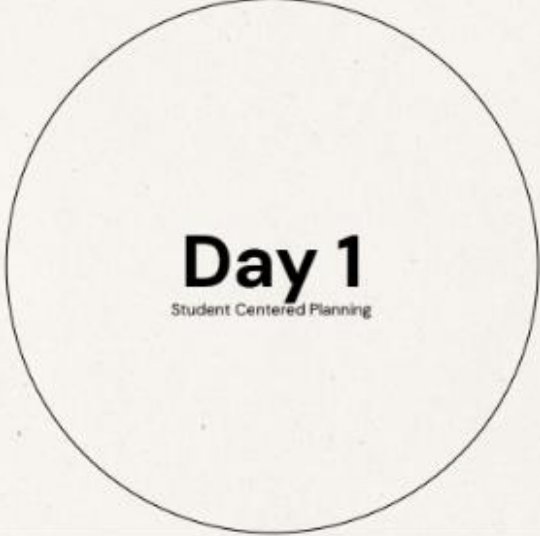

TEDs	Students	Parents/Guardians	Employers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TEDs will gain the knowledge and skills to have collaborative conversations and meetings with key stakeholders in the transition planning process for students with ASD. • TEDs will gain the confidence in the supported collaborative environment provided in the training to continue collaborating with stakeholders in the future. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with ASD will actively participate in collaborative stakeholder meetings held by their TED in a supported environment which will increase their likelihood to be an active contributing member to achieving the transition goals set by the ARD committee. • Students will achieve sustained employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/guardians will gain a greater understanding of the transition process and better knowledge of how the transition program can support employment opportunities for their child. • Parents/guardians will be an active and positive collaborative piece to successful employment for their child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employers will understand the benefit of employing students with ASD at their place of business. • Employers will be active collaborating members on the team ensuring that students with ASD have continued successful employment opportunities.




AGENDA

Day 1	Student Centered Planning
Day 2	Parent/Guardian Collaboration
Day 3	Employer Collaboration

A hand holding a black marker is shown checking off a list of items on a document. The list consists of several rows, each with a square box. The first two boxes are checked, and the third is being checked by the marker. The document has horizontal dashed lines.

Students	Parents/Guardians	Employers	
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Day 1 Student Centered Planning</p> </div>			

Learning Outcomes


	<p>1 - Understanding ASD TEDs will be able to identify the core deficits of ASD as identified by the DSM-V & how the deficits relate to transition planning.</p>	<p>2 - Understanding Student Involvement TEDs will be able to identify requirements for student involvement in transition planning & identify ways/resources for involvement.</p>
	<p>3 - Functional Vocational Evaluation TEDs will be able to identify key considerations for functional vocational evaluations & know where to access multiple evaluation resources.</p>	<p>4 - Discussing Employment TEDs will be able to identify appropriate conversation topics to discuss with students around the topic of employment.</p>

<h2 style="text-align: center;">1-Understanding ASD</h2>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity, ranging, for example, from abnormal social approach and failure of normal back-and-forth conversation; to reduced sharing of interests, emotions, or affect; to failure to initiate or respond to social interactions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors used for social interaction, ranging, for example, from poorly integrated verbal and nonverbal communication; to abnormalities in eye contact and body language or deficits in understanding and use of gestures; to a total lack of facial expressions and nonverbal communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deficits in developing, maintaining, and understanding relationships, ranging, for example, from difficulties adjusting behavior to suit various social contexts; to difficulties in sharing imaginative play or in making friends; to absence of interest in peers.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stereotyped or repetitive motor movements, use of objects, or speech (e.g., simple motor stereotypes, lining up toys or flipping objects, echolalia, idiosyncratic phrases). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insistence on sameness, inflexible adherence to routines, or ritualized patterns of verbal or nonverbal behavior (e.g., extreme distress at small changes, difficulties with transitions, rigid thinking patterns, greeting rituals, need to take same route or eat same food every day).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highly restricted, fixated interests that are abnormal in intensity or focus (e.g., strong attachment to or preoccupation with unusual objects, excessively circumscribed or perseverative interests). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input or unusual interest in sensory aspects of the environment (e.g., apparent indifference to pain/temperature, adverse response to specific sounds or textures, excessive smelling or touching of objects, visual fascination with lights or movement).


<p style="text-align: center;">Let's look at these deficits and the impact on employability</p>	<p><u>Deficits in social-emotional reciprocity</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would this negatively impact employment? • What skills can we teach the student • What can we discuss with the student • What can we discuss with parents • What jobs would be a good fit?
<p><u>Deficits in nonverbal communicative behaviors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would this negatively impact employment? • What skills can we teach the student • What can we discuss with the student • What can we discuss with parents • What jobs would be a good fit? 	<p><u>Deficits in relationships</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would this negatively impact employment? • What skills can we teach the student • What can we discuss with the student • What can we discuss with parents • What jobs would be a good fit?

<p><u>Stereotyped or repetitive behaviors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would this negatively impact employment? • What skills can we teach the student • What can we discuss with the student • What can we discuss with parents • What jobs would be a good fit? 	<p><u>Insistence on sameness</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would this negatively impact employment? • What skills can we teach the student • What can we discuss with the student • What can we discuss with parents • What jobs would be a good fit?
<p><u>Highly restricted, fixated interests or focus</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would this negatively impact employment? • What skills can we teach the student • What can we discuss with the student • What can we discuss with parents • What jobs would be a good fit? 	<p><u>Hyper- or hyporeactivity to sensory input</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How would this negatively impact employment? • What skills can we teach the student • What can we discuss with the student • What can we discuss with parents • What jobs would be a good fit?


	<p style="text-align: center;">2 - Understanding Student Involvement</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transition planning must begin no later than age 14, but can begin earlier• The student must be invited to all ARD committee meeting where the purpose of them meeting is to discuss transition• The student must have an opportunity to be appropriately involved in their plan for transition to adult life• Conversations must include age-appropriate transition assessments to help the student identify interests, preferences, needs, and strengths as they relate to the student's expectations for their postsecondary goals.	<p style="text-align: center;">2 - Understanding Student Involvement</p>
---	---

<p>Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the student involved in developing their transition plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Before the ARD? ◦ During the ARD? ◦ After the ARD? • How can school staff help students better understand the role of transition assessments? • How can school staff involve the student in developing steps to achieve their postsecondary goals? • How can the student lead (some or all portions of) their ARD committee meeting? • How can school staff engage the student in development of their Individualized Education Program (IEP)? 	<h2>2 - Understanding Student Involvement</h2>
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<p>Resource for Meeting with Students</p> <p>I'm Determined One Pager https://www.imdetermined.org/tool/one-pager/</p>  <p><small>I'm Determined, 2022</small></p>	<h2>2 - Understanding Student Involvement</h2>
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**Where Students & Assessments
Meet and WHY...**



The graphic features the text "Transition Assessment" in white on a dark blue background. To the right is an icon of a document with a checkmark. Below the text are the logos for TEA (Texas Education Agency) and TSLAT (Texas Student Learning Assessment). A blue play button icon is overlaid on the text.

Transition Assessment

(Texas Education Agency, 2021)

3 – Functional Vocational Evaluation

Going beyond the transition assessment

- What transition assessments have been conducted to determine the student's preferences and interests related to postsecondary education, and what were the results?
- What transition assessments have been conducted to determine the student's strengths and needs related to postsecondary education and postsecondary-level coursework?
- How can a school address college readiness and skills for postsecondary-level coursework in the ARD committee meeting?

Functional Vocational Evaluation

- The ARD committee must consider an appropriate functional vocational evaluation (FVE) when more information is needed to help determine the student's postsecondary training and/or postsecondary employment goals.
- An FVE may be needed to help the ARD committee develop a comprehensive transition plan. This evaluation process should include information from multiple sources and include recommendations related to career interests, aptitudes, and skills.
- Student and parent input should be included in an FVE.

Functional Vocational Evaluation

- Considerations**
- An FVE may be considered when:
 - A student has difficulty communicating their career interests.
 - A student has completed training at multiple job sites, but there is not a clear direction for next steps.
 - A transition assessment has not provided enough information to develop a comprehensive transition plan.
 - How will the school gather information from the student and parent?
 - What existing information can be used?
 - What new information is needed?
 - What do you need to know?

Functional Vocational Evaluation




VCU
 VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY
 REHABILITATION AND RESEARCH TRAINING CENTER
 JUNE 2014

Community Based Functional Skills Assessment for Transition Aged Youth with AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER


- Research based assessment tool
- Complete with the student this afternoon
- Provide information for parents, employers, and gaps in learning for in class instruction for skills needed to strengthen for employability

Functional Vocational Evaluation

- Pair up and complete the assessment
- Partner A as the TED
- Partner B “mock student”

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Rating Key

Level of Independence 1 - Does not do 2 - Requires physical prompting to complete 3 - Requires extensive prompting, verbal, physical, or verbal cue 4 - Requires limited prompting, verbal, physical, or verbal 5 - Requires no support (functioning as independent with no support)	Environment, Stress, or Anxiety 1 - None 2 - One to two known external event/condition 3 - Discomforted to three or more external events
--	--

Date: _____ Time: _____

HOME OBSERVATION

SELF-DETERMINATION / ADVOCACY	Level of Independence	Environment/Performance
LIFE MATE		
1. Demonstrates choice-making	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
2. Demonstrates problem solving	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
3. Demonstrates the ability to request help	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
	Total ____ out of 15 = ____ %	Total ____ out of 9 = ____ %
LIFE EMPLOYER		
4. Demonstrates choice-making	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
5. Demonstrates problem solving	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
6. Demonstrates self-regulation of emotions, feelings and/or behavior	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3
	Total ____ out of 15 = ____ %	Total ____ out of 9 = ____ %

Functional Vocational Evaluation

Share thoughts on the assessment -

FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ASSESSMENT

Observer: _____ Rating Key: _____

Level of Independence: 1 - Does not do, 2 - Requires physical prompting to complete, 3 - Requires extensive prompting, verbal, visual, physical or written, 4 - Requires limited prompting, verbal, visual, physical, or written, 5 - Requires no support (challenging) or independent self or supports.

Environments Where Performed: 1 - Home, 2 - One to two less restrictive settings, 3 - Generalized to three or more environments.

Date: _____ Time: _____

SELF-DETERMINATION / ADVOCACY		HOME OBSERVATION	
	Level of Independence		Environments Performed
LIFE AWARE			
1. Demonstrates choice-making	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3	
2. Demonstrates problem-solving	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3	
3. Demonstrates the ability to request help	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3	
	Total ____ out of 15 = ____ %	Total ____ out of 9 = ____ %	
LIFE EXPLORER			
4. Demonstrates choice-making	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3	
5. Demonstrates problem-solving	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3	
6. Demonstrates self-regulation of emotions, frustration and behavior	1 2 3 4 5	1 2 3	
	Total ____ out of 15 = ____ %	Total ____ out of 9 = ____ %	

(Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation and Research Training Center 2014)

4- Discussing Employment


- Appropriate employment goals and objectives are the measurable steps that enable a student to achieve postsecondary employment.
- Discussing career education options may help the student identify a career choice and the essential skills necessary for employment.

- Employment goals should address skills for acquiring a job and maintaining competitive employment, supported employment, or self-employment.
- Employment skills should focus on successful completion of school-based career exploration and work experiences.

Conversation Starters with Students...

- Think about what **SUPPORT** you might need to find a job
 - filling out an application
 - interviewing
 - accommodations like you had for school from your teachers

<h2>4- Discussing Employment</h2> <p>"Student Conversation Starters..."</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about what SUPPORT you might need to find a job <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ filling out an application ○ interviewing ○ accommodations like you had for school from your teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about what a career can look like.... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ full time, part time ○ college degree needed or certification, high school diploma ○ lots of employees or just a few ○ salaries, hourly pay, or volunteering opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What questions do you have about jobs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ does having a job make you nervous or excited ○ what would you do with the money you earn at a job

<h2>4- Discussing Employment</h2>	<p>Share this video with students during meeting</p>  <p>Career - Just 1 Texas SPED Director</p> <p>(Texas Education Agency, 2023)</p>
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TED & Student Meeting Agenda

1. Meet and greet social time! Grab snack and drinks!
2. Complete one pager from I'm determined.
3. Conversation starters
4. Video
5. Complete Functional Vocational Assessment
6. Confirm meeting time with parent/guardian for following week.
7. See you later!





Students	Parents/Guardians	Employers	
<div data-bbox="383 1121 919 1654"> <p>Day 2 Parents/Guardians Collaboration</p> </div>			


Learning Outcomes

	1 - Understanding Parent Involvement TEDs will be able to identify several key reasons why parents involvement was identified as the number one identified factor for success for transition for students with ASD.	2 - Conversations to Have with Parents TEDs will be prepared with multiple talking points to have confident collaborative conversations with parents/guardians about transition and employment.
	3-Discussing Goals with Parents TEDs will know the required components of transition goals and be prepared to write collaborative goals with student and parent/guardian input.	4- Helping Parents Foster Independence TEDs will be able to list a number of independent skills that students with ASD can be working on during this transition period and share this list collaboratively with parents/guardians.

<h2>1-Understanding Parent Involvement</h2>	<p>When a student is younger than 18, the student's parent(s) and other people invited by the parent or school must have an opportunity to be appropriately involved.</p>
<p>The student's parent(s) can be involved in transition planning by attending the ARD committee meeting and giving input on decisions about the future, such as assisting in the selection of an endorsement, appropriate classes, career-related training, self-determination resources, and opportunities for community participation.</p>	<p>Considerations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do parents provide input on their child's transition plan? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Before the ARD? ○ During the ARD? ○ After the ARD? ● How does the school provide opportunities for parents to learn more about the transition process? ● Are opportunities available for parents to learn about supporting their child's self-determination? ● Do parents know who to contact with questions about their child's transition plan?


<p>Explain who you are!</p>  <p><i>Spotlight on supports:</i> Meet the TED!</p> <p>Did you know there's someone in your school district who is responsible for connecting students and their families with resources for transition planning? This person is called the Transition and Employment Services Designee, or "TED." Most TEDs have other roles, so your TED may also be the special education director, a counselor, or a teacher.</p> <p>If you have questions about your transition plan or want help finding resources, contact the TED in your school district.</p> <p>See the following page for steps to find the TED for your district or charter school by using AskTED, the Texas Education Directory.</p> <p><small>(Texas Education Agency, 2022)</small></p>	<p>2 - Conversations to Have With Parents/ Guardians</p>
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<p>Share the Texas Transition Guide</p>  <p>Pathways</p> <p>The Texas Transition & Employment Guide to a Successful Life After High School for Students with Disabilities</p> <p><small>(Texas Education Agency, 2022)</small></p>	<p>2 - Conversations to Have With Parents/ Guardians</p>
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<p>Next Steps Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review Together• Practice with a partner• You will complete this with the student & parent/guardian <p>Next Steps</p>  <p><small>(Texas Education Agency, 2023)</small></p>	<p>2 – Conversations to Have With Parents/ Guardians</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Writing goals for transition should be collaborative• Input should come from students and parents/guardians• Data collected should inform the goals• Tools can help create goals written with fidelity	<p>3 – Discussing Goals with Parents/ Guardians</p>
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Goal Writing Tool



Writing Appropriate Measurable Postsecondary Goals Fidelity Checklist and Reflection Tool

Purpose: This self-check will help you determine how effectively you or your local education agency (LEA) are writing appropriate measurable postsecondary goals for your students with disabilities. You will identify areas of strength and areas of need. Most importantly, you can measure your progress.

Instructions: After completing the [Writing Appropriate Measurable Postsecondary Goals](#) course, you will select a sample of student Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), and complete the Fidelity Checklist for each one. Use the Reflection Tool to compile your results and take action toward improving your practices and postsecondary outcomes for students. You may find your completed course and personal notes helpful as you move forward in your practice.

Fidelity Checklist

Writing Appropriate Measurable Postsecondary Goals Criteria	Meets Criteria		If no, what prevented the students' IEP from meeting the criteria?
	Yes	No	
1. The student has postsecondary goals included in the first IEP to be in effect when they turn 14 or younger if determined appropriate by the admission, review, and dismissal (ARD) committee.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
2. The student's IEP includes a postsecondary goal in educational/training that reflects a measurable and observable outcome, not a process or activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	
3. There are objectives or benchmarks for each postsecondary goal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

(Texas Education Agency, 2022)

3 – Discussing Goals with Parents/ Guardians

4– Helping Parents/ Guardians Foster Independence

Next Steps to Independence: Skills and Strategies

The checklist represents averages and will not fit every child perfectly. If appropriate, use a younger or older age and grade range to better understand the child or adult student's strengths and transition needs.

The Next Steps checklist focuses on specific skill areas that help predict postsecondary success for children and adult students with disabilities:

- Choice Making & Decision Making,
- Goal Setting & Independence,
- Self-Management & Self-Awareness, and
- Self-Determination & Self-Advocacy.

4- Helping Parents/ Guardians Foster Independence

(Texas Education Agency, 2022)

Next Steps to Independence: Skills and Strategies

TEXAS TRANSITION

18+ (Ages 18-22)

Next Steps to Independence: Skills and Strategies

Checklist: The next steps checklist are education, family, and student transfer considerations on skills needed for future success. The legal advice flow book, contracts, in-person, and self-advocacy. The resource will assist the next including the young adult's current performance and skills for the required program on the secondary, education and family can support young adults with teaching and learning strategies in five categories under the corresponding area. This checklist also includes action steps for families as appropriate.

1. Critical Thinking & Decision Making

Young adults can:
 - evaluate and compare a partner or full-time job
 - demonstrate skills with skills-multiple settings
 - demonstrate behavior skills in a new setting
 - assess community options, when they graduate high school
 - analyze problems for possible solutions
 - be supported by their family members or school services when they graduate

2. Goal Setting & Independence

Young adults can:
 - make decisions about their living situation (e.g., where they will live, who they will live with, how they will pay rent)
 - participate in community activities and volunteer work
 - demonstrate independent transportation skills
 - participate in community activities and volunteer work

3. Self-Management & Self-Advocacy

Young adults can:
 - demonstrate transferable employability skills (e.g., critical thinking skills, reading/writing, communication skills, ability to work in a team)
 - self-advocate at the workplace, independent in an adult educational setting
 - make a daily routine using calendar and reminders
 - explain daily activities with peers in a variety of situations
 - maintain attendance based on the schedule and in their school or adult education program (AED), as in their schedule
 - effectively use behavior strategies to be successful in a variety of situations and environments
 - identify personal and strengths to work
 - identify their strengths and abilities for their career needs for work of education
 - explain transferable skills (e.g., critical thinking)

4. Self-Determination & Self-Advocacy

Young adults can:
 - make decisions in the transition of work or school when they need assistance

Continue to the next page

TEA

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4- Helping Parents/ Guardians Foster Independence

(Texas Education Agency, 2022)

Next Steps to Independence: Skills and Strategies

TEXAS TRANSITION

18+ (Ages 18-22)

Next Steps to Independence: Skills and Strategies continued

Important Action Steps for Families

- If your young adult is on the mental health for Medicaid services, encourage or assist their insurance plan by calling 1-877-839-7243 (during business hours) or 1-877-839-7243 (after hours) to get information on the plan.
- Ensure that your young adult is participating in their self-determination discussion about their planning.
- Meet with your young adult's teachers to discuss the Summary of Performance (SOP) prior to graduation.
- When your young adult turns 18, send them in regarding to what if they want to participate in elections. If your young adult is not, you may want to have an agreement for a letter to the State (there are limited exceptions for when you want to allow for voter-mail registration).
- Meet with your young adult on required education and self-advocacy skills at their agency (e.g., 3601, 3601P, 3601P2).

Notes: For young adults age 18 and over and families: See the Texas Transition and Employment Guide for more detailed information on a position.

Teaching and Learning Strategies

1. Critical Thinking & Decision Making

- Provide opportunities for their accommodations and supports for program activities.
- Provide a list of transition-related community activities for the young adult to participate in outside of school.
- Support the student and 504 with the young adult as an active member of the advisory, review, and discuss (ARD) committee.

2. Goal Setting & Independence

- Encourage the young adult to create academic and personal goals.
- Develop and track weekly or monthly school or home goals with the young adult.
- Help the young adult understand adult rights and responsibilities.

3. Self-Management & Self-Advocacy

- Encourage the young adult to use a planner or calendar.
- Help the young adult develop strategies to handle emotions.
- Help the young adult understand how medication makes their body and emotions feel.
- Support the young adult in asserting adult rights and responsibilities.

4. Self-Determination & Self-Advocacy

- Assist the young adult with asking for help.
- Encourage the young adult to ask questions when they feel uncomfortable.
- Help the young adult develop different techniques to ask for help.
- Help the young adult identify and articulate their disability, related strengths, and weaknesses.
- Support the student and 504 with the young adult as an active member of the ARD committee.



TEA

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<h2 style="text-align: center;">4- Helping Parents/ Guardians Foster Independence</h2> <p style="text-align: center; font-size: small;">(Texas Education Agency 2021)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Daniel on Employment and Independent Living</p> 
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TED, Student, & Parent/Guardian Meeting Agenda

1. Meet and greet social time! Grab snack and drinks!
2. Share Texas Transition Guide
3. Complete Next Steps Assessment
4. Talk independence and share resource
5. Write COLLABORATIVE goals

Students	Parents/Guardians	Employers	
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Day 3 Employer Collaboration</p> </div>			

Learning Outcomes

	<p>1 – ASD on the Job TEDs will know multiple points to share with employers about how student employers with ASD can be positive contributing employees.</p>	<p>2-Who Knows What? TEDs will gain knowledge from two experts in the field and be able to share knowledge when speaking to other possible employers and know who to access when struggling to find employment opportunities.</p>
<p>3-Strategies in Action: Visual Supports TEDs will understand how to explain the use of visual supports in an employment setting to employers and gather data to create a visual system to support students in a work setting.</p>	<p>4-Strategies in Action: Video Modeling TEDs will understand how to explain the use of video modeling in an employment setting to employers and gather data to create a video modeling system to support students in a work setting.</p>	

<h1>1-ASD on the Job</h1>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on students' strengths • Business benefits for hiring students with ASD • Research based FACTS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Less turnover with students with disabilities ○ Less absenteeism ○ More diverse, better work culture
<p>How do we approach potential employers for our students?</p>	

<p><i>Welcome Marc!</i> Owner of Bitty & Beau's</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing realistic employment opportunities for students with ASD from the employer's point of view 	<h1>2- Who Knows What?</h1> 
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VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Texas Workforce Solutions-Vocational Rehabilitation Services are designed to help individuals address employment barriers related to a disability and supports eligible individuals as they prepare for, obtain, retain or advance in employment.

Individualized services are provided through VR staff co-located at offices across the state and may include:

- Assessment for eligibility, career exploration, and planning for employment.
- Disability supports through counseling, therapies, treatments and/or assistive devices.
- Training to enhance and expand employment skills through work readiness training, work-based learning experiences, professional training to earn a credential or certificate or work readiness training.
- Job search assistance to help you find competitive integrated employment and support once you are on the job.

Vocational Rehabilitation also helps students with disabilities make the transition from school to work.



Workforce Solutions for the Heart of Texas is one of 28 local workforce development boards in Texas that partners with the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) to provide workforce solutions to employers and job seekers. The Heart of Texas region includes Bosque, Falls, Freestone, Hill, Limestone and McLennan counties.

Meet:
Sherry Gilmore



2- Who Knows What?

Using visual supports helps set up students with ASD for success in the workplace because it aligns with how their brains process information. Some examples include -

- Checklist
- Picture of expectations
- Step by step written instructions
- Step by step pictorial instructions



3-Strategy in Action: Visual Supports

4-Strategy in Action: Video Modeling

- 1-Teacher or job coach shows or models the correct expected behavior
- 2-Student worker copies the correct behavior
- 3-Combine with reinforcement
- 4-Repeat until skill is mastered or to reteach skills as needed
- 5-Use to teach all skills



Meeting with Employer Onsite Example Agenda

Prior to Student Arrival

1. Introductions
2. Tour of job site
3. Description of job expectations
4. Explain EBPs that could support student/job skills
5. Take videos, pictures, etc to prepare work based accommodations
6. Set up time to return to set up accommodations or train other staff to work with student with ASD or implement accommodations

When Student Arrives for Meeting

1. Introductions
 - a. Student or TED first (talk about this with student first, take student suggestion)
2. Tour of the employment site
3. Have student share strengths
4. Employer ask questions
5. Student ask question
6. TED allow time for independent interview
7. TED, Employer, and student practice job skill
 - a. Take notes, pictures, etc to prepare supports for future

RESOURCES

IN Calendar. (2021, December 07). Student involvement in IEPs has changed the education system. [Website]. IN Calendar.

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Texas Education Agency. (2021). *Guide to Employment and Independent Living*. Austin: Expert Services. [Website]. Special Education Support.

<https://eduplanet.org/tx/tx-iesv-governance-structure-expert-services-texas-employment-and-independent-living/>

Texas Education Agency. (2021). *Task Transfer and Employment Guide*. [Website]. Special Education Support. <https://eduplanet.org/tx/tx-iesv-governance-structure-expert-services-transfer-and-employment-guide/>

Texas Education Agency. (2021, June 23). *Transition assessment*. [Website]. Special Education Support. <https://eduplanet.org/tx/tx-iesv-governance-structure-expert-services-transition-assessment/>

Texas Education Agency. (2021, June 28). *Next steps: Postsecondary skills and strategies*. [Website]. Special Education Support.

<https://eduplanet.org/tx/tx-iesv-governance-structure-expert-services-post-secondary-skills-and-strategies/>

Texas Education Agency. (2021a, September 20). *Careers / Job*. [Website]. Special Education Support. <https://eduplanet.org/tx/tx-iesv-governance-structure-expert-services-careers-job/>

Texas Education Agency. (2021). *Using Appropriate Measurable Goals*. [Website]. Special Education Support.

<https://eduplanet.org/tx/tx-iesv-governance-structure-expert-services-measurable-postsecondary-goals-fully-checked-and/>

Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation and Research Training Center. (2014). *Community-based functional skills assessment for transition aged youth with autism spectrum disorder*.

<https://www.rehabcenter.org/sites/default/files/communityassessment011114.pdf>

TEDs & Students with ASD Evaluation (am)

Please complete this survey at the BEGINNING of DAY 1 of collaborative professional development session.

* Indicates required question

1. Rate your level of knowledge of working with students with ASD in planning individualized transition programming. *

Mark only one oval.

- 1 - no knowledge
- 2 - very little knowledge
- 3 - neutral knowledge
- 4 - fairly knowledgeable
- 5 - extremely knowledgeable

2. Add any additional comments
-

TEDs & Students with ASD Evaluation (pm)

Please complete this survey at the END of DAY 1 of collaborative professional development session.

* Indicates required question

1. Rate your level of knowledge of working with students with ASD in planning individualized transition programming. *

Mark only one oval.

- 1 - no knowledge
- 2 - very little knowledge
- 3 - neutral knowledge
- 4 - fairly knowledgeable
- 5 - extremely knowledgeable

2. Add any additional comments
-

Student Employment Data Form

Please complete this form monthly and share it with your collaborative professional development provider.

1. Month

Mark only one oval.

- January
- February
- March
- April
- May
- August
- September
- October
- November
- December

2. Number of students with ASD in my transition program.

3. Number of students with ASD with current employment.

4. Number of students with ASD without current employment.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

<p>Can you provide an overview of your transition program for students with autism?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What specific goals and objectives does the program aim to achieve?
<p>Can you share any success stories from former students who have completed your transition program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• How did the program contribute to their post-school achievements?
<p>In your experience, what are the most common barriers or obstacles that students with autism face during the transition process? How do you overcome these challenges?</p>
<p>What strategies or approaches have you found to be successful in fostering independence and self-advocacy skills in students with autism during the transition period?</p>
<p>Can you share any examples of innovative or creative approaches you have used to engage students with autism in your transition program?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can you describe the key components or elements that make a transition program effective for students with autism?
<p>How do you evaluate and measure the effectiveness of your transition programs for students with autism?</p>
<p>What are some of the key challenges you have encountered when developing transition programs for students with autism?</p>

How do you individualize transition plans for students with autism based on their unique strengths, challenges, and aspirations?

- How do you involve students in the planning process?

What resources, tools, or training do you find most helpful in supporting the development of transition programs for students with autism?

- Are there any gaps in available resources that you have identified?

Can you share any specific examples of difficulties you have faced in providing appropriate accommodations and supports for students with autism in their transition programs?