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Transitioning Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder from School to Society

Charla Brenta Spurlin DeLeo
Walden University

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Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2017

Abstract

Transitioning Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder from School to Society

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Charla Brenta Spurlin DeLeo

MS, Jacksonville State University 2007

BS, Jacksonville State University, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

High school administrators in a rural school district were providing transition planning to students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in order to meet postschool transition goals. Despite these efforts, few students with ASD were employed or enrolled in postsecondary training, and parents reported that they were dissatisfied with the postschool transition process. The purpose of this collective case study was to explore parental and staff perceptions of the postschool transition processes of students with ASD to increase the understanding of the practice related to postschool transitions. Guided by Tinto and Pusser's institutional framework, research questions were focused on the experiences of parents and staff, including teachers and support personnel, with the postschool transition process of students with ASD. A purposeful sample of 25 participants, including the first 10 parents of students with ASD who applied and the staff who supported them, were interviewed. Teachers were also observed during the postschool transition process. Archival postschool transition survey data were also analyzed. Themes were identified through application of open coding and thematic analysis to interviews, observations, and survey data and included: parents and teachers need support [reference guide and professional development (PD)] and stakeholder collaboration is crucial to success even though time is a constraint and skills prioritization is evident in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). Teachers used IEPs to guide the postschool transition process, but parental concerns remained. Therefore, a PD for teachers and reference guide for parents were created for the local site to improve parental trust of the postschool transition process for students with ASD.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this paper to my cousin, Bradley, who has shown me infinitely the abilities within his disability, ASD-Mild, and who served as my drive for this paper. It is my hope that this project study helps all who seek its knowledge and that I continue to promulgate the necessity of understanding and love, which is the basal message of this work!

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

More than 10 years after the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), there is a gap in the equitable transitions to postsecondary training and/or the workforce of those who are disabled and those who are nondisabled. Brand, Valent, and Danielson (2013) noted that only 26% of students with disabilities in comparison to 45% of nondisabled students enrolled in postsecondary education within 4 years of high school. Individuals with disabilities suffered greater unemployment rates (16.2%) than did those who were nondisabled 8.8% (Brand et al., 2013). Brand et al. indicated that there is a need for increased transition efforts to strengthen the college and career readiness skills of students with disabilities so that they can be successful in postsecondary training and/or the workforce work. Cobb, Lipscomb, Wolgemuth, and Schulte (2013) asserted that, despite policymaker efforts, there is a gap between posthigh school outcomes for those with disabilities and those without disabilities: 45% of those with disabilities are living independently as opposed to 59% of those without disabilities. According to Robinson, Curwen, and Ryan (2012), in comparison to those with disabilities such as orthopedic and intellectual disabilities, those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are more likely to experience unsuccessful transitioning because of their difficulties with communication processing. Therefore, students with ASD need more explicit transition plans than do those students who do not have difficulties with communication processing.

The concept of transitioning from high school to the postsecondary training and/or the workforce has been one of contention among researchers. Cobb et al. (2013) defined transition as successful as evidenced through one or more of the following outcomes: independent living outcome, postschool educational outcome, and/or employment outcome. Robinson et al. (2012) stated that transition is measured through outcomes in education, employment, living arrangements, and relationships. Therefore, there is a need to improve the gap between those who are disabled and those who are nondisabled and agree that communication processing disorders, such as ASD, create more difficulties in the pathway towards improving this gap (Cobb et al. 2013; Robinson et al., 2012). Acknowledgement by the general public of the discrepancy could lead to better preparation of students with ASD and their parents.

This study contributed to understanding how successful transitioning for those with ASD can be improved. In the absence of a pathway to transition for students; parents, teachers, and students can experience anxiety that hinders postschool outcomes of any kind (Robinson et al., 2012). Therefore, the accountability for students' mastery of transition efforts, even when goals are present and agreed upon, is often lacking. This problem impacts students with ASD who begin working towards transition goals at the age of 14, but may not have a understanding of the intent of these goals even if they make progress towards them. This study contributed to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by exploring the postschool transition process and the perceptions of parents interposed with those of staff relating to this process.

Definition of the Problem

Regulations regarding the implementation of special education are convoluted. IDEIA (2004) mandated that all individuals with disabilities be given equal access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). As a part of this mandate, schools are required to create individualized education plans (IEP) with the input of the parent, special education teacher, local education association representative, general education teacher, and someone who can interpret the results (IDEIA, 2004). The IEP provides all stakeholders with a guide to the student's education from age 3 to age 21 and must include transition activities and efforts to prepare the student for postsecondary training and/or the workforce no later than the age of 14. IEP teams are required to support students with ASD-mild and their individualized goals by implementing their IEPs to create a measurable, agreeable plan of skills acquisition (Alabama State Department of Education Office of Special Education Services, 2015; IDEIA, 2004). These mandated measures are procedural safeguards to ensure the sanctity of FAPE for all.

Over the last 3 years, the Clay County School District's Special Education Tracking Software's (SETS) Report of Parental Concerns indicated that 100% of parents surveyed have concerns about their students' IEPs in regards to transition planning (Clay County Schools, 2015) even though 100% of these students were successful in their postschool goals of entering the postsecondary training and/or the workforce (ALSDE, 2015). Clay County's SETS Report of Parental Concerns from Individualized Education Plans within the System Dated 2013-2015 (2015) showed that 67% of the ASD-mild population intended to pursue higher education at one of the local junior colleges, 16%

intended to attend a 4-year university, 16% intended to seek employment within local

industries, and all have been successful (ALSDE, 2015). Although the district

administrators responded to reported concerns with additional staff to help students and

their parents prepare for transition (Clay County Schools, 2015), there was a gap between

the transition success of students with ASD and the reported students' and parents'

perceptions. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the gap in

practice related to the difference in parent and teacher perceptions of the transition

services for students with ASD in the target district.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Since the conception of IDEIA (2004) in 1975 as the Education for all

Handicapped Children (EHA, PL 94-142), the United States has sought access to a FAPE

through the planning and implementation of IEPs, which include academic and transition

goals. Although this law and subsequent reauthorizations mandated IEP planning, Wei,

Wagner, Hudson, Yu, and Javitz (2015) reported that only 32% of students with ASD

attend postsecondary training and/or begin work after graduating high school. Those

with ASD represented the third lowest percentage of those with disabilities

acknowledged in IDEIA who graduated high school and move on to postsecondary

training and/or the workforce (Wei et al., 2015). Because the number of those diagnosed

with ASD is now one in every 88 people (Baio, 2012), the ASD populous will lose an

estimated 18 million dollars in potential income, and the federal government will lose an

estimated 5.4 million in tax dollars over the next 30 years, due to the transition-related

issues (Wei et al., 2015). Cheak-Zamora, Teti, and First (2015) reported that less than

25% of those with ASD live independently and only work an average of 5 hours per week.

According to Pinder-Amaker (2014) and Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015), emotional transition preparation is directly tied to physical transition. Pinder-Amaker (2014) reported that students with ASD who enter post-secondary training are at risk for comorbidity issues, such as anxiety or depression. Students who meet criteria for a major psychiatric issue (22%) are likely to develop another issue within one year of diagnosis, and 60% of students with ASD have also manifested anxiety and/or depression by their adolescent years; therefore, their transition into post-secondary training and/or the workforce could escalate the transition toll (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015). Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) also reported that, in an effort to help their children transition appropriately into post-secondary training and/or the workforce, parents of those with ASD tend to exert more control over their students decisions than do parents of the average child. Of the 17 children with ASD studied, 100% of them reported that their parents were "in charge" of making decisions. Parents of these students also reported anxiety over these decisions and confusion as to what services they can request and/or receive in post-secondary training centers, colleges/universities, and/or work environments (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015). This anxiety is detrimental to the postschool transitions of students with ASD.

Researchers have shown that ASD students transitioning from high school to the postsecondary education experience attended school with proper transition planning (Chiang, Cheung, Hickson, Xiang, & Tsai, 2012; Shattuck, Narendorf, Cooper, Sterzing,

&Taylor, 2012; Wei et al., 2015). Chiang et al. (2012) and Shattuck et al. (2012) found that students with ASD who maintained good grades in high school were more likely than those who did not maintain good grades to enroll in college or university. Wei et al. (2015) asserted that there have been few studies on how these students accomplished their transitions; therefore, more information is needed in this area because much could be learned from the successes of these students with ASD.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

There has been a focus on transition planning at the state level for students with disabilities. According to a state official, over the last 3 years, advocacy groups in have pressured the Alabama Legislature to strengthen the accountability and transition services for students with special disabilities (G. Dial, personal communication, April 22, 2015). Consequently, changes have been made to the Alabama Administrative Code and are reflected in Alabama State Department of Education Office of Special Education Services' (ALSDESES) *Mastering the Maze* (2015) and in Alabama's Special Education Services' *Preparing for Life: Transition Planning Guide* (2015). These changes included the implementation of college or career preparatory classes, mandatory introduction to Alabama Vocational Rehabilitation, vocational assessment, proactive services, and the establishment of more structured IEPs with additions focusing on the inclusion of a separate transitions page detailing plans and concerns (ALSDESES, 2015).   These changes emphasized the importance of the postschool transition process, but parents and advocates still believe there is dissention.

Increased structure in transition planning could benefit students with ASD. Lee and Carter (2012) offered support for increased structure with transition planning when they found transitioning students with high functioning autism from high school into meaningful work situations is a complex process requiring strategic planning by all stakeholders. Lee and Carter contended that transition is and that, with the right skills acquisition, their students can participate meaningfully within society (Parents, personal communications, April 15, 2015). Transition has been a focus at both the local and state levels because parents continue to express concerns (Parents, personal communications, April 22, 2015). Although there have been changes made to reflect these concerns, all of the parents still raised concerns regarding their students' transition plans (Teachers, personal communications, May 22, 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore staff and parental perceptions of the postschool transition processes of students with ASD in order to close the perceived gap in practice related to these transitions.

Definitions

For the purpose of this qualitative case study, the following terms were defined:

Concerns: These are issues listed in the profile of the IEP and must be addressed within the goals for the year (IDEIA,2004).

Free appropriate public education (FAPE): FAPE refers to the academic, social, and emotional gains made by a child to help him or her acess the general education curriculum through the IEP mandated by IDEIA (2004).

Goals: IDEIA (2004) mandated that goals must be annually derived, measured, and applied to the full scope of the disability to ensure FAPE; but, requirements differ within disabilities as to how many goals must be created and met.

Individualized education plan (IEP): An IEP includes statements of the following: (a) present level of educational performance; (b) special education and/or related services and/or supplementary aids and services; (c) explanations of the extent to which the child will be educated in a student's least restrictive environment (LRE), which is the general education setting; (d) any individual accommodations; (e) frequency and location of services and accommodations or modifications; (f) goals; and (g) explanations of how the child's progress toward annual goals will be measured and how his or her parents will be regularly informed of progress (IDEA, 1997).

IEP team: IDEIA (2004) defined the IEP team as one that convenes to ensure that access to FAPE is given to the qualifying student in question and is composed of the following individuals: parent(s); the special education teacher; the local education association representative, the student, if he or she is 14 or older; and at least one general education teacher.

Individualized education plan meeting (IEP meeting): IDEIA (2004) defined the IEP meeting as one in which parent(s), the special education teacher, the local education association representative, the student (if he or she is 14 or older), and at least one general education teacher meet to discuss progress made and determine goals for the following school year.

Individuals with disabilities educational improvement act (IDEIA): IDEIA (2004) is reauthorized federal legislation that outlined the services timeline for students with disabilities. All students with qualifying disabilities specified in IDEIA are eligible for services from birth until graduation from high school. Part B of the IDEIA is applicable to school-age children who are 3 through 21 years of age and focuses on securing FAPE for all students through the mandating of participation in IEP meetings, special education and/or related services and/or supplementary aids and services, frequency and location of modifications, accommodations, services, an explanation as to the choice of LRE, goals, and explanation of how progress on the goals set are to be calculated and communicated.

Measurable goals: This refers to goals recorded within the IEP to include benchmarks, which are orchestrated according to the amount of progress a student is to have made by the end of the corresponding progress period because IDEIA (2007) also requires an annual IEP record review/meeting each year; but, any of the team members may request that a meeting be convened for any purpose at any time during the year.

Parent: IDEIA (2004) defined the parent as one who maintains biological rights to a child. Within ALSDESES (2015), the parent is defined as a stakeholder who holds the responsibility of maintaining an active role within the IEP team and propagating career exploration and encouragement at home.

Postschool outcome: IDEIA (2004) defined a postschool outcome as entry to postsecondary training and/or the workforce after passage of secondary school.

Student: According to IDEIA (2004), the student is the recipient of specially designed services. ALSDESES (2015) defined the student as a primary stakeholder who,

upon reception of services, must discipline himself or herself to make the adequate gains supported by parent and teacher through services rendered.

Teacher: ALSDESES (2015) defined the role as that of a stakeholder who coordinates planning of special services and ensures that objectives are planned and taught so that the students can appropriately transition.

Transition: IDEIA (2004) defined transition as the transfer of the student from high school to postsecondary training and/or the workforce. At least one goal created in relation to this transition must be included within the student's IEP and an additional transition page related to this goal and the plan for this transition must be included within Alabama's SETS (ALSDE, 2015).

Postschool transition process in Alabama: No later than the IEP in place during ages 12-13, the student team will consider the student's development of communication and social skills, skills of self-advocacy and self-determination, and purposeful future-centric planning following these parameters: No later than the IEP in place during age 14, consider appropriate transition assessments and implementation of such so that the student can determine the appropriate diploma pathway; no later than the IEP in effect during age 15, the team should review diploma pathways and considerations toward future occupation; identify strengths, weaknesses, values, interests, and abilities related to occupation choice by participating in Career Preparedness 2 and available electives, and select the course of study most appropriate for the chosen career path; no later than the IEP in effect when the student turns 16, create a full transition plan complete with necessary objectives tailored toward the attainment of a postschool outcome; no later than

age 21, or at graduation that ends the educational experience, complete a summary of

academic achievement and functional performance (SOP) documenting academic and

functional performance and recommendations to meet goals (ALSDESES, 2015).

Significance

Postschool transitions are difficult for students with ASD. Pinder-Amaker (2014)

purported that the 65% of the ASD population who enter college or university adopt an

additional *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5* (DSM-5) diagnosis during their tenure at

the institution due to a lack of transition skills; this increases the dropout risk for the

students. Although there has been some study on the importance of transitioning ASD

students (Pinder-Amaker, 2014; Wehman, Shall, Carr, Targett, West, & Cifu, 2014; Wei

et al., 2015), little research has been conducted to determine implications of parental and

staff perceptions of current practice. Locally, the Transition Verification Report for Clay

County Schools (ALSDE, 2013, 2014, 2015) indicated that all parents and students

participated in planning for their transitions; but, those same 100% reflected concerns

regarding the transition program in the parental concerns section of their students' IEPs

in the years 2013 through 2015 (Clay County Schools, 2015).

Successful transition program implementation plays a role in the local, state, and

federal economies through the introduction of college and/or career-ready individuals to

postsecondary training, college, and/or the workforce. However, because words like

success and college and/or career-ready are abstract concepts, the purpose of this study

was to understand perceptions of staff and parents concerning the current practices in

transitioning students with ASD and the implications of these perceptions. Hopefully, this research was helpful in designing appropriate transitions for students with ASD.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore staff and parental perceptions of the postschool transition processes of students with ASD in order to close the perceived gap in practice related to these transitions. Researchers had focused on transitioning students with disabilities; but, not all students with disabilities have the same strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, there was merit in studying the perceptions of staff and parents on their ASD students' transition programs so that the current gap in practice could be resolved and needs better met.

The results of this study benefited myriad groups. Although the target audience was a rural high school in East-central Alabama, other administrators of similar high schools and their staff could benefit from the study because transition was crucial to all ASD students. Information leading to a streamlined transition program helped staff and administration to prepare graduates who would benefit local communities and the State of Alabama because of their input to the workforce and earning potential.

These three research questions guided this qualitative study:

1. What are the experiences of parents, teachers, administrators, and specialeducation support staff with the postschool transition processes of students with ASD?

2.   What are the recommendations of parents, teachers, administrators, and

special education support staff for the postschool transition processes of

students with ASD?

3.   How do teachers, administrators, and special education support staff

perceive district and campus training and support systems meet their needs

related to the postschool transition processes of students with ASD?

Review of the Literature

A review of the literature suggests that postschool transitions are important, but

this is not a heavily researched area. Researchers have explored transition efforts in

general to those designed for specifically disabled students who seek postsecondary

training, college, and/or the workforce (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,

2014). Scholars helped students' who are specifically disabled, such as students with

ASD, transition because some students with disabilities require additional supports and

resources beyond those required by the average students. The need for study of transition

for those with ASD is great because more children with ASD are being identified each

year (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Therefore, students with ASD

could benefit from more research on postschool transitions.

I reviewed literature concerning transitioning those with ASD to postsecondary

training, college, or the workforce including federal legislation mandates for those with

ASD and other disabilities, current transition practices opportunities for poshigh school

outcomes, and perceptions/concerns related to the postschool transition process. In

addition to the federal mandates, emphasis on Alabama's state mandates will also be

discussed; and, in the section discussing parental and staff perceptions, their respective concerns will also be reviewed. All information was reviewed in juxtaposition with Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of epistemological development.

Conceptual Framework

Tinto's (1987, 2006) theory of epistemological development is related to the postschool transition process and the efforts of all stakeholders involved in the process. Tinto and Pusser (2006) further developed this theory as an infrastructural support framework with the following core components: commitment, expectations, feedback, and involvement. Transition of any student from high school to any postsecondary outcome can be construed as difficult; however, through appropriate planning and preparation of the student, the situation can be made easier for students with disabilities (Dipeolu, Storlie, & Johnson, 2014). Students with ASD tend to thrive on patterns and schedules; therefore, they require more preparation and planning than a typical student, and credence should be given to the needs of those with ASD (Dipeolu et al., 2014).

Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of epistemological development addressed efforts of student transition success and has been cited extensively in studies of transition. Tinto's (1987,1993) theory details institutional divisions between academic systems, which encompass all formal education of students and social systems, including the teaching of soft skills and attendance to daily and personal needs through the formal and informal interactions between all individuals within an institution. Tinto also determined that individuals learn through both direct and indirect and formal and informal structures; therefore, formal and informal types of communication within both academic and social

systems should be considered a part of the whole process of learning within any institution (1987, 1993). Direct and indirect communication structures have been proven important to those with ASD who have been established as being 50% more likely than those without ASD to manifest a second DSM-V diagnosis in instances in which organizational structure is lax (Pinder-Amaker, 2014). Berger and Braxton (1998) further found that the direct effects of organizational attributes were evident in successful social integration in institutions that have clear communication and support for their students. Dipeolu et al. (2014) determined that increased communication of policies and procedures in both the high school and the post-secondary climates would benefit ASD students who favor patterns and schedules. Structure and organization are crucial to the successful postschool transition of a student with ASD.

The application of an institutional framework to ensure successful postschool transitions is necessary. Tinto and Pusser (2006) expanded Tinto's theory through application to an institutional framework designed to help college and university leaders ensure student transition success through maintaining a structure of the following: (a) commitment, (b) expectations, (c) feedback, and (d) involvement. When applied to a primary or secondary school or district, Tinto and Pusser indicated that the same principles are applicable. Therefore, their consensus framework was used to form the theoretical basis of this research.

Commitment is a necessary piece of any institutional framework. Tinto and Pusser (2006) maintained that the most important factor for transition support is the structure of commitment as a variable in the school infrastructure because commitment

can inspire ASD students by using positive peer pressure derived from faculty and peer support that includes goal communication through information saturation. Institutional commitment to preparing students to be graduates who are college and career ready is the basis of Alabama's Plan 2020, and all schools are mandated to enact this plan, which benefits all students but exemplifies that all must be enabled regardless of their disability (Bice, 2014). Although commitment requires more than just a mandate, the personal commitments that follow such a mandate are evidenced in the Central High School's Alabama Continuous Improvement Plan (2015), which asserted that all stakeholders would work together to prosper college and career-ready students. However, commitment must be evident on all levels to be effective.

High expectations are also a necessary component to an institutional framework. Tinto and Pusser (2006) reported that high expectations were the second most influential characteristic of the school or system's framework, as they indicated that institutional expectations differ. Wei et al. (2015) found that students with ASD who actively participated in transition planning early in high school were more likely to achieve their goals than those who were not actively involved; therefore, early planning is necessary to help student achieve their goals. However, Hammond (2015) found that postsecondary institutions often have expectations that vary from those of secondary institutions. Hammond, Mei et al. (2014), and Shepherd (2015) asserted that ASD students benefit from perceived high expectations. Mei et al. asserted that high expectations, coupled with support, which is the third most influential characteristic according to Tinto and Pusser (2006), promote attrition in students with ASD. According to Cheak-Zamora et

al. (2014), supporting students and parents with knowledge and understanding is paramount to any transition. Parents often feel that no one at an institution understands the plight of their student; however, when parents are invited to see the evidence of the level of support given by staff, they understanding that staff do understand and are able to trust staff to work with their children (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2014). Without high expectations, challenges cannot be met.

Trust is developed in juxtaposition to the fourth and fifth components of student success: Feedback from parents and students that is given credence, and the encouragement by staff of student and parental involvement within transition planning breeds trust (Tinto & Pusser, 2006). According to Cheak-Zomora, Teti, and First (2014), ASD youth and their parents reported apprehension regarding the transition to postsecondary training, college, and/or the workforce because they felt that these youth would be "pigeon-holed" with only certain programs or tasks. Hammond (2015) asserted that honest communication among all stakeholders is necessary for a student to succeed. Cheak-Zamora et al. also asserted that young adults and parents experience anxiety over both transition planning and the process itself; therefore, both parties need to be included in transition planning, and supportive elements within the process should be considered for both. Wei et al. (2015) reported that high school experiences do impact transition to postsecondary institutions. Therefore, trust is necessary to the successful postschool transition.

In the scope of the conceptual framework, Tinto and Pusser (2006) noted that transition from one institution to another is possible with the appropriate training and

supports, and this process will breed involvement if followed. However, there is a disconnect within transition needs for those with ASD and transition mandates for those with ASD because case managers have reported that parental concerns are evident in each meeting even though explanation occurs (Teachers, personal communications, May 22, 2015). Federal mandates have contributed to the larger problem, which is helping students with ASD to transition from high school to postsecondary training or education so that they can participate meaningfully within society. Therefore, there was merit in seeking further information within the perceived gap in perceptions of the transitions services afforded to students with ASD in an effort to better understand the perceived gap in communication system and supports surrounding the transition of students with ASD so that the transition services, supports, and professional development (PD) could be tailored to the needs of students with ASD and parents of students receiving the services.

Literature Review of the Larger Problem

Legislation concerning transition planning for students with disabilities began in the mid-1970s with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA, PL 94-142). EHA, or PL 94-142, was intended to mandate the creation and implementation of an IEP for all students with disabilities and the participation of all children over the age of 14 in the IEP meeting so that they could actively participate in transition planning (Wei et al., 2015). Because the language in PL 94-142 was vague and created confusion for all involved parties, the reauthorization of this law, the IDEA (1997), clarified that students age 14 and older were required and active participants of their transition-related IEP must be in place by the time the student is 16 years of age

(ALSDESES, 2015).   These are explicit mandates, but the process is still questioned by parents and advocates.

The latest reauthorization, the IDEIA (2004), changed transition language in the law to emphasize that the "student with a disability" should be referred to as a "child with a disability" [34 CFR 300.43] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)] and the purpose of the IEP should be to prepare the child for "further education, employment, and independent living" [34 CFR 300.1(a)] [20 U.S.C. 1400(d)(1)(A). The reauthorization further clarified that the child with a disability should be invited to any IEP meeting that discussed transition services [34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)]. These transition services were to be designed with a results-oriented process focused on improving the child's academic and functional abilities in such a way that the child's transition from high school to postschool activities is facilitated (IDEIA, 2004). In addition, all students with disabilities must be provided with a SOP, which includes recommendations as to how he can meet postsecondary goals (IDEA, 2004,).

To ensure federal compliance, ALSDESES (2015) created a companion volume, *Mastering the Maze*, to accompany mandates of IDEIA and required that all inclusions within the IEP be entered into the Special Education Tracking System (SETS). However, ALSDESES Director Richardson noted that there is not enough clarification in federal legislation to indicate how federal legislators intended for states to enact their transition mandates, and this has caused confusion in local agencies in which differing practices breed the potential for lawsuits (personal communication, June 28, 2015). The Transition

Verification Report for Clay County Schools (ALSDE, 2013, 2014, 2015) indicated this confusion.

Current Transition Practices for Those with Autism Spectrum Disorder in 2016

Because the number of students diagnosed with autism is growing each year, there has been a rise in national, state, and local credence (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014). Although IDEIA (2004) and *Mastering the Maze* (2015) mandated that transition practices for students with ASD in Alabama are differentiated through each IEP, researchers have made efforts to find patterns within postschool outcomes and the strategies used to achieve them, and the strategies implemented in the rural high school studied are discussed here. According to Haber et al. (2015), more concentration has been placed on experimental studies conducted prior to graduation than on correlational studies postgraduation. There is a need to include strategic social skills interventions to prosper postschool outcomes of students with ASD (Haber et al., 2014; Westbrook et al., 2014). However, there is also merit in conducting correlational studies post graduation. Haber et al. found that multistakeholder collaboration within curricular choices within transition planning has the largest implications on postschool outcomes. Inclusion in vocational education classes relate more within employment than in other outcomes, and transition programs and interagency collaboration are more related to education outcomes (Haber et al., 2015). Wei et al. (2013) found that immersion within science, technology, and math (STEM) classes benefitted those with ASD and prospered entrance into college because the scientific language appealed to the pragmatic nature of most students with ASD. Therefore, best practice includes multistakeholder and multidisciplinary inclusion.

Assessment data have also shown the need for multistakeholder collaboration. However, according to Carter, Brock, and Trainor (2015), curricular decisions made by multistakeholder collaborations within IEP meetings must be driven by the appropriate transition assessment. Assessment of strengths and weakness from multiple perspectives, such as intelligence scales, abilities tests, and interest inventories, in juxtaposition with discussion from all parties is needed to create successful transition planning (Carter et al., 2015). Therefore, in both correlational and experimental designs, scholars have proffered some themes within positive postschool outcomes for students with ASD. Multistakeholder transition planning is crucial to postsecondary outcomes (Carter et al., 2015; Mazotti, Rowe, Cameto, Test, & Morningstar, 2013). Morningstar, Lombardi, Fowler, and Test (2015) posited that a college- and career-readiness framework is necessary to any postschool outcome for those with ASD. According to the Morningstar (2015), the college- and career-readiness framework should focus on student-centered academic and nonacademic factors contributing to critical thinking within in-school learning and engagement aligned with college and career success. Similarly, Small, Raghavan, and Pawson (2013) found that academic and nonacademic factors must be given equal credence to prosper engagement. Lombardi et al. (2014) found that students with disabilities scored far lower than students without disabilities in critical thought application, and Schmalzried and Harvey (2014) found that low critical thinking scores for students with disabilities is contributed to confusing terminology and general lack of student understanding about transition efforts made by special education, general, and career/technical teachers. Therefore, it is necessary to participate in mutistakeholder

collaboration while maintaining clarity of the postschool transition process and goals (Kucharczyck et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2015).

Teacher training is the final transition practice that has been determined as an affecting factor for postsecondary outcomes. Kucharczyck et al. (2015) used a multistate focus group study to explore interventions for students with ASD and found that professional development in the form of coaching is crucial to transition planning. Because of the variability from one employee to another within implementation of the transition plan, it is imperative that all staff receive relevant, continued training (Mazotti, Kelley, & Coco, 2015; Segall & Campbell, 2012).

Potential Postschool Outcomes and Predictors of Success

Little research has been conducted concerning stakeholder perceptions of the postschool transition process. The literature that has been conducted ranges from positive to negative and varies in terms of complaint basis concerning the negative reviews. According to Madaus, Grigal, and Hughes (2014) and Lee, Rojewski, Gregg, and Jeong (2015), low socioeconomic status affects the success of transition planning through limiting access to continuing education. However, Shepherd (2015) argued the necessity of helping students with ASD find balance with their typical peers because those who achieved such balance showed greater intent in pursuing further education. Bouck and Joshi (2014) furthered the tenets of Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of epistemological development when they found that success in postsecondary outcomes for those with mild intellectual disabilities is primarily based on the students' transition planning that must include high quality preparation and expectations from state

postsecondary transition facilitators. Lee et al. found that aspirations are a key factor in the success of any postsecondary outcome, but aspirations cannot be developed without high expectations and support from all available stakeholders. Rosetti, Lehr, Lederer, Pelerin, and Haung (2015) defined parental perceptions of time spent meaningfully by young adults with pervasive disabilities as being independently active in the community away from a person's parents and in the company of age peers and doing a variety of interest-based, age-appropriate, purposeful, and relevant tasks that resulted in the student seeming happy. Rosetti et al. stated that parents' wishes were not unreasonable because these parents wished to see their children active and doing independently. Therefore, parents want their children with ASD to become meaningful adult participants within their surroundings, whatever those surroundings may be (Lee et al., 2015; Rosetti et al., 2015). When considered from this perspective, the notion is reasonable.

Implications

While compiling the literature review, I began questioning the extent that students with the detrimental effect of the perceived gap in practice related to the transition practices for students with ASD (Carter et al., 2015; Kucharczyck et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2015; Madaus et al., 2014; Mazotti et al., 2013; Morningstar et al., 2015). The study of literature was directed toward the examination of the postschool transition process and stakeholder perceptions of the process and how those perceptions affected stakeholder satisfaction and student transition from high school to and/or the workforce. Parents' perceptions are not unreasonable because they want for their children to be able to be active within their surroundings (Rosetti et al., 2015).   Teachers need to solicit

multistakeholder transition planning for use in the postschool transition process to aid improved success within postsecondary outcomes (Carter et al., 2015; Mazotti et al., 2013) and relevant professional development that provide strategies and practices that aid transition (Mazotti et al., 2015; Segall & Campbell, 2012). However, there is a disconnect within perceptions of what is done among stakeholders even though well-developed transition plans are in place (Cheak-Zamora et al., 2015; Henninger & Taylor, 2014).

Cheak-Zamora et al. (2015) found that 100% of caregivers studied within their focus groups exhibited fear and anxiety over their students with ASD entering post-secondary life regardless of the scope of their students' transition plans. Henninger and Taylor (2014) found that even the most involved parents also had issues with the students' transition plans. Although dissatisfactions with the post-school transition process are evident when the scope of the process is studied, there is recourse in focusing the future research on the gap between what the post-school transition process entails and what parents perceive as reasonable outcomes (Lee et al., 2006; Shepherd, 2015). Lee et al. (2015) posited that aspirations developed through high expectations lead to post-school success, but little research has determined the nature of building high expectations. Likewise, little emphasis has been given as to what supports parents and their students with ASD need for transition (Shepherd, 2015). The rural high school in East-central Alabama that was studied greatly benefitted from the qualitative study designed as described.

Summary

In Section 1, I introduced a problem where further study is needed to explore staff and parental perceptions of the current post-school transition processes of students with ASD in order to close the perceived gap in practice related to these transitions. This qualitative, collective case study explored the perceived gap by conducting interviews with parents and staff and observations of teachers to determine their needs. Although all stakeholders within an IEP meeting are equal, literature proved that their perceptions of the process are not even in cases where all agree on the plan in place. For this reason, it is crucial that all educational leaders interested in prospering college and career ready ASD students who succeed in their post-school outcomes gain a better understanding of the disconnect in parental and staff perceptions of the post-school transition process for students with ASD.

In Section 2, the focus was on providing a comprehensive explanation of the proposed methods of data collection within this study. Whereas the literature review has served as a catalyst for the research, the methodology served as the blueprint for the study's intent for the knowledge garnered.   In Section 2 of this project study, I discussed the specific methodology used to answer the central and sub-questions discussed in Section 1. In addition, I described the sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis procedures proposed to answer the research questions identified in Section 1 so that the local gap in practice and local problem identified can be further explored.

Within Section 3 of this project study, I discussed the aspects of the project that were developed after gaining some insight on the possible answers to the central and sub-

questions discussed in Section 1. In addition, I discussed the description and goals, rationale, review or literature, implementation, and project evaluation of the potential project based on the data collected and analyzed within Section 2. Finally, I discussed the implications, including social change.

Within Section 4 of this project study, I discussed the project's strengths and limitations in addressing the disconnect within perceptions of what is done among stakeholders even though well-developed post-school transition plans are in place. I also addressed recommendations for future research based upon the work of the study and included an analysis of my scholarship and learning throughout the doctoral project study process.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore staff and parental perceptions of the postschool transition processes of students with ASD in order to close the perceived gap in practice related to these transitions. Helping students with disabilities, such as ASD, transition from high school to postsecondary training and/or the workforce has been an interest for the United States, Alabama, and Clay County, Alabama (C. Richardson, personal communication, June 28, 2015). The following three research questions were explored in this project study:

1.	What are the experiences of parents, teachers, administrators, and special education support staff with the postschool transition processes of students with ASD?

2.	What are the recommendations of parents, teachers, administrators, and special education support staff for the postschool transition processes of students with ASD?

3.	How do teachers, administrators, and special education support staff perceive district and campus training and support systems meet their needs related to the postschool transition processes of students with ASD?

Research Design and Approach

A qualitative research design was determined as being the most closely aligned with the relevant research questions because a qualitative approach offered the best means of collecting and analyzing interview and survey data (Sage, 2011). Qualitative

research allowed me to analyze the breadth of the interview and survey data and did not

limit me to specified numbers as quantitative research would (Sage, 2011). The research

design was a collective case study in which homogeneous sampling was used to

investigate the central phenomena, perceived differences in staff and parents' perceptions

of the transitions services afforded to students with ASD (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). A

case study focuses on understanding one microcosm within the macrocosm, and using a

collective case study design allowed me to compare several different case studies in an

effort to investigate the central phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). To align with the

chosen design and approach, staff and parents of students with ASD were invited to

participate.

In order to ensure that a collective case study was the best qualitative research

design for the data collection, I considered other methods. Bogdan and Biklen (2007)

contended that a phenomenological approachis used to determine the reasoning behind

human decisions, and this would not be an appropriate design because I sought teachers'

perceptions related to the self-efficacy in using the postschool transition process to

promulgate student success. The same tenet applied to parents because I was seeking

parental perceptions of the postschool transition process, and these perceptions would

have been convoluted by the study of human reasoning, which is the core of

phenomenologically-based studies; therefore, this method was rejected. I also considered

grounded theory because its cyclical and systematic data collection and analysis

processes were used to explain the actions of people to develop a theory, but I explored

the central phenomena of the perceived gap in staff and parental perceptions of the

postschool transition processes of students with ASD so this method was also be inappropriate. (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). Likewise, an ethnography was inappropriate because long-term access to participants was impractical because students will graduate prior to the end of any long-term study (Sage, 2011). Finally, because the nature of the study was to determine the perceived gap in perceptions of parents and staff regarding the postschool transition processes of students with ASD, I did not have the teachers change their instructional methods as is indicative of the action research design (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Based on this juxtaposition of other research methods, using a collective case study proved to be the most appropriate.

This qualitative research study was conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the perceived gap in parental and staff perceptions of the postschool transition processes of students with ASD. A collective case study approach was used so that multiple cases could be analyzed. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), case studies are used to explore a central phenomenon using a bounded system, which indicated a case or multiples cases. In addition, I worked toward gaining an in-depth understanding of the cases within this project study by collecting multiple forms of data, such as interview data, observational data, and archival documents (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). A collective case study was used to explain the perceived gap in practice within the transition plans of those with ASD within a bounded system (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Therefore, a collective case study design aligned with the purpose of this research study.

Participants

The setting for this study was a small, public, rural high school in East-Central Alabama. Although the county system in which the high school is located was once composed of two high schools, these high schools were combined and placed in a new facility complete with an up-to-date technological infrastructure and the equipment to match it. According to the system's school information system, Chalkable Information Now (INow), the system served 2,053 students and is the only public school system within the county (Clay County Schools, 2016). The Clay County School system is composed of four separate cost centers: two elementary schools that feed into the junior high school and high school. The high school is the largest of the schools with an enrollment of 715 students of which 56 are participants of the special education program and 10 of the participants of the special education program are students with ASD (Clay County Schools, 2016).

A qualitative research design was applied to answer the research questions. The 25 case study participants included high school special education teachers (four), support staff (three), administrative staff (four), and general education teachers (four) were included in the study as well a representative group of 10 parents of students with ASD who are located at Central High School and have transition plans in place. Because Clay County Schools has only one high school, purposeful sampling was used for the study due to the small number of teachers and parents associated with students with ASD at the high school.

Criteria for selection of participants. Each case in this study was a parent or staff member with pertinent knowledge, or personal experience, of a high school student with ASD. Study participants included four high school special education teachers, four administrative staff, four general education teachers, three support staff, and 10 parents of students with ASD. All case study participants were selected through purposeful sampling due to the small size of the high school. Parent and general education teacher participation were also determined through purposeful sampling; but, these groups were homogenous as the numbers requested were inclusive of the majority of potential participants.

The primary criteria for selecting the staff participants were as follows: (a) staff must have access to pertinent knowledge of the postschool transition process of students with ASD and (b) staff must have direct experience with the implementation of the postschool transition processes of students with ASD for at least 1 full year prior to the inception of the study. Because I used both high school administration, both high school counselors, all four special education teachers, and all three special education paraprofessionals as participants, there was no need to further limit these case studies. Only four general education teachers agreed to participate and met the criteria to participate. These four teachers all had 5 or more years of teaching within the district, and this experience indicated they may have (a) a clearer understanding of the instructional expectations and guidelines for the transition plans of students with ASD and (b) have the postschool transition process in place as it relates to students with ASD. Parents were limited to the first 10 affirmative participants who could actively participate

in the study. Homogeneous sampling allowed me to purposefully select parents and staff

who meet the criteria necessary for this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Prior to the

selection of the participants, I gained access to the schools and teachers.

      Access to participants. To secure approval for research data collection within the

district, I completed an application (completed October 2015) for the research and

forwarded it to the superintendent. Once approval of the research application was

provided (approved November 2015), the superintendent obtained approval from the

principal of the targeted high school. The principal manually signed a letter of

cooperation (Appendix D). I also sought approval to conduct the study through the

Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), which assigned me an approval

number (05-11-16-0410659). Once IRB approval was obtained, the superintendent e-

mailed all applicable staff the invitation to participate (Appendix I) and all teachers a

separate letter (Appendix H) because they were asked to participate in both an interview

and an observation. The high school principal e-mailed parents a separate invitation due

to privacy issues (Appendix I). Both participation letters included within them reference

to a demographic survey (Appendix K), which included contact information for the

potential participant.

      Researcher-participant relationship. I worked to develop a researcher-

participant relationship to ensure that participants were comfortable in sharing their

perceptions and beliefs with me prior to, during, and post interview and observation. As

an instrument of the research, I played an integral, equal part of the researcher-participant

relationship in order to support instrumental changes for administrators, special education

teachers, parents, and students with ASD in the district (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I affirmed my goal of a researcher-participant relationship by obtaining approval to conduct research from Clay County Schools and Walden University IRB and informed consent from potential participants. I also established a researcher-participant relationship by ensuring the participants understood their responsibilities if they chose to become a participant within this project study. Participants' responsibilities were outlined within the invitation to participate letter and informed consent form.

Once permission to conduct research and collect data within the district was provided by the superintendent, school principals, and Walden University IRB, I e-mailed the invitation to participate letters (Appendix H, Appendix I) to the superintendent and only the staff/parent participation letter to the high school principal for distribution to parents as was earlier specified. The invitation to participate form explained the responsibilities of the participant; which included the purpose of the study, data collection procedures, voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits of being in the study, confidentiality of participation, and a link to a demographic survey replete with contact information (Appendix K). The voluntary nature of the study was indicated at the top of the district e-mail and in the subject header so as to reiterate the voluntary nature of the study. The superintendent then electronically distributed the appropriate participation letter to each special education teacher, general education teacher, principal, and counselor of students with ASD. The principal sent the e-mail to applicable parents of students with ASD to avoid FERPA issues. The superintendent and principal served only as an initial conduit of electronic distribution of the participation notice with no

further directions from the superintendent's or principal's offices. Informed consent from each participant was obtained through the completion of a hard copy prior to the interview. Parents, administrators, counselors, and support staff were given an informed consent that specifies participation in an interview for the study, and staff were given informed consent that specified participation in an interview and an observation (Appendix F; Appendix G). I provided each participant an unsigned print copy of the informed consent during the interview to reiterate pertinent information related to this project study, such as background information, procedures, voluntary nature of the study, risks and benefits in the study, payment, privacy, and contacts and questions.

One week after the superintendent electronically distributed the documents to each potential participant and after receipt of contact information through the demographic survey (Appendix K), I personally contacted via e-mail each person who completed the demographic survey to schedule a date, time, and location to review and sign informed consent and conduct a classroom observation and/or face-to-face interview.   If an observation was applicable to this participant, I completed the observation first so that I could utilize insight from the observation within the interview where applicable. If the needed teachers, principals, counselors, and at least 10 parents of students with ASD had not responded to the initial email request for research participants from the superintendent, I would have requested that the superintendent resend the email, but this was not necessary.

An application to conduct research within district was submitted October 2015 (Appendix B). On October 20, 2015, the superintendent made notification of official

approval via letter (Appendix C). In addition, the high school principal gave the superintendent approval for me to gather data from teachers within his school (Appendix D). Once an IRB approval number was received, I obtained a signed letter of cooperation from the high school principal. The signed letter of cooperation documented the district's and high school principal's willingness to participate in the project study (Appendix D).

Protection of participants.To prove that I fully understood the ethical treatment of all participants, I obtained a certificate from The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research This research study had a low risk level to participants even though the employed participants had worked with me because I was no longer employed as their direct supervisor. I served as Clay County Schools Director of Special Education; 504; Gifted; Curriculum; Nursing and Health; Counseling and Guidance; Library/Media; Textbooks; Response to Instruction (RtI); Alabama College and Career Readiness Standards (ALCCRS); Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI); and Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI). I was known within the community as the Direction of Special Education. However, I did not serve any child directly and was only considered part of the support system for all special education students within the district, and parents interface with principals when they encounter issues with students' educational plans.

The principal of the school is considered the ultimate authority. He directly supervises the teacher/ support staff participants and directly impacts their workloads. I work solely in a collaborative nature as a support person. In addition, participation was voluntary, and a meeting was held with the school principal to reiterate the voluntary

nature of the study, discuss the purpose of the study, and address any questions or

concerns raised by the principal. I also compiled a list of participants who met the

original criteria as alternate participants in the event that a selected participant later

withdraws from the study. It was not necessary that the superintendent email an invitation

to participate a second time to alternate teachers. Overall, the safety, well-being, and

confidentiality of all participants was a priority throughout the duration of the study.

When reporting the findings within this project study, pseudonyms were used in order to

protect participants further. In addition, all electronic data collected from each participant

was kept secure through storage in password-protected files on my home computer, and

all non-electronic data was stored securely in my home desk. I will store these data for 5

years as per Walden University protocol.

Data Collection Methods

The purpose of this study was to analyze the perceived gap in communication

between stakeholders regarding the post-school transition processes of students with

ASD. Qualitative data collected within this study consisted of interviews, observations,

and documents (Lodico et al., 2010). Upon reading the invitation to participate

(Appendix F; Appendix G), participants were directed via link to finish a demographic

survey complete with questions such as such as gender, highest level of education, years

teaching students with ASD, other experience with students with ASD, and current grade

level(s) taught (Appendix K). Data collected through the demographic surveys allowed

me to compare similarities within participants when the need arose. Once participants

completed their surveys, a special character was assigned to that participant's name for coding for security purposes.

Observations

Utilizing observations allowed me to meet and understand participants in their natural and comfortable surroundings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). I also had the opportunity to gain a full understanding of the participants and their implementation of the transition plans of those with ASD because I only observed teachers' implementation of a transition exercise. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), I understanding interview concerns is easier if a visual representation of the concepts being discussed is given, and I found this to be true.

I conducted a nonparticipatory observation within each participant's classroom for one class period. Field notes were numbered consecutively to correspond with the identifying number of the participants during the interview process and were recorded on an observation protocol (Appendix J) as suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2011). After the culmination of each observation, I electronically recorded the data in a narrative format to be included within my database for ease in coding, analyzing, and/or retrieving post research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2009).

Interviews

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), data collected through interviews are the most integral of the information discovered because the researcher is able to shape the data that is gathered. Therefore, once informed consent for participation in the one-on-one interview was received, I scheduled interviews with staff according to their

schedules. It is also important to note that, while the staff are colleagues, I had and still have no supervisory relationship with them. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). One-on-one interviews were semi-structured, open-ended in nature, and designed in such a way as to promote targeted discussion about the implementation of and perceptions of the post-school transition process of students with ASD (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This information was used to triangulate portions of the post-school transition process, which help prosper the growth of meaningful skills and promote understanding of the process within the minds of stakeholders.

Individual interviews were scheduled via contact prior to observations at a mutually agreeable time for participants whose informed consent has been secured. Interviews were conducted with each participant during the time and at the location specified. For teaching staff, these interviews were conducted after observations of transition plan implementation. Each interview was one-on-one, lasted no longer than 60-minutes, and took place at the teachers' Central High School classrooms during noninstructional time. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the participants to respond to a series of open-ended questions that were not leading and did not solicit yes/no only responses (Appendix H; Appendix I; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Staff were asked to express their perceptions regarding the instructional supports and methods used to instruct students, district professional development, and use of manipulatives in implementation of the transition plans of students with ASD. Parents were asked similar questions, and interviews for them were scheduled at mutually agreeable times and locations. Although the local high school was first considered, parents were also be

offered the option of conducting the interviews in their own homes, but not in facilities; however, all parents elected to meet at the high school for their interviews. For all parties, I used an established list of questions with individual probes utilized in an unbiased nature to elicit additional information that may be relevant to my study and to allow the participants to create their own responses (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In an effort to make certain that the questions on the interview protocol were clear and yielded the information needed to answer the research questions and inform the problem statement, I sought and secured IRB approval. Participation in the study occurred after I had obtained Walden University IRB approval. Based on IRB feedback, I revised my interview questions as needed so that clear and reliable responses were obtained.

Each interview was numbered consecutively for each participant group to ensure that the participants' identities remained confidential. I audio recorded each interview, labeling each recording only with the associated number of each participant and group. In addition, I used an interview protocol for staff and for parents (Appendix H; Appendix I; & Appendix J), as suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2011). A printed list of the interview questions served as the interview protocols and were read in the order that they appeared. In addition, a list of probes was on the interview protocol to choose from if I wished to gather more information about a participant's response. There was space between each interview question so that I was able to write participant responses and field notes.

All interview data were transcribed verbatim so that the data could be easily coded, analyzed, and stored or retrieved post research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In

addition, I used an audio recorder because using an audio recording and interview protocol helped minimize any anticipated ethical issues that could have brought harm to the participants, such as risks, confidentiality, deception, and informed consent (Bogdan & Biklen, 2009). Protecting participant and researcher also added more trust to the interview situation.

I met each participant at the mutually agreed upon time and in the agreed upon location. To confirm that all participants felt at ease throughout the interview process, I reiterated the purpose of the study, the research procedures, and methods to protect confidentiality. Participants were informed as to what measures would be taken to keep identifying information confidential so as to promote candid responses. I reminded participants that their participation was voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time, without consequences.

Documentation

In juxtaposition to one-on-one interviews, I also studied parent data in the form of publicly reported state reports based from 2010-2016 which included results from cohorts 2009, 2011, 2013, and 2015 on the *Alabama Post-School Outcomes Survey* (Appendix E) to determine and help address the perceived gap in communication concerning perceptions and realities of the transition plans of students with ASD. Archival data collected from previous administrations of the *Alabama Post-School Outcomes Survey* to determine parents' thoughts on their students' postsecondary successes through multiple choice answers was also utilized (ALSDE, 2015). In the first section of the survey (ALSDE, 2015), parents answered questions about employment that inquired whether or

not the student had a full-time, half-time, or no paying job at the time of departure;

whether or not the student had worked since high school at a full-time, half-time, or no

paying job; and the reason any student who had no job had not worked. If the student

indicated work after high school, the survey used questions designed to determine

whether the job was competitive, self-employed, supported, sheltered, or other; how

many days the student had worked since leaving high school; how much he or she was

paid; whether or not he or she had benefits such as sick leave or health insurance;

whether or not the student had sought help for employment since leaving high school;

and whether or not help was received. If the student had received some kind of post-

secondary education or training, the surveyor was directed by instructions in the

administration process to ask questions about this training. The final section of the survey

asked parents and/or students to determine student satisfaction in the following ways:

satisfaction with employment; satisfaction with post-secondary training; whether or not

the high school helped to prepare him or her for what he or she is doing now; whether or

not there was involvement in the IEP process in high school; why he or she did not

graduate if that was the case, satisfaction with work, education or training, where he or

she lived, friends, family life, community life, free time, transportation, and his or her

decisions. Therefore, the analysis and charting of these findings proved very useful in

triangulation of parental recommendations as to the perceptions of the process from the

perspective of the graduate or parent disseminating information. It also helped to answer

the research questions and lend credence to the problem statement because parents and/or

graduates denoted that they had concerns about the post-school transition process even though they did not ask the administrators for help.

Role of the researcher

As a current employee of the district and one who is responsible for program development, there were some experiences and biases that I could have brought to the project study that were related to the topic. Even taking on the role of a researcher, it was impossible for me to immerse myself in the data without becoming affected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) since supporting our staff, parents, and students in implementation of our programs was my ultimate goal. Therefore, I endeavored to minimize the influences of my experiences and biases by acknowledging them within a personal research journal (Ortlipp, 2008). Ortlipp (2008) maintained that keeping a personal research journal would allow me to see the biases that I might infringe upon the study. I consciously acknowledged any thoughts, actions, and feelings I had during the data collection processes and analyzed their meaning within the study in an effort to exclude any bias. In addition, I worked to exclude my thoughts and impressions from my nonverbal communication cues by focusing solely on the recording process.

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Data Analysis

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Qualitative analysis, through means of a constant comparative approach, was utilized to codify the qualitative data garnered in response to the three questions. The data analysis for this study used analytic techniques, such as coding and categorizing, to organize the data. Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, and Coleman's (2000) Kaleidoscope Theory, which is grounded in the constant comparison method, was utilized to compare, integrate,

and delimit categories of the data collected so that a pervading theory relevant to the perceived gap in communication between staff and parents concerning postschool transition processes of students with ASD can be made. Kaleidoscope Theory, which is grounded within the constant comparison method, influenced my work (Dye et al., 2000). According to Dye et al. (2000), the constant comparison method involves the following three steps: comparing incidents applicable to each category based on the research questions, integrating similar categories, delimiting the theory, and writing the theory.

In order to implement the kaleidoscope method, I transcribed all conducted interviews and codified these interviews in juxtaposition with additional pertinent documents, observations, and data from surveys as themes became evident throughout the exploration of the data collection (Dye et al., 2000). Bogdan and Biklen (2007) and Denzin and Lincoln (2011) recommend careful reading and sectioning of the transcribed data in order to find emergent themes, patterns, and relationships, and I heeded these recommendations.

In the second step, I carefully read and correlated the typed transcriptions by gaining familiarity of the information through a close reading (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Initial themes and categories that emerged related to staff member and parental perceptions of the post-school transition process, perceptions of strengths and barriers regarding the implementation of transition exercises; staff members' perceptions of instructional supports (e.g., PD and teacher collaborations). Once the categories and themes emerged, I began to code the data gathered during the observations and interviews. I also included personal reflections and field notes written during each

observation and interview under the appropriate codified theme. In addition, integral documentation was triangulated to corroborate, increase the accuracy and credibility, and reduce researcher bias of the observational and interview data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

For the third step, I had participants conduct member checks to make certain that the information transcribed was accurate in terms of content. These member checks included participant reviews of their interview transcripts to ensure that all information was correctly communicated so that inferences can be drawn from the data collected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). None of the member checks resulted in any corrected information. Fourth, I conducted a cross-case analysis of the interview transcripts and categorized the information garnered from the transcriptions according to emergent themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). After these steps were completed, I began the refinement process explained as follows (Dye et al., 2000).

1. Refinement 1: I delimited the data by checking my categorizations, and the kaleidoscopic pattern changed due to the revision of rules of inclusion for each category to include the need for professional development and/or support for parents and staff to better understand how to accommodate all involved parties needs in order to facilitate transitions of students with ASD from high school to post-secondary training and/or the work force.

2. Refinements 2 and 3: I delimited the data by rechecking and implementing member checking to further ensure validity (Dye et al., 2000). During the member checking, no corrections were made. These refinements further clarified my themes, but required a fourth and final refinement.

3. Final Refinement: I rechecked the data to make certain that I did not delimit the categories as such so that they do not appropriately fit the data and are allowing the themes to emerge. During this refinement, I determined that my categories had excluded the data that allowed for creation of professional development or a guide because I had delimited data that noted barriers for access to a professional development for parents. The same process was completed for data concerning the Alabama Postschool Outcomes Survey, and data did indicate that student transitions were successful. After completing this same process for the survey, I completed the entire process one final time, including all data sets, so that I could triangulate the findings and write my theory (Dye et al., 2000).

Accuracy and Creditability

In an effort to ensure accuracy and credibility within the study, member checking was used to validate the accuracy of my research findings. No corrections were made during the member check. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) purported the need to create a formal or informal preliminary report of my findings to the participants to review to check the accuracy of the data and verify themes and inferences among the data that I have made in order to ensure that my interpretations of the participants' personal reflections and views were not be misconstrued within the final report of the project study. In order to ensure understanding, as suggested by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), each participant was emailed and/or hand-delivered a preliminary report of my findings within a week, post observation and interview, to review and offer feedback regarding my

interpretation of responses made during the interview and behaviors initiated during the observation. Participants offered no corrections to the data presented.

In addition, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) suggested that data collected in qualitative studies be triangulated to increase credibility and validity of the research study. In this study, all data collected were triangulated through means of a constant comparative nature. Dye et al. (2000) purported that data triangulation combines observational, interview, and archival documents to corroborate the data collected, and I conducted this triangulation immediately with fluidity as the constant comparative method suggests. Data triangulation allowed me to check observational data against interview data against relevant archival documents to this project studies central phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This triangulation did increase the overall credibility and validity of the study (Denzin &Lincoln, 2011; Dye, 2000).

Discrepant cases

Discrepant cases could have emerged among the 10 cases studied. Since I utilized the constant comparative method (Dye et al., 2000), I constantly analyzed cases studied as to whether or not the case was discrepant, or contained outlying or inconsistent data. When I determined a case was discrepant, I developed additional themes or categories to reanalyze the data collected because I determined that the data from the two identified discrepant cases did relate to the central phenomena and added insight to the overall study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Data Analysis Results

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore staff and parental perceptions of the current postschool transition processes of students with ASD in order to close the perceived gap in practice related to these transitions. In-depth structured interviews were used to address the central question regarding what recommendations participants had for the transition of students with ASD from high school to society or the workplace. In addition, two subquestions were also considered: (a) what are participants' experiences with transitioning students with ASD, and (b) how participants perceive district and campus trainings are meeting their needs. After data were collected and analyzed through color coding, application of Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, and Coleman's (2000) Kaleidoscope Theory, which is grounded in the constant comparison method, helped me to create a hierarchy within my research questions, allowing me to identify central and sub research questions. Each observation and/or interview conducted provided me with insight as to what the staff and/or parents felt was good and bad about the post-school transition process. The findings from the study are discussed below.

Findings

This section is organized into the following subsections: demographics, interviews, observations, results and summary of findings, themes from findings, and summary.

Demographics

The 25 participants for this study included parents, counselors, administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, and special education aides who were the first to return their surveys or were the only applicable participants. Selection criteria for staff participants included the following: (a) staff must have access to pertinent knowledge of the post-school transition process and (b) staff must have direct experience with the implementation of the post-school transition process of students with ASD for at least one year prior to the study. All counselors, administrators, and special education teachers agreed to participate. However, since more than four general education teachers agreed to participate, further exclusion criteria were used to determine which teachers had more than 5 years teaching experience within the district. Teachers with 5 years experience were perceived as being more experienced with students with autism. Parent participants were limited to the first 10 participants who responded to the principal's email. Total participation included the following: 2 counselors, 2 administrators, 4 special education teachers, 4 general education teachers, 3 special education aides, and 10 parents. Basic demographics of staff are summarized in Table 1, and basic parent demographics are included in Table 2.

Table 1.

Basic Demographics of Staff Participants

Participants	Gender	Years of Experience with Students with ASD	Job Classification
Staff Participant 1	Woman	23	Counselor
Staff Participant 2	Woman	24	Counselor
Staff Participant 3	Man	23	Asst. Principal
Staff Participant 4	Man	31	Principal
Staff Participant 5	Woman	33	Math Teacher
Staff Participant 6	Woman	18	Special Educ. Teacher
Staff Participant 7	Woman	18	Special Educ. Teacher
Staff Participant 8	Woman	10	Career/Tech Teacher
Staff Participant 9	Woman	15	Math Teacher
Staff Participant 10	Man	12	History Teacher
Staff Participant 11	Man	3	Special Educ. Teacher
Staff Participant 12	Woman	18	Special Educ. Teacher
Staff Participant 13	Woman	10	Special Educ. Aide
Staff Participant 14	Woman	8	Special Educ. Aide
Staff Participant 15	Woman	8	Special Educ. Aide

Table 2.

Basic Demographics of Parent Participants

Participants	Gender	Years of Experience with Students with ASD	Job Classification
Parent Participant 1	Woman	16	Parent
Parent Participant 2	Man	16	Parent
Parent Participant 3	Woman	17	Parent
Parent Participant 4	Man	17	Parent
Parent Participant 5	Woman	18	Parent
Parent Participant 6	Woman	18	Parent
Parent Participant 7	Man	18	Parent
Parent Participant 8	Woman	14	Parent
Parent Participant 9	Woman	16	Parent
Parent Participant 10	Man	16	Parent

Interviews

In each interview in this collective qualitative case study, I utilized semi-structured, open-ended questions, which were designed to gather information to help understand the perceived gap in communication between parents and staff concerning the postschool transition processes of students with ASD. I conducted 25 interviews with parents and staff in an effort to find information pertaining to why the views of parents and staff are so different regarding the success of transition plans of students with ASD since all agree on the actions taken during the planning process. The data collected during these semi-structured, open-ended interviews allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of individual views within the collective case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The interviews were scheduled at times convenient to the participants over the course of two weeks. Parent interviews took place in the privacy of the main conference room located at the high school, and staff interviews took place within the classroom or office to which each participant was assigned. Prior to beginning each interview, I briefly introduced myself, explaining my role as researcher and the participant's role with regard to the purpose of the study. In order to ensure confidentiality, participants were asked to exclude all identification information, such as ther names and those of their students and colleagues, during the interview. Participants were reminded that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw or stop their participation at any time without any negative effect. Utilizing semistructured open-ended questions allowed participants to answer questions without constraints or researcher influence and allowed them the freedom of response. The in-depth, semi-structured interview questions used for staff can

be seen in Table 3. The in-depth, semi-structured interview questions used for parents

can be seen in Table 4

Table 3.

Semi-structured Interview Questions for Staff Participants

1. How do you help students prepare for the transition from high school to post-secondary training/education or the workforce?

2. What seems to be the most effective part of the current post-school transition process? The least? Why?

3. What are your thoughts on support provided to parents related to understanding the post-school transition process? What are your training needs? Explain.

4. If you could do anything differently for our students to better help with transition, what would you do? Why?

5. What are perceptions of the post-school transition process that parents,

teachers, administrators, and students may have? Explain.

6. The 2013 Alabama Post School Outcomes Survey indicates that 100% of

students from Clay County Schools effectively transition to post-secondary

training and/or the workforce, but parents still note concerns about the post-school

transition process on their student's IEP. What are your thoughts on why this is

so?

Table 4.

Semi-structured Interview Questions for Parent Participants

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1. How do you and your family help your student prepare for the transition from high school to post-secondary training/education or the workforce?

2. Based on your experience, how would you describe the strengths of the current post-school transition process are at your student's school? Why?

3. How would you describe the weaknesses of the current post-school transition process at your student's school? Why?

4. Describe how the school staff has helped you to understand the transition planning process at your student's school. Are there areas related to the post-school transition process at your student's school that you feel need more information? Is there any additional training you can think of that would help you and your student related to transition planning? .

5. If anything could be done differently for your student to better help with transition, what would you do? Why?

6. What are perceptions of the post-school transition process that parents, teachers, administrators, and students may have? Explain.

7. The 2013 Alabama Post School Outcomes Survey indicates that 100% of students from Clay County Schools effectively transition to post-secondary training and/or the workforce, but parents still note concerns about the post-school transition process on their student's IEP. What are your thoughts on why this is so?

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Observations

Observations were only conducted with teacher participants, and were scheduled prior to the interviews in order to create the least intrusion within the day. Each observation focused solely on the transition lesson being taught in the classroom. During each interview, I was a nonparticipatory observer who colllected field notes through the use of the form noted in Appendix M. The form was designed so that only the instructor

and actions related to instruction were recorded. Conducting observations of teachers allowed me a set of data to juxtapose with information garnered from interviews.

Results and Summary of Findings

In this subsection, I provide a summary of the findings for the central research question and two sub-questions. However, the two sub-questions and their findings are separated from the central research question findings. I organized this section as follows: central research question, subquestion 1, and subquestion 2.

Central Research Question. What are the recommendations of parents, teachers, administrators, and special education support staff for the transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace? According to the analyzed data, all participants believed that support for parents and teachers and collaboration between all involved parties was crucial to transitioning students with ASD from high school to post-secondary training and/or the workforce. In fact, parent participant 8 noted that her lack of support from a coparent had been partially replaced by her case manager. Participants also mentioned that such support and collaboration depended upon rapport among involved parties because support cannot be seen as such unless trust is established through the building of rapport. In addition, all participant interviews, teacher observations, and Post-School Outcome Surveys also offered at least some mention of emphasis on the following transition-related skills and their importance within the post-school transition process: daily living, academic, work, and social/emotional. Finally, communication and understanding were noted as equally important aspects of the support infrastructure needed by parents in order to support their students with ASD, and parents and staff

noted professional development (PD) in these components was necessary. Under the realm of communication and understanding, parent participant 1 noted that "teachers and staff truly care for [my student with ASD] and wish to see him become more independent once he leaves high school." However, parent participant 9 offered this summation: "Our staff offered support where others might not have, and I think that was a crucial difference."

Subquestion 1. What are the experiences of parents, teachers, administrators, and special education support staff with the current transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace? Findings from the observations showed that staff are implementing transition practices listed within the IEPs of students with ASD. Both parents and staff indicated in their interviews that the following transition-related skills are necessary within the post-school transition process: daily living, academic, work, and social/emotional. However, findings indicated that parents still exhibited concerns over the transitioning of their students with ASD from high school to post-secondary training and/or the workforce. Parent participant 1 noted, "I have to admit I know little about the options and services that are available to J as he prepares to leave high school;" while staff participant 1 indicated, "I really think that our staff do a great job explaining things to parents about the post-school transition process, but I don't think many people can learn without experience." This juxtaposition seems to indicate the pervasiveness of experience as necessary to understanding; therefore, staff's realization of the importance of aiding parents within this experience is crucial.

Subquestion 2. How do teachers, administrators, and special education support staff perceive district and campus training and support systems meet their needs related to the transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace? Findings indicated that staff participate in PD, and all staff indicated that they had appropriate training to complete their jobs. However, analysis of the central research question proved this to be a fallacy because special education teachers studied intimated that they would be like to be better able to help parents understand the post-school transition process and potential post-school outcomes but felt they were not expert enough to do so. Teacher participant 9 was particularly vocal about the need for parents to be more understanding saying, "Parents need to understand their part in this process. They seem to think that we are their enemies, and the doctors they see one time per year are their friends. That's got to change because it's stupid, and it's hurting our kids." Therefore, special education teachers could benefit from PD designed to help better communication skills. Helping staff communicate the necessities of transition plans of students with ASD would also help staff to foster better relationships with parents.

Themes from the Findings

After data analysis, I found that a total of five major themes and one minor theme. These themes were color coded and organized into themes that emerged using the Kaleidoscope Theory. I organized this subsection as follows: Central Research Question, Subquestion 1, Subquestion 2, and Subquestion 3.

Central Research Question. What are the recommendations of parents, teachers, administrators, and special education support staff for the transition of students

with ASD to society and the workplace? Based on analysis of the data generated in

regards to the central research question, three major themes and one minor theme

emerged. This section is organized as follows: first major theme, second major theme,

third major theme, first minor theme, and interpretation of the central question findings.

Major Theme 1: Parents need support in understanding the post-school

transition process and post-school outcomes, and teachers need PD to help provide

support. All participants agreed that there should be resources availed to parents

regarding the post-school transition process and potential post-school outcomes of

students with ASD. Although each parent noted that the staff at Central High School had

helped them, they also noted several needs. When asked why they thought the 2013

Alabama Post School Outcomes Survey indicated that 100% of students from Clay

County Schools effectively transition to postsecondary training and/or the workforce, but

parents still note concerns about the postschool transition process on their students' IEPs,

parents offered responses that offered insight but allowed that the school was not at fault

for these issues. Parent participant 1 noted, "Parents do not understand the post-school

transition process completely. Their lack of knowledge may cause them to feel

overwhelmed during IEP meetings causing concerns." Parent participant 6 offered,

"Maybe these parents are just worriers like my wife." Regardless, although only 1 parent

mentioned the word guide, all 10 parents interviewed indicated that they would like

something to help them understand the post-school transition process itself and, more

specifically, what options were available for their students. Likewise, staff participants

offered similar thoughts: Staff participants 6, 10, and 15 specifically mentioned the need

for a guide while staff participant 9 mentioned "parenting classes" and staff participant

13 lamented not being able to "pour knowledge straight into [parent's] heads.

Nevertheless, all indicated some help is needed for parents. Tomeny (2016) found that

ASD symptom severity was positively related to both maternal stress and

psychopathology symptoms; therefore, a guide might help to alleviate some of the

stressors related to parenting a child with ASD and may serve as a point of intervention

for mothers and fathers alike. However, for this process to be fully effective and fluid,

teachers would need professional development training on implementation of the guide.

Parent participant 1 indicated that "basic information" regarding transition goals should

be presented before an IEP meeting, and all seemed to agree with this; however, special

education teachers are not currently trained to assist parents in understanding the basic

information guide so this is certainly an issue that needs addressing. Although staff

participants 1, 4, 5, and 10 did not think they needed more training and staff participants

3,6,7, and 8 made no mention of a need, each of these participants did indicate that they

had extensive experience. As staff participant 3 stated, "I think parents could benefit

more from personal relationships with the school employees, but parent involvement

takes more effort than most parents have to give so they have worries. If we could do a

training on reassurance, that would be great."

Major theme 2: Collaboration and building rapport with parents and

between parents and other agencies is crucial to helping students with ASD

transition. All 10 parent participants indicated that they believed the case

manager/special education teacher of the student with ASD needed to be directly

involved with transitioning their students. Parent 1 indicated that "[m]any times teachers assume that parents understand all of the options and services and all of the associated acronyms that are a part of the discussion. This assumption can cause parents to become overwhelmed." This follows Tomeny's (2016) finding that there is merit in the link from stress to having a child with ASD. Although parents did indicate that it was not the school's job to build a relationship with the family, parent participant 10 proffered, "[W]hen a school has staff that empathize with parents and seek to calm their fears, a tremendous weight is lifted from both parent and school." Friend and Cook (2013) asserted that collaboration is especially important when working with children with special needs and their families; and their framework for collaboration includes understanding and application of the following five components: personal commitment, communication skills, interaction processes, programs or services affected, and context. Friend and Cook (2016) furthered that, when true collaboration occurs, all involved parties feel confident in their trust of each other. As previously stated, staff participants also noted the importance of collaboration and expressed a need for improved communication skills, and these improved communication skills could be used to further build rapport with parents that would hopefully help to eradicate the following barriers.

Major theme 3: Parents need a transitions reference guide in order to actively participate in transition planning. All 10 parent participants noted their need for support in understanding the possibilities surrounding post-school outcomes, but 2 of those parent participants noted that they felt parental support concerning explanation of options past school was supposed to be the job of the Alabama Department of

Rehabilitation Services (ADRS) was not the job of school staff. Staff participants echoed

similar thoughts even though all indicated willingness to support parents within the

school setting simply because they noticed the need even though staff are already helping

parents establish connections with ADRS and other outside agencies. Staff also indicated

low self-efficacy in helping parents to determine postschool options. Therefore, in order

to maintain and build upon the current relationship with ADRS and other outside

agencies and not further burden teachers with extra work, establishment of a guide

presented by the school to parents concerning transitions from high school to college or

the workforce seemed most appropriate. The guide would be a self-sustaining tool that

could be studied by parents at their leisure and would satisfy the need for training parents

in options available to post school outcomes, while not adding to the duties of staff.

Although there could be concerns as to whether or not parents would actually read the

guide, which would be offered in paper and electronic form, the document would provide

support in offering an explanatory resource book, complete with contacts to which they

will be or have been introduced. Staff collaboration could also help correct this barrier.

Minor theme 1: Time is a barrier to staff collaboration. Staff participant 15

best summarized the barrier to staff collaboration in saying, "we…are not effective when

we have to deal with paperwork…. We work real hard!" These statements are certainly

true and are really indicative of the time spent. Eleven of the staff members surveyed

indicated that they felt they were most ineffective when dealing with matters concerning

paperwork, which encompasses a great deal of time and is always going to be a necessity.

The same is true for parents; therefore, the conceptualization of a guidebook would,

again, best fit the time constraints faced by all 21 participants who noted time as an issue. In addition, it seems that time spent communicating with parents is often inefficient as staff participant three stated, "Our teachers do an excellent job of telling everything that needs to be told and should be told, but, when parents complain, it's usually about something they didn't listen about. And the other half of the time, it's just something they didn't understand." This means that efficient communication would help provide staff time to collaborate since teacher participant 5 indicated that "there is a gap in what we regular education teachers know about support across the lives of our ASD students." It should be noted that the four who did not note time as a constraint were general education teachers, who are not required to submit extra paperwork for their students with ASD.

Interpretation of central research question findings. The central research question focused on suggestions parents and staff had for the betterment of transitions for students with ASD. These findings indicated that both parents and teachers would benefit from the creation of a guide that details the IEP and postschool transition processes and potential post-school outcomes. Parents' use of the guide would allow for more informed communication with school staff regarding the transitions of students with ASD. In turn, since special education teachers also serve as case managers for their students, they need PD in communication strategies and techniques. Although time is a factor that must be considered, implementation of this plan is crucial to the successful transition of students with ASD.

Subquestion 1. What are the experiences of parents, teachers, administrators, and special education support staff with the current transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace? Data analysis of subquestion 1 provided one major theme. This subsection is organized to show first Major Theme 4, which is followed by an interpretation of findings for subquestion 1.

Major theme 4: Skills taught within the post-school transition process are prioritized for students with ASD. When analyzed, work skills were given the most credence within the issues analyzed and this was evident from both parents and teachers. However, both parents and teachers related work skills attainment to most daily living and social/emotional skills. Parent participants 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, and 8 indicated that they have increased responsibilities around the house applicable to both work and daily living skills attainment in order to prepare their children for the outside world. Staff participant 1 emphasized the importance of using transition assessments in the planning of a career path, and staff participants 9 and 11 asserted that the most effective part of the post-school transition process was the implementation of career/technical classes taken in preparation for on-the-job training. Since the goal of schools in Alabama is to make certain the students are college or career ready, the focus on career pathways is certainly integral.

Participant interviews and observations showed secondary emphasis on daily living-related transition skills within transition planning and implementation. Parent participants 1,2,3, 4, 6, and 8 referenced home-taught daily living skills, including household chores and errands as being crucial to their success.   However, similar

significance was placed on school-taught daily living skills as staff participants 1, 6, 7, 11, and 14 made specific mention of including daily living lessons within their curriculum for all students and not just those with ASD. Staff participant 11 stated, "Preparedness is the key to life so I actually start by teaching students that they have to be prepared." Staff participant 7 indicated that engaging in realistic talk with students with ASD is very important, and it leads students to an understanding that they "are expected to take on more responsibilities, become more involved in self-directed IEPs…." Therefore, preparation for daily life is an area in which both parents and staff place great importance so the need is merited.

Social/emotional skills were given almost equal treatment to daily living skills in an analysis of the parent data sets, but staff placed less emphasis on these skills. Morningstar, et al. (2015) purported that social/emotional skills training is important to all people, but it is essential to the successful transitioning of students with ASD. Parents and teachers echoed this same sentiment, but teachers seemed more confident overall that their student's social emotional needs were being met. Staff participant 9 insisted that she did not see a difference in her students with ASD and other students. However, parents' belief that social/emotional needs were met varied. Parent participant 3 positively indicated that her child with ASD "learned what he needed to learn when he needed to learn it" and that the staff were pivotal in his social/emotional development. However, parent participant 5 stated, "As long as I am with him, he can feel safe to do and be what he wants to be." Regardless, all involved made at least some references to the need for

social/emotional skills development. Observations showed that teachers naturally embedded these skills within their plans.

Academic skills received the lowest degree of mention in the study from both parents and teachers. In fact, no parent participants mentioned academics. Still, all four general education teachers made certain that they mentioned it in their interviews, and observations certainly proved that academics had equal presence.

Interpretation of subquestion 1 findings. Subquestion 1 focused on experiences of parents and staff in helping students with ASD transition. Although parents and staff placed prominence on work skills, there was a differentiation between daily living related and social/emotional related skills. Parents placed more emphasis on the social/emotional needs of their students with ASD during the post-school transition process, and staff indicated they believed social/emotional needs were being met. All participants placed little credence on academic skills as a part of the postschool transition process for students with ASD.

Subquestion 2. How do teachers, administrators, and special education support staff perceive district and campus training and support systems meet their needs related to the transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace? Data analyzed for subquestion 2 prompted my finding one major theme. This subsection is organized as follows: major theme 5 and interpretation of subquestion 2 findings.

Major theme 5: Teachers need PD regarding the communication process. Although no teacher participants indicated that they needed training all participants indicated that the fully understood the need to support each other through the process.

Further, all ten parent participants indicated that they viewed their students' special education teachers as guiding their students and them through the post-school transition process even though it is the job of the IEP team to make decisions. Parent participant 9 made a comment that exemplifies the importance of good support: "The staff have led me to understand that they love me and my child and would never suggest anything without careful consideration. I am positive that, if I need to know it, I find it out!" Although this sentiment is not the norm, it is indicative of what the norm could become. This means that the special education teacher's ability to communicate effectively is tantamount to the success of the transition plans of students with ASD.

Interpretation of subquestion 2 findings.   Staff could benefit from training that helped them to better understand and employ counseling communication techniques. According to Friend and Cook (2013), communication is the key to collaboration. Therefore, teachers could more effectively help parents and students understand the post-school transition process if they were trained in the application of counseling communication techniques.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative, collective case study was to explore staff and parental perceptions of the current postschool transition processes of students with ASD in order to close the perceived gap in practice related to these transitions. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), case studies can be used to explore a central phenomena, and this was certainly the central use.   All 25 participants were parents and staff who have experience with helping students with ASD in transition planning and implementation.

An in-depth exploration into the cases of all 25 participants helped me to triangulate interview, observation, and archival data, and focusing analysis with Kaleidoscope Theory Carter et al. (2014) believed that the realm of academia is not as important to students with disabilities as are critical daily living and social/emotional skills, and evidence supported that.

Through data analysis, emergent themes proved the need for ongoing professional development to support teachers' cultivation of interpersonal skills when dealing with parents. Effective PD for special education teachers would include training on the following: communication skills, empathy, and cultural diversity. Data analysis also supported the construction of a self-help guide to transitions for students with ASD. This manual would include information about the IEP process, the postschool transition process, and postschool outcome options. Participants indicated such was necessary through their advocation for each other and for themselves within their interviews and observations and through archival data studied. Participants reported frustration with the difficulty associated with their roles as well as those of others in the transitions of students with ASD from high school to college or postsecondary training. In particular, parents expressed gratitude for teachers' knowledge of what pathway their children with ASD should take, but they also asserted confusion as to the steps in the process and within postschool outcomes. In turn, teachers and support staff expressed concerns about parents inability to visualize realistic outcomes with limited support availed to them from institutions such as vocational rehabilitation and mental health. Haber et al. (2015) maintained that all support agencies need to work together with the school and the parent

to ensure that a student with ASD's transition needs are met; therefore, professional development for teachers combining effective communication, empathy, and cultural diversity would be beneficial in helping teachers to solidify the coming together of the transition team. The creation of a manual for parents that explains the IEP process, the postschool transition process, and potential post-school outcomes would aid teachers in their advocacy for students with ASD.

Conclusion

Within Section 2, I discussed the methodology of the proposed project study, which included such topics as research design and approach, participants, and data collection and analysis methods. To maintain alignment with the purpose of the project study stated in Section 1, the qualitative research design with a collective case study approach was used to further the exploration of the aforementioned central phenomenon. After the data are analyzed, a project study may result in professional development that helps to eliminate the perceived gap in communication regarding the transition plans of students with ASD among stakeholders

Within Section 3 of this project study, I discussed the project, which was developed after gaining some insight on the possible answers to the central and sub-questions discussed in Section 1. In addition, I discussed the depiction and goals, rationale, review or literature, implementation, and project evaluation of the prospective project based on the data collected and analyzed within Section 2. Finally, I discussed the implications including social change.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this collective case study was to explore the perceptions of staff and parents regarding the transition plans of students with ASD in order to address the perceived gap in practice related to transition practices. After I gained insight from the review of literature relevant to the findings of this study and the study itself, I created a blended PD entitled Taking Advocacy and Localizing It for Kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder (TALK ASD) and a help booklet for parents entitled TALK ASD: Preparing for Postschool Options, which are both labeled as Appendix A, in order to help address the gap. TALK ASD training session for teachers will occur during the first 3 days of inservice of the new school year and will be followed with corresponding professional learning communities (PLCs). In this section, I discuss the study description and goals, rationale, review of literature, implementations, and project evaluation. The potential impact within the realm of social change is the final explication within this section.

Description and Goals

Exploration of the perceptions of 15 staff members and 10 parents regarding the transition plans of students with ASD allowed me to triangulate observational, interview, and archival documents to address the perceived gap in practice related to transition practices. I found that there was a need to develop PD with a focus on communication and a manual for parents regarding the IEP process, postschool transition process, and postschool outcomes. According to Henninger and Taylor (2014), families need more support in terms of communication from schools and support agencies so that they can

understand what they need to do in order to help their students with ASD transition from high school to workforce and/or postsecondary training. This information proves that parents need a transitions reference guide and that special education teachers/case managers need to be trained to effectively communicate options to parents.

Supportive communication training has been proven as key in relationship building, which is a process necessary to help school staff meet the needs of families supporting students with ASD through their transitions from high school to postsecondary training and/or the workforce (Friend & Cook, 1992). When juxtaposed with a manual that purports better understanding of the IEP process, the postschool transition process, and postschool options, adequate support for students with ASD who are going through the postschool transition process and their parents can be achieved. However, no PD provided to teachers at the rural high school studied has proffered a combination of instruction on such knowledge and communication. As a result of the findings of this study, I developed a blended PD that focuses on empowering teachers with communication strategies necessary to build relationships with parents that support the transitions of their students with ASD from high school to postsecondary training and/or the workforce. To further aid parents in understanding, this PD also includes a parent component in the form of a manual that fosters the understanding of the IEP process, postschool transition process, and potential postschool outcomes for students with ASD. The overarching goal of the PD was to increase staff's knowledge of the communication process and parents' knowledge of the IEP/postschool transition process and potential postschool outcomes.

This PD follows a blended delivery format using both face-to-face and distance learning environments. There are six goals of the 3-day, face-to-face portion of the PD:

- Goal 1: School staff will begin to develop a PLC concerning the development of positive relationship building through communication

- Goal 2: School staff will demonstrate basal knowledge of positive communication and best practices within communication.

- Goal 3: School staff will apply and analyze positive communication in a controlled setting.

- Goal 4: School staff will increase their efficacy in building relationships through positive communication.

- Goal 5: School staff will understand the basic components of TALK ASD: Preparing for Postschool Options so that they can offer parent support on an as-needed basis.

- Goal 6: School staff will understand the expectations of the distance learning component.

- Goal 7: Parents will understand the content of TALK ASD: Preparing for Postschool Options.

The distance learning portion of the blended PD will include the completion of one online PLC completed throughout the year during which participants will share various experiences with communicative efforts made with parents. Potential shareable experiences include successful and unsuccessful communication attempts with parents over the course of their relationships with these parents. The goal of the TALK ASD

PLC will be for teachers to successfully communicate with parents during the first month of implementation. The PLC will be conducted via Google Groups, which is a platform that supports asynchronous learning and is already linked to teachers' e-mail accounts.

This PD was designed to address study participants' feedback. Both the staff and parent participants within this study indicated that they had empathy for others' role in the difficulties associated with helping a student with ASD transition from high school to college and/or the workforce. Therefore, staff participation during the blended PD will promote positive social change by increasing staff's knowledge and understanding of communication strategies and potential postschool outcomes, thereby creating positive staff-parent relationships and, in turn, increasing the self-efficacy of students with ASD.

Rationale

In the findings presented within this study, I found that there is a need for ongoing PD that helps to foster communication skills within staff so that they can aid parents' understanding of the planning associated with the postschool transition process and with potential postschool outcomes. Although parents are considered equal participants of the IEP team, parents' lack of knowledge concerning the process and postschool outcomes has caused them to defer more of their participatory power to the remaining members of the team, in specific the case manager. This has caused the gap in practice related to the difference in parental and staff perceptions of the postschool transition process. Within the last 10 years, no PD has focused on effective communication strategies for staff (D. Parson, personal communication, August 16, 2016). Therefore, study participants would benefit from PD that focuses on acquiring better communication skills with the intent of

increasing self-efficacy so that they can be more effective in aiding parents in their understanding of the IEP process or postschool outcomes.

Review of Literature

All 25 participants in this study indicated that they felt some level of empathy for each other's role within the postschool transition process for students with ASD. Staff realized that their role in the process is to teach and prepare students with ASD for their postschool outcomes; but parents, who have been thwarted by outside agencies, turn to staff to ensure their students have the best postschool outcome. Therefore, parents of students with ASD have placed the undue burden of determining postschool placement on their students' special education teachers. This pressure placed on special education teachers by themselves and the parent has led to a perceived gap in practice. Because of the confusion, this is a topic for which professional development has not been rendered within the last 10 years. The staff indicated low self-efficacy in communicating with parents and outside agencies to come to a consensus within transition planning; but, they also indicated a willingness to learn new strategies and/or content to help with this issue. According to Moon (2014), learners need to be engaged in order to actively participate in the learning process, and such engagement can occur only when there is a desire to learn. The desire to help parents and, in turn, students would qualify in this respect; however, teachers must be taught how to communicate to parents the need for their prominence in determining their students' transition plans. Therefore, professional development in communicating postschool outcomes may help to reduce the perceived gap in

communication between parents and staff regarding the postschool transition processes of students with ASD and promote student's postschool success.

My search for current, peer-reviewed material proffered results from three relevant sources: published books, peer-reviewed journals articles, and web publications. In order to find these materials, several key phrases and combinations of these phrases were used: *professional development models, effective communication, self-efficacy, education, transition planning, IEP planning, students with ASD, needs of parents of students with ASD,* and *social change*. When conducting my search using these phrases, the following online search engines aided my access to relevant literature: Google Scholar, WorldCat, Educational Research Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest, and Education from Sage. Twenty-seven sources were identified to meet the criteria of relevance to the study, and each of these sources are used within this review of literature.

Relevant literature related to the genre of PD included those regarding blended PD, virtual PD, face-to-face PD, and communication PD; each is addressed within this study. Also outlined is the exploration of the conceptual frameworks used to guide the study toward practices that would increase elf-efficacy within parents and staff who work with students with ASD. In the literature review, I compiled a range of research pertinent to professional development and the role it could play within the improvement of the perceived gap in communication between parents and staff members regarding the transition plans of students with ASD. Subsections include conceptual frameworks, types of PD, increasing self-efficacy within parents and staff through effective PD, and contents of effective communication of postschool outcomes PD.

Conceptual Frameworks

A lack of professional development and limited support from outside agencies had detrimentally affected parental and staff self-efficacy. Special education teachers who act as case managers to students with ASD had become more determinant of IEP goals than parents because parents' lack of understanding of postschool outcomes caused them to be less vocal during IEP meetings. The dominance of the case manager furthered natural parental concerns. Therefore, I designed TALK ASD using Dewey's (1933) ideas of reflection and King and Ketchener's (1994) model of reflective judgment. Dewey believed in an "active, persistent and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it and further conclusions to which it leads" (p. 4). Dewey believed that every issue must be given thought before a judgment is rendered, and this application of thought is relevant to this study because professional development should be designed so that it is worthwhile. In this case, TALK ASD needed to be designed in such a way that special education teachers who act as case managers could restore parents' ability to equally participate in transition planning and implementation by enacting effective communication principles. Further, in the model of reflective judgement, King and Ketchener (1994) offered that reflective judgment results from a development process, which fosters the need for professional development. Because no change is immediate, TALK ASD process needs to be planned within the PD so that it can be implemented. When juxtaposed, these two conceptual frameworks offer a definition of what reflection entails and a manner in which reflection can be implemented within daily operations through the use of professional development.

Dewey's ideas of reflection. Dewey (1933) maintained that there is a need for studying reflection as a process and how a person processes a reflection. Reflection evolves as a chain link of thought that completes revolutions inside the head until understanding is reached (Dewey, 1933) Therefore, when judgment occurs as a result of the reflection, it is a final thought (Dewey, 1933). However, when this knowledge is applied to professional development, effective PD could provoke thoughts that serve as a chain link and determine a clearer outcome for all participants. This chain link should also reflect teachers' implementation of TALK ASD.

Model of reflective judgment. Dewey's (1933) ideas require more thought if they are to be applied to education and corresponding professional development. King and Kitchener (1994) constructed their model of reflective judgment complete with seven stages. The first three stages of reflective judgment are considered to be prereflective thinking stages in which the thinker believes that all knowledge is constant and stable, and these stages occur within the initial thought process regarding the information intake. The final two stages exemplify reflection in which individuals are able to understand the entirety of a thought in order to make a judgment based on that thought and the experiences and cultural beliefs of the person making the judgment (King & Kitchener, 1994). Such practice as is outlined in this theory of reflective judgment is necessary to the theme of all PD because it should be designed so that it is meaningful to the participants and can impact social change within the construct of its design. However, meaningfulness has a developmental nature, and it applies to both parents and staff within this study. Both need to gain the talent of reflective judgment in order to help meet the

transition needs of their students with ASD; therefore, application of this theory is necessary. Teachers need to use reflective judgment in their application of the communicative principles, and parents need to use reflective judgment to analyze their thoughts on the process itself and the knowledge conveyed to them by teachers so that they can learn to make informed decisions regarding the postschool transition processes of their students with ASD.

Types of Professional Development

Face-to-face Professional Development. According to Fishman et al. (2013) face-to-face PD is the occurrence of a trainer gathering a small or large group of participants together in one place for in-person instruction. This kind of PD is one of the most widely known formats of PD, and it is also one of the most expensive as the trainer has to travel to the location in order to render instruction (McConnell, Parker, Eberhardt, Koehler, & Lundberg, 2012). However, storied learners might benefit from face-to-face learning because they foster better learning from in-person, direct instruction. This type of instruction is often used for hands-on learning. When considering face-to-face PD as an option, a person must analyze the efficiency of using such a costly means of PD to determine whether or not face-to-face training is actually necessary.

Online Professional Development. Another format of PD is online PD, which is delivered via the following three basic formats: synchronous, asynchronous, and hybrid (Bates, Phelan, & Moran, 2016). According to Bates et al. (2016), synchronous online PD, such as webinars, occurs in real time and resembles face-to-face PD; however, it is not as costly because the trainer does not have to travel to conduct the meeting. Online

synchronous PD formats allow the learner to participate from home or while traveling because a person can connect via tablet or PC. One other synchronous form of online PD, which has increased prevalence in the last few years, is the use of a Twitter account to conduct a webinar in real time with like-minded participants (Bates et al., 2016). Bates et al. (2016) reported that Twitter or Facebook usage offers a platform for continuation even after the group ends because members are able to contact meet within the established group and follow each other for advice and/or support thereafter. This level of support could be beneficial to special education teachers/case managers.

Asynchronous online PD can take many forms and can involve use of any combination of discussion boards, social networks, and resource sharing websites, but all are accessible through self-pacing (Bates et al., 2016). Discussion boards are online sites that house question and answer formats for participants. Typically, a facilitator posts questions and anticipates answers while guiding the focus of the conversation with replies to these answers. Resource sharing websites offer much the same format, but the information tends to be more specific to sharing a particularly helpful concept or product, rather than engaging in an question and answer session. According to Bates et al. (2013), using social media networking groups is the cheapest, most efficient way to conduct a learning environment within the asynchronous platform because discussion boards and resource-sharing sites often have associated hosting fees.

The final type of online PD commonly used is known as hybrid. Hybrid online PD offers any combination of both synchronous and synchronous PD, and can be designed to include as many of the aforementioned platforms as can be imagined or as

can be effectively applied (Bates et al. 2013; Fishman et al. 2013). The potential to reach

diversely talented audiences through multiple mediums makes hybrid PD an

advantageous form for learners and facilitators.

      Professional learning communities. Professional learning communities (PLCs)

Are another format of PD that can be rendered online, face-to-face, or through

any blended means (McConnell et al., 2012).   Regardless of the delivery medium, PLCs

involves the facilitation of gathered professionals who share their experiences in an effort

to help others with similar experiences. According to McConnell, et al. (2012) and Blitz

(2013), online PLCs can be equally as effective as face-to-face PLCs. The most

important aspects in considering any professional development are teacher buy-in and

content development because teachers who understand that there is a need for PD will be

receptive to any well-designed content (Blitz, 2013; DuFour & DuFour, 2013; McConnel

et al. 2012).

      Eaker and DuFour (2015) also asserted that, although there is no formula for the

perfect PLC, shared mission, vision, values, and goals are necessary. Often called buy-in,

sharing of common principles of thought is a necessary component of successful PLCs.

Therefore, the facilitator needs to make certain that the participants meet these

requirements. Participants should be those who understand the need for change and will

actively seek to implement the changes suggested through the PLC. Those who supervise

and/or support participants in their implementation of content from a particular PLC

should actively encourage participants to engage so that buy-in is ensured (Eaker &

DuFour, 2015). Through the sharing of their experiences in PLCs, teachers develop

supportive relationships within their communities and within each other, and these conditions make the PD worthwhile.

 Blended PD. The final format of PD discussed in this literature review is blended PD, which involves the blending of all formats of PD to suit the needs of the study (Hodges & Cady, 2013; Matzat, 2013). Parks, Oliver, and Carson (2016) asserted that PD needs to be personalized in order for optimal outcome to occur, and personalization is best accomplished through a blended model so that the needs of all can be met. Blended also needs to be highly organized so that all details contribute to the whole of the learning because disorganization leads to ineffectiveness (Eaker & DuFour, 2016).

 Blended PD with the following components was determined to be the most prosperous form of PD for this study: face-to-face instruction in the basal knowledge necessary to complete the project and understanding of the use of social justice and multicultural counseling skills to build relationships; implementation of an asynchronous, online PLC that continues to support the thought processes developed in the initial trainings; and a guidance manual for staff to give to parents concerning the IEP and post-school transition processes and potential postschool outcomes. According to Parks, Oliver, and Carson (2016), a multifaceted approach helps to increase true attainment and buy in. Including various format of PD increases the potential impact for staff, parents, and students with ASD.

Increasing Self-Efficacy within Parents and Staff Through Effective Professional Development

Professional staff need effective PD in order to remain abreast of the most current information regarding instruction if they are to maintain or improve their self-efficacy (Kennedy, 2014; King, 2014). However, Morningstar and Mazotti (2014) purported that the need for relevant PD that improves self-efficacy is even greater with staff that help with transitions for students with ASD than those who work with students in general education. Teachers of students with ASD face the challenge of preparing students who likely have sensory issues and social anxiety that required more rigid structure in their daily life than do those students (Haber et al. 2015). In addition to preparing students with ASD to enter the workforce and/or college, staff who work toward helping students with ASD transition must also work toward engaging family participation. Since parent expectations have been proven as a predictor of student transition success, family engagement is a necessity; and PD regarding attainment of such is imperative (Morningstar & Mazotti, 2014). For PD to be effective and improve of maintain self-efficacy within participants, it must be carefully created, implemented, and evaluated (King, 2014). Therefore, the design must meet the needs of the participants because the purpose of any PD is to bring positive change (Harland & Kinder, 2016).

Earley and Porritt (2014) believed PD must impact students; therefore, a student-centered approach works best to determine teacher efficacy since student gains are a common goal for most teachers. However, participants in this project indicated issues with communication between parents and staff, not students; and they indicated that this

gap in communication is detrimentally effecting student progress. This sentiment follows the findings of Doren, Flannery, Lombardi, and Kato (2012) and Flannery, Lombardi, and Kato (2015) who indicated that teacher, not student characteristics, defined the expectations of students and increased self-efficacy within teachers.

Therefore, the best design for this study would be one that is transformative and implemented with fidelity in such a way that staff understand the information and are invigorated by its possibilities (Kennedy, 2014). Transformative designs allow for various conditions to be included within PD in order to achieve the desired outcome, which is bettered self-efficacy in communication of post-school content. This bettered self-efficacy could improve the gap in practice related to the perceived differences in interpretation of what should be included within transition planning for students with ASD.

Contents of Effective Communication of Post-school Content Professional Development

Communication Strategies. According to DeCapua and Tian (2015), school-family communication is crucial to student success and requires PD in the area of communication skills. Kuhn, Marvin, and Knoche (2016) noted that communication skills are especially important to staff who work with students with special needs. During their interviews, both parent and teacher participants indicated a need to be understood, and staff have indicated that no communication training has occurred in the last ten years; therefore, there is a need for training in communication skills and strategies.

Loizos, Roussounido, and Michaelides (2012) created one such training and evaluation within a school in Cyprus. Their training course spanned two month and included four weekly trainings with a break in between the fourth and fifth training sessions during which each weekly session teacher attempted to imbue teachers with theoretical and practical components. During session one, teachers were introduced to theoretical frameworks regarding parental involvement, approaches to school-family relationships, multicultural and social justice issues, and oral communication. Session two involved cognizance of communication and counseling skills and their effect on the teaching process. The third session focused on preparing for a parent-teacher conference through the use of counseling skills, and the fourth session detailed active listening and counseling skills. The fifth session served as an evaluation session after a four-week testing period.

Including knowledge of multicultural and social justice counseling skills within the training is also important for teacher-parent communications. According to Kim, Sheridan, Kwon, and Koziol (2013), the role of the teacher is as mediator between what goes on at school and home. However, teachers cannot assume this role without being trained in multiculturalism and social justice so that they can understand the entirety of the family perspective (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015). According to Ratts, et al. (2015) multicultural and social justice counselors understand their social status and privilege and open about their cultural background. In order to be considered respectful of other's multicultural and social justice beliefs, one has to first consider his beliefs about all subject matters. This means that one's process of continual

self-reflection is crucial to any understanding of another person's belief system. In turn, understanding others' beliefs is crucial to gaining and maintaining the trust necessary to build a positive relationship (Ratts, et al. 2015).

Competent counselors also acquire reflective and critical thinking skills and apply those skills to conflict resolution while maintaining respect for other cultures. In addition, these counselors will also initiate conversations to determine how beliefs and values held by the client influence the counseling relationship, collaborate with clients to identify ways that the relationship is effected, and use cross-communication skills to connect to the client (Ratts, et al. 2016).

Cross-communication skills can be defined as a branch of social justice and multicultural counseling skills applications known as active listening, tending, and body language. These skills are important to an understanding of someone's multicultural and social background when one is counseling. Because all special education teachers are also considered case managers for their students with ASD, they often assume the role of counselor to the parents of those students with ASD. Although these parents do have a need for counseling on issues regarding the transition plans of their students with ASD, special education teachers are not typically trained to perform such a function during their collegiate degree programs (Ratts, et al. 2016). Therefore, all counselors, or those who act in such a capacity, must be prepared to exemplify counseling skills, such as active listening (Adams, Vasquez & Prengler, 2015).

According to Loizos, Roussounido, and Michaelides (2012), active listening occurs when an individual, or listener, is engaged in purely focusing on the words of the

speaker. However, this process requires more than simple focus on the words being spoken. Active listening entails making certain that one is engaged with not only what is being said, but also what is not being said. Trained counselors analyze the content of each listening session by consciously applying knowledge obtained from the social justice and multicultural perceptions of the speaker (Adams, Vasquez, & Prengler, 2015). Therefore, in order to implement TALK ASD, special education teachers need to be trained to actively listen.

According to Adams, Vasquez, and Prengler (2015), tending is a counseling technique that is used in conjunction with active listening to help the speaker understand that active listening is occurring. Tending can include both verbal and non-verbal cues. Verbal cues might include a brief response, such as an "umhmm," but it could also come in the form of a more lengthy verbal response. Nonverbal cues could come in the form of the next important counseling skill, body language. Through nodding, facial expressions, and even a turned body, a listener can indicate that active listening is occurring (Adams, Vasquez, & Prengler, 2015). According to Ratts, et al. (2016), special education teachers are often perceived as assuming the role of counselor for parents of students with ASD, and the application of counseling techniques, such as body language, could positively affect these teacher-parent relationships by adding a level of trust that could be omitted otherwise.

The final counseling skill important to all practicing counselors is body language. As aforementioned, body language can be used by the counselor or substitute counselor to indicate active listening (Loizos, Roussounido, &Michaelides, 2012). However, body

language can also be observed and assessed by the active listener to help determine social justice and multicultural perspectives, beliefs, and current states. For example, if a parent comes in with a furrowed brow and pursed lips with his hands clenched, it would be appropriate to assume that this parent is angry, or confrontational, at the very least. Such assessments of current mental state are necessary for any person to make about another person, but these assessments are particularly important for those who assume the role of counselor to another individual. Therefore, special education teachers need to receive PD in counseling techniques.

According to Blamires, Blamires, and Roberson (2013), there is a definitive need for teachers to establish relationships with parents of their students. It would seem prudent to assert that special education teachers, in particular those who work with students with ASD, have more need to invest in their parent-teacher relationships. Building relationships between teachers of students with ASD and their parents could better the transitions of students with from high school to post-secondary training and/or the workforce.

These same skills are evident within teachers who maintain good relationships with parents of students with ASD. Brown, Bekker, Davison, Koffman, and Schell (2016) asserted that shared decision making is the best method of decision making, and that is what is mandated within IDEIA (2007). Likewise, Blamires, Blamires, and Roberson (2013) advocated the need for a parent-teacher partnership. However, without effective communication skills, no teacher appropriately act as case manager to a student with ASD because these skills are necessary to the teacher-parent relationship.

Communication occurs every day, but the level of effectiveness of staff communication skills can detrimentally or positively affect the outcome of many situations (DeCapua & Tian, 2015). When juxtaposed with the fact that teachers and parents reported needing support in understanding each others roles more clearly, communication skills seems to be a needed PD component. Well-trained teachers are capable of offering the kind of support needed by parents of students with ASD, and they facilitate better relationships because of their training (Loizos, Roussounido, & Michaelides, 2012).

Individualized Education Plan/Transition Planning Components. Teachers must have a thorough understanding of the IEP process and transition planning components in order to communicate these properly. Although teachers are typically fluent in their discussions of IDEIA requirements (2007), updates based on interpretation are fluid an ongoing within each state (ALSDESES, 2015). Corkum, Bryson, Smith, Giffen, Hume, and Power (2014) asserted that there was also a need for parents to understand both the IEP and post-school transition processes as defined by IDEIA (2007). Parents need to be as fluent as are teachers in the understanding of these components, which reflect the individualization of needs for their students with ASD and how these individualized plans apply to their futures. However, parents may have difficulties scheduling time for professional development at times other than shortly prior to the meetings they feel obligated to attend. Therefore, an accessible, simply worded training or document is necessary to help parents understand the processes in full. Currently, parents are given an option to attend an informative training once per year and

are otherwise given guidance only when they ask questions. In order for this explanation

to be relevant, parents and staff indicated in their interviews the need for parents to have

a document to which they can refer their questions and revisit concerns personally so that

acceptance can occur.

Postschool Options for Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Corkum, et

al. (2014) reported that training in post-school outcomes for students with ASD is

virtually nonexistent because of the varied nature of opportunities availed to students

with ASD due to logistics. This means that any information given to parents would

provide them with only a basal understanding of federally funded opportunities, and none

of these would be specific to their area. Parents and staff have indicated they need a

detailed explanation of all opportunities so that they can actively participate in the

transition planning of their students with ASD. Although the information contained

within such a document would be region-specific, a platform for one region could be

easily adapted for other regions by states and/or local education agencies.

Project Description

The TALK ASD is a blended PD designed to target communication deficits

through knowledge empowerment so that they can use this training to answer questions

pertaining to the reference booklet on post-school outcomes created for parents of

students with ASD. The use of a blended design allowed for optimal usage of teachers'

time. Participants will complete the first phase of the TALK ASD in face-to-face format

during in service at the beginning of the school year. Thereafter, four PLCs will be

moderated by the team leader and posted the first week of September, November,

February, and April to help support special education teachers throughout the remainder of the year. All four special education teachers at the high school will participate in the PD designed to help special education teachers better communicate the post-school transition process to parents of students with ASD. Having all special education teachers participate in the PD will allow them to become a more effective core unit of support for each other, as well.

The first day of the three-day instruction is a face-to-face component during which a certified counselor will attempt to explain a basal knowledge of multicultural and social justice counseling techniques that can be applied with parents of students with ASD to help them better understand the post-school transition process and in-depth knowledge of the TALK ASD manual. The first portion of the training includes an overview and exploration of the multicultural and social justice counseling techniques, which are derived from American School Counseling Association (ASCA)'s standards and practices. Also, during this session, the PLC will be established, and teachers will be told that the PLC will follow the prompts given until it finally culminates into a support group. Therefore, after completion of the phase one, goals one, two, and six of the project study will be accomplished.

During the first half of the second day of face-to-face training, special education teachers will be invited to participate in the Gmail group TALK ASD, which will serve as the PLC format that will begin in September. Although these teachers will be reminded not to give specifics about the cases they manage, the intent of the group will be to share past and present experiences so that they can learn from each other. However, the main

purpose of this training is that teachers will be asked to dissect what it means to be an effective communicator. This study will focus on the term communication from a multicultural and social justice perspective. During this training, participants will compile a list of their parents and their cultural backgrounds as well as what they perceive as their parents wants and needs in regards to themselves and the progress of their students with ASD. The list will not be shared with anyone, but the list will offer the special education teacher time to analyze the familial background because making an effort to understand the parents' experiences, cultural and otherwise, will help the teacher to better communicate with parents. September's PLC assignment will be aligned to this section of the training and will include language as follows: Without revealing private information, share an experience in which you or a colleague met with a disgruntled parent. With what you now know about communication, how could you have better handled the meeting? Please respond to at least one other colleague's answer through on this PLC topic with another question or an insight.

During the second half of day of the second day of training, participants will complete an in-depth discovery of counseling techniques, such as active listening and reflection, which are forms of positive communication that can be applied in all formal and informal conversations with parents. Participants will begin their understanding of goal three, which asserts that school staff will analyze positive communication by watching the presenter interact with a role playing as an angry parent who is overprotective of his student with ASD and a docile parent who is not as actively involved with her the progress of her student with ASD as the IEP team would like. The

corresponding PLC topic for this training will be rendered in November and will be stated as follows: What did you learn about positive communication from the demonstrations? How can you apply what you have learned in your meetings with parents of students with ASD? Please respond to at least one other colleague's answer through on this PLC topic with another question or an insight.

In the first half of training on day three, school staff will be asked to practice building relationships through positive communication with an assigned partner who is given a canned role-playing scenario. After a brief review and reflection period, teachers will be assigned a partner and a role-playing scenario to use during the practice session. Special education teachers will be paired in alphabetical order and given a number corresponding to their alphabetical assignment. Oddly numbered participants will role play against their evenly numbered participants first. Role players will enact the scenario given, and the responders will have a chance to exemplify positive communication. This will conclude acquisition of goals three and four, which asserts that school staff will increase their efficacy in building relationships through positive communication. The PLC prompt the corresponds with this training will be delivered in February and will be appear as follows: How did you feel when you were faced with your parent conflict? How did your knowledge of positive communication help you to resolve the conflict? Please respond to at least one other colleague's answer through on this PLC topic with another question or an insight.

The final segment of training on day three will be devoted to goal five, which asserts that staff will understand the basic components of *TALK ASD: Preparing*

for Post-School Options so that they can offer parent support on an as-needed basis. Direct instruction of the guide components will be delivered, and a question and answer session will be included during the last fifteen minutes of the training to ensure that training adequately addresses all participants' concerns. The final PLC prompt, which will be delivered in April, will be worded as follows: Discuss your perceived growth in terms of relationship building. What gains do you feel you have made? Please complete the attached survey to determine the effectiveness of TALK ASD.

The next step for the TALK ASD to be implemented at the state level so that all special education teachers can be trained in relationship building, all parents can have access to *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Options,* and all students can transition successfully. The following subsections are discussed next: potential resources and existing supports, potential barriers, proposal for implementation and timetable, and roles and responsibilities of student and others.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The needed resources to implement the mentorship program include access to computers, Internet, printer, copy machine, copy paper, and a word processor program. In order to ensure the success of TALK ASD, it is necessary to ensure special education teacher buy-in. Because these teachers are the intended core implementers, it is their knowledge attainment that is crucial to success. The complete mentorship program may be found in Appendix A. The information found in Appendix A includes the 1-day introductory training program for mentors and the 2-day intensive trainings and PLC. *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Options* is included as Appendix A.

I will be the facilitator at the introductory face-to-face training for special education teachers and corresponding PLC. During the Day 1 of training, participants will receive a basal overview of TALK ASD, its components, and its structure. Days 2 and 3 of the training will take place weekly in succession thereafter during the remaining inservice days: During these, I will intensively cover topics such as counseling techniques so that teachers can build better relationships with their parents of students with ASD.

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers for the Talk ASD mentorship program include time constraints. Although the introductory meeting will be conducted during three of the inservice days at the beginning of the school year, the PLC commitment will be asynchronous; therefore, participants will need to make certain they follow their own timetables in completing work. Teachers may participate from their classrooms or from their phones, but they will need to make the time commitment in order to see the program's full benefits. These time constraints could cause retention deficits.

Another potential barrier may be teacher buy-in. Although all special education teacher participants indicated that they wanted to find a means to better fulfill the roles parents wanted them to fulfill, teachers may become reticent to more work and/or changes. This is an issue that must be addressed within the introductory meeting if the program is to be effective.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

TALK ASD will begin on the third inservice day for teachers in August so that

teachers can be acclimated to the training and their new students with ASD and parents as

they learn. Day 1 will be an 8-hour training that will include two sessions. The morning

will be spent discussing theoretical background information, and the afternoon session

will be spent discussing the process itself. There will be a 1-hour break for lunch.

Day 2 will entail an 8-hour training that will include the topics of multiculturalism

and social justice perspective. During the first session, special education teachers will

have the opportunity to analyze themselves so that they can identify their issues and learn

to look for the same in others. There will be a 1-hour lunch break immediately following

this session. The first PLC, which will be asynchronous and correspond to the first half

of Day 2 training will be uploaded in September and used to prompt teachers to explain

an experience with a disgruntled parent and how understanding of that parent's

multicultural and social justice beliefs might have made a difference in the handling of

the situation. The second half of Day 2 training will focus efforts on the understanding

and attainment of counseling techniques, such as active listening, reflection, body

language, and tending. The PLC corresponding to this training will be uploaded in

November and will include content that allows teachers to reflect on their skills

attainment. Training during the first half of Day 3 will focus on helping special

education teachers to build better relationships through research and application of this

topic. The application will occur when participants are asked to role play with each other

as the facilitator keeps watch, looking for use of strategies learned through the course of

the program. Scenarios for this interaction will be canned, but reactions to the content will not be. Participants will draw from their experiences to help prepare. The corresponding PLC will be uploaded in February and will include a discussion based on this experience.

Although training sessions have focused on the acquisition of skills, the second half of Day 3 will focus solely on understanding the content of *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Options.* Special education teachers will receive an in-depth explanation of every portion of the manual (Appendix A). Once these participants understand the components of the manual and what the post-school transition process entails outside of the school setting, they will be able to use their counseling skills acquisition help parents of students with ASD through the process. The corresponding PLC will be availed to participants in February of the school year, and it will include questions designed to help participants understand their perceived growth in terms of relationship building. Hopefully, this process will help parents and teachers achieve their collective understanding so that students with ASD can transition appropriately. The timetable for the project study can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5.

TALK ASD Program Timetable

	Content	Format of Delivery	Time	Asynchronous PLC
Day 1	Introduction to TALK ASD	Face-to-face delivery	7:00 AM- 4:00 PM (1-hour lunch)	N/A
Day 2: Part 1	Multicultural and Social Justice Perspective	Face-to-face delivery	7:00 AM- 11:00 AM (1-hour lunch)	Initial Responses Due September 15, Responses to Colleagues Due September 30
Day 2: Part 2	Counseling Techniques	Face-to-face delivery	Wednesday 12:00 PM- 4:00 PM	Initial Responses Due November 15, Responses to Colleagues Due November 30
Day 3: Part1	Building Relationships	Face-to-face delivery	Wednesday 7:00 AM- 11:00 AM (1-hour lunch)	Initial Responses Due February 15, Responses to Colleagues Due March 2
Day 3: Part 2	*TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Options*	Face-to-face delivery	Wednesday 12:00 PM- 4:00 PM	Initial Responses Due April 15, Responses to Colleagues Due April 30

Roles and Responsibilities of Students and Others

It is my intention that TALK ASD will provide intervention strategies to supplement the current response to the local gap in practice in perception of parents and special education teachers regarding the post-school transition processes of students with ASD. My main role will be to present the findings and seek the permission of administrators and teachers to implement TALK ASD. In addition, I will facilitate the 3-day trainings and PLCs. The key stakeholders in this program are special education teachers of students with ASD and parents of students with ASD, but school and district administrators are minor stakeholders, as well. This PD will help special education teachers learn to better support the needs of parents of students with ASD.

Special education teachers are responsible for implementing the IEPs of students with ASD. However, transition content is vast; and, in order to better service parents of students with ASD and their students, they need training that helps them to build better relationships and understanding of the content. Therefore, teachers will work through the content provided within the face-to-face trainings and the PLCs in order to attain skills for building better relationships with parents of students with ASD.   At the end of the training, teachers will be fully prepared for their secondary roles as case managers.

Parents are instrumental to the successes of their students with ASD, especially in the transition years. However, parents need guidance through the overwhelming post-school outcome opportunities available for their students with ASD. Although the parents' main role will still be caregiver, special education teachers will be better able to lead them towards an advocative stance with the help of TALK ASD.

The administrator's role will to be provide support to the program. Administrators at the school and district level will assist the program director with the time frame and setup. They will also serve as positive supports to both special education teachers and parents.

Project Evaluation

Special education teachers and parents need to support each other. Because special education teachers are assigned the role of case manager, parents look to them as experts on the transition planning for their students with ASD; therefore, special education teachers need to be prepared for this role. TALK ASD training will empower special education teachers to be better case managers through the application of counseling techniques such as positive communication and active listening. Because there are only four teachers at the site for which this PD was designed, there is no need for a second cohort. The PLC created and sustained after the culmination of the training should be sufficient to maintain vigilance in application of TALK ASD; however, evaluation is necessary to ensure success.

The evaluation of TALK ASD is designed to ensure the program's validity and credibility. A formative evaluation in the form of a survey will be used to determine this validity formative evaluation will allow me to diagnose needs and correct issues within the project. The formative survey used will be aligned with project goals of increasing parental and staff understanding and communication of the post-school transition process so that students with ASD can transition to their most appropriate post-school outcomes.

The use of a formative survey is necessary so that TALK ASD and its

corresponding manual can be updated to immediately focus on issues impeding the

transition planning of students with ASD. Using a summative evaluation would allow me

to assess only at the end of the entire training, and ascertaining what aspect impeded the

process would be more difficult. Likewise, using a goals-based or outcome-based

evaluation would not have been supportive of the program because these methods do not

allow for immediate reparations to issues. After implementing TALK ASD with special

education teachers, building and district administrators need to support teachers in their

implementation of the knowledge garnered through the organization of a family training

at which administrators assist special education teachers in their exemplification of

TALK ASD: Preparing for Postschool Options. During this one-hour parent training,

special education teachers will explain each topic included so that parents have an

understanding as to what needs to be addressed and can be addressed in transition

planning so that post-school outcomes are appropriately determined.

A formative assessment of the TALK ASD will provide insight as to the

correction of the gap in practice as related to parents' and special education teachers'

perceptions of the post-school transition processes of their students with ASD. TALK

ASD and its merit are dependent upon the evaluation process to measure success. School

staff and parents will complete a survey at the end of each day of training (Appendix A).

A mix of multiple choice and open-ended questions will be used to gain insight from

participants. Participant responses are beneficial in order to understand the positive

aspects of the program and areas that still need improvement. In addition, feedback will

also provide insight to communication challenges faced by participants and how the communication challenges evolve.

This evaluation process for the parent reference guide, TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes will take place at the one-hour IEP parent training scheduled for the Spring (Appendix A). By Spring, special education teachers should have had time to build better relationships with their parents of students with ASD, and they should have had time to allow parents to peruse the TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-school Outcomes. Fully explaining post-school outcomes to the group should enable parents to be fully trained so that they can provide insight to the evaluation of reference guide at this time.

Project Implications

This area summarizes possible social change implications and importance of the project to local stakeholders and in larger context. It is organized as follows: local community and far-reaching.

Local Community

The project is of importance to local stakeholders because it provides a means for the gap in practice as related to differences in parental and staff perceptions of the post-school transition processes of students with ASD to be remedied. This program can be implemented district wide or at the local school level. The target population for TALK ASD is special education teachers and parents of students with ASD who are age 14 or older and involved within the post-school transition process. In addition, this project could be extended to the elementary and middle school levels as it provides a much-

needed understanding of what it means to be a case manager and potential post-school

outcomes for students with ASD.

Far-Reaching

The long-term goal for TALK ASD is that it is used to remedy the gap in practice

as related to differences in parental and staff perceptions of the postschool transition

processes of students with ASD. Possible implications for social change to result from

this program are better teacher-parent relationships, higher rates of students with ASD

attending post-secondary training, increased percentage of students with ASD who

become gainfully employed in meaningful work, and decreased parent anxiety related to

post-school outcomes of their students with ASD. As a result of the TALK ASD, the

work populous could increase, and the unemployment rate could decrease due to students

and parents who are able to commit to work.

<div align="center">**Conclusion**</div>

In Section 3, I presented a description of TALK ASD, which is a program

designed to attack the gap in practice as related to differences in parental and staff

perceptions of the post-school transition processes of students with ASD. Students with

ASD need comprehensive, collective support from all stakeholders to help them

transition successfully. Implementation of TALK ASD provides special education

teachers with a plan of action that will help them strengthen their relationships with

parents of students with ASD. Trust established within this relationship will allow

parents of students with ASD to be more receptive to what special education teachers

believe. Therefore, this project could be used to provide development to an area of the

workforce otherwise untapped by allowing teachers to empower parents of students with

ASD to become advocates for their children and their post-school outcomes. In this

section, I included a description and goals, rationale, literature review, project

description, project evaluation plan, and project implications.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

In this section, I address the strengths and limitations of the doctoral project, TALK ASD. I also include recommendations for alternative approaches. I conduct a self-analysis to determine what I learned about scholarship, project development, and leadership and change. I also discuss findings about myself as a scholar, practitioner, and project developer. I include a personal reflection on the importance of my work and what I learned throughout the process of completing a doctoral project study. I also discuss implications, applications, and directions for future research.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths are evident within this project. First, TALK ASD was developed based on the analysis of the staff and parent interviews, teacher observations, and archival data, which indicated a need for additional resources to support the postschool transition processes of students with ASD. TALK ASD lasts for an intensive period during which special education teachers will complete 24 hours of face-to-face trainings and a corresponding PLC. The timeframe allows special education teachers to build trusting relationships between each other so that the PLC component can be maintained throughout the remainder of the year with minimal facilitator input. In addition, this timeframe and process allows teachers to become more self-actualized in their communication with parents because they will gain a deeper understanding of the parents' perceptions of the postschool transition process.

Another strength of TALK ASD is that it focuses on helping special education teachers better support parents of their students with ASD. By better communicating with parents, teachers will help students with ASD succeed in areas of transition that might otherwise have been neglected at home. Third, participation in TALK ASD encourages special education teachers to build rapport with the support staff and general education teachers so that the importance of transitions of students with ASD is understood by all. The program is fully aligned with IDEIA (2004) and Alabama's Plan 2020 (Bice, 2012), which both support the growth of students with ASD in leading fulfilling lives.

A few limitations were also noted within my study. First, the special education teacher participant data collected were composed of three females and only one male. Therefore, there could be some circumspection within the data. The same was true within the general education teachers studied as only one of the four were male. Likewise, of the 10 parent participants, only four were male. Therefore, findings from this study cannot be generalized due to the nature of the research, and a recommendation for future studies would be to include male participants.

A second limitation was that the study and TALK ASD professional development program focused on parents and staff of students with ASD at the high school level. Another recommendation would be to include parents and staff who work with students with ASD at the primary and middle levels to participate in the study and the PD program. Adapting TALK ASD to teachers and parents of students with ASD in primary and middle school levels will make a difference with helping students with ASD and their

families better plan for their students' transitions to postsecondary training or the workforce. Also, TALK ASD would be beneficial to all teachers, not just special education teachers, because it helps teachers understand how to build better relationships, and all could benefit from that. Nevertheless, findings from this rural high school could serve as a model that can be used by other school districts to help their teachers build better relationships with parents.

The third limitation was that TALK ASD requires dedication and commitment on behalf of the special education teacher participants. Special education teachers are already tasked with the creation and implementation of annual IEPs for students with ASD; and, although implementation of the principles taught within TALK ASD will make the process easier for them, special education teachers must make a commitment to using the principles. Therefore, funding for a stipend may need to be given consideration.

The fourth limitation was that the mentorship program is a supplement to the postschool transition process, which is mandated by IDEIA (2007). This program is not geared to focus on academic assistance for students with ASD. Instead, it offers coaching and guidance from facilitators and fellow participants that lead to self-actualization in the area of communication. However, students' academics could benefit as a result of the process.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

In studying the gap in practice related to the conflicting views of parents and staff regarding the postschool transition processes of students with ASD, I chose to apply a

qualitative case study approach because I wanted to ensure that I received in-depth information from parents and staff. Qualitative means, such as interviewing and surveying, allowed me to gather these data. I still believe that the nature of this research is such that qualitative means were necessary. However, as alternative approaches, I would recommend that researchers complete ethnographic or narrative research. Ethnographic studies of families and/or teachers of students with ASD would provide the most accurate data because the researcher would immerse himself or herself within the family and/or classroom, but I could not complete such a study because of the parameters contained within my role as a student researcher. Additionally, narrative research of the postschool transition process of one student might offer insight. However, this research would need to take place over the course of 4 years if the narrative researcher were to gather the entire story of the process.

Another means of studying this same content alternatively would entail adopting different definitions of the problem. For example, I considered the IEP and postschool transition processes of students with ASD as synonymous; however, researchers might opt to consider both terms as separate entities. This could lead to an alternate solution because extracting the transition section from the rest of the IEP process might lead to different information. Likewise, I found the problem in this local study to be a gap in practice related to the differences of parental and staff perceptions as to what the postschool transition process entails. Through analysis, I determined that parents' lack of understanding was primarily because they did not trust their special education teachers and what they said about the process. However, if the problem were proven not to be

related to a lack of trust, TALK ASD would not be a solution. In that case, an alternative

solution might be that parents need more in-depth training.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

In relation to the research and development of the project, the most pivotal lesson

I learned was that I was responsible for the creation of TALK ASD. Although

completing the doctoral classes for educational leadership and the corresponding

prospectus were the foundations guiding my study, it was I who orchestrated TALK ASD

as a result of the findings. However, without the doctoral process, I would never have

been able to create TALK ASD. Through this process, I have learned to become a

scholar-practitioner in my thought, analysis, and writing. I understand what entails

thought analysis and conception and realization of a project as a result of that analysis.

Because I have learned to participate in the highest level of learning, I understand that it

is necessary to apply critical thinking and problem-solving techniques in order to find

alternative solutions.

As a scholar, I most enjoyed the data collection and analysis. Although I had

inferences, collecting data and analyzing data allowed me to understand rather than to

infer based on my preconceived notions. Based on what I learned from participants'

perceptions, I am able to effect change by creating and implementing a PD program that

targets the transition needs of students with ASD through helping their families

understand the process and potential postschool outcomes. This implementation will

have a positive effect on the overall community because it will increase both parents' and

students' potential productivity. As an educator, this process has inspired me to become

more active in the development of my district and the community in which I live. Remaining passive in the growth of our district and community is no longer an option for me because I have become more assertive in my leadership roles. I have begun working with interagency partners to broaden and expand the reach of my ideas.

After the culmination of data collection and analysis, it became evident that parents and special education teachers could benefit from the creation of a PD designed to help special education teachers communicate more clearly all aspects involving the postschool transition processes of students with ASD. I found that the postschool transition process often confuses parents, and teachers and parents felt all could benefit by improved communication. Teachers and parents also purported that they believed that parents needed a guide to which they could refer when not communicating directly with their students' special education teachers. Although the purpose of TALK ASD is in fulfillment of this study, a full review of the mentorship program proposal will be submitted and presented to the school leadership team for evaluation. All stakeholders are represented on the school leadership team, and the team can make the decision to implement the PD program. In addition, the leadership team can make adjustments wherever necessary to the program.

Designing the project and planning the TALK ASD PD program required inquiry and consideration. This thought process included being able to foresee that teachers could become better communication agents during their parental contact because that contact is mandated. Another area that required critical analysis was the conception of the PD process itself. For example, many different factions comprise TALK ASD. The

introductory session offers a 6-hour buy-in for teachers, using the research that led to the development as a basis. The first training and corresponding PLC is comprised of an analysis of multicultural and social justice perspectives, the second focuses on implementation of counseling skills, the third encompasses what it means to build a successful relationship, and the fourth provides an in-depth explanation of the reference manual for parents. The creation of such a varied PD was a daunting task because I worked to balance the content to optimize teachers' potential to retain and use their retentions.

Furthermore, preparation for the proposed next steps also required analysis. I knew that I wanted this program to maximize the success of the postschool transition processes of students with ASD so that their paths lead to their optimal postschool outcome. To give parents a self-explanatory guide to follow in juxtaposition with training would further strengthen the relationship bond instigated by teachers. Students with ASD need all stakeholders to participate in their postschool transition processes to ensure success, and this will allow them to do so.

Since I was young, I thought that leadership and change coincided because a person's leadership ability is measured by how he or she works through change, and the doctoral process has only strengthened that thought. Completing the project study was a learning experience in which I identified a local problem and developed a supporting solution to help bridge the gap in practice related to the differences in perceptions of parents and teachers regarding the postschool transition processes of students with ASD. Completing this doctoral study has ingrained within me the knowledge that leadership

effects change. I have also discovered that my duty to effect changes within my district and community is tantamount to being myself. My leadership and effecting change will be a process that I will continue throughout the rest of my career and life.

Leadership also includes accepting the obstacles that occur within the planning of change. I worked to analyze the situation and formulate TALK ASD in such a way that separate people and parts of the postschool transition process could come together and benefit the whole of every student with ASD. I am also prepared to involve community stakeholders as a part of the process so that students with ASD and their families feel comfortable and prosperous within their surroundings by establishing bonds of familiarity. Implementing TALK ASD will allow students with ASD to receive maximum beneficence from all stakeholders because these stakeholders will be equipped to fulfill their duties.

Although change can be difficult because many people are reticent, I believe that most stakeholders involved will view TALK ASD as beneficial to their work. This was the reason that I chose special education teachers to be the catalysts for change. Because they also serve as case managers for their students with ASD, special education teachers have assumed the role of transition guides for families, but they have not been fully equipped to help. Therefore, I believe all stakeholders will be grateful for the implementation of TALK ASD.

In retrospection of the doctoral process in terms of myself as a scholar, practitioner and project developer, I appreciate the planning of program directors. Each step within the doctoral process was calculated to teach a lesson that culminated in the

creation of this project study, which will effect change. I could not be more emphatic about the kindness and wisdom bestowed upon me by my chair, whose magnanimity has been more than evident; and I am equally thankful for my second chair. There have been times when I have been discouraged at my lack of progress, but I do know that this has arisen from my often irrational expectations of myself. There were also many times when I lost loved ones and my progress slowed far too much. However, through the recommendations of my chair, I excelled at the pace I was meant to excel.

Another aspect in my growth as a scholar was that I attended residency in the last semester of my first year, but I am grateful that I waited to attend. At that time, I had completed two classes, and I believed that I had a direction for my prospectus. The people that I met during the residency, instructors and classmates, helped me to define my vision. Although my vision has been refined throughout the process, the goals had not, and I attribute its longevity to that residency.

As a practitioner, I have helped to implement the postschool transition processes of students with ASD and TALK ASD. I also recognize the need for additional support for the gap in practice in relation to differences in parents and teachers perceptions of the process. As a team member, I have contributed suggestions to enhance the postschool transition process for students with ASD. I have also had the pleasure to acknowledge teachers and parents who are working together to implement the postschool transition processes of students with ASD. In addition, I collaborated with administrators to plan PD activities for teachers and to answer questions from staff to further understanding of the frameworks implementation.

As a project developer, I developed the TALK ASD PD program to address the gap in practice related to the perceptions of parents and staff regarding the transition plans of their students with ASD. In developing the PD, I used the teacher participant data and information presented in the second literature review in Section 3. Currently, I am unaware of a PD to support the creation and implementation of postschool transition processes of students with ASD in the local school district. Therefore, I will present the TALK ASD professional development program.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

When I reflect on my doctoral journey, the need to juxtapose what I knew about the law and what I knew about building relationships was tantamount. Because I had worked with parents for the entirety of my life, first as a young peer tutor and later as an administrator, it was easy for me to see the potential for the disconnect regarding what the postschool transition process entails and what parents and staff perceive. However, not even I could have surmised the grief that came forth within data collection. Teachers and parents lamented over the entire process and the dedication they have to each other, but parents still admitted their reservations.

There is a reason for every step of the doctoral study process. For example, from completing the review of literature, I learned that there is a similarity within all parents regarding postschool outcomes in that they all worry, but parents of students with ASD seem to exhibit higher levels of stress than their counterparts (Carter et al., 2012). Understanding this helped to prepare me for what I found within the data collection

process, and it helped me to refine my analysis. This analysis led to findings that can be used in myriad ways.

Throughout the doctoral program, I envisioned the project study. What I read, analyzed, and discussed was synthesized to create TALK ASD. I am motivated to lead TALK ASD in the near future, and I look forward to being given an opportunity to do so.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The professional development that was developed based on the findings of the study and has the potential to create social change for a rural high school. Recommending that this high school implement training to bridge the gap in practice that resulted from differences in perceptions of the current practice will benefit the school's graduation rate, teacher efficacy, and parent efficacy. Special education teachers perceived that the current post-school transition process positively effected most students, but parents did not acknowledge the same benefits for the same students as indicated by their responses in the annual PostSchool Outcome Survey (ALSDE, 2015). It is noted that successful transitions of students with ASD involve established, interactive multistakeholder relationships (Bouck & Joshi, 2014). The TALK ASD professional development program that resulted from this study would help to meet the needs of students by providing additional support to teachers so that they can help parents to establish these multistakeholder relationships. In turn, will positively affect students potential to thrive during the postschool transition process. TALK ASD is designed so that teachers become fully aware of the effects of their communication skills with families so that they can become better facilitators for a pathway to success for their students with ASD.

If school personnel focus their attention on creating an atmosphere of compassion through implementation of TALK ASD and all stakeholders can work together to breed understanding of the process and help students with ASD transition, then social change is possible. In order to effectively implement TALK ASD, school and district administrators will need to help support their special education teachers in their implementation. By incorporating this PD, administrators will be allowing special education teachers to receive much needed training and/or reinforcement to supplement their creation and implementation of the current postschool transition process. Since special education teachers will learn relationship building concepts, such as multicultural and social justice perspectives and counseling skills, they will be better prepared to help build trusting relationships with parents and help guide them through the process of incorporating stakeholders to aide the post-school transition processes of students with ASD. This will, in turn, create more successful transitions for students with ASD and will lead to more students with ASD achieving their optimal post school outcomes. This could also lead to an increase in the labor force, and it will certainly lead to students with ASD leading meaningful lives. Implementation of the TALK ASD would lead to social changes that could be exponential.

This project can have a major effect on a rural high school, and findings can be shared through a publication, peer-reviewed journal, and at a conference. The findings of this project may also have a major effect at the university level where schools of educational preparatory programs shape our future teachers and school leaders' principles of learning regarding the teaching of general and special education students. These

findings could also be beneficial to the mental health and vocational rehabilitation programs within each state. However, in order for the TALK ASD to supplement the current postschool transition process, it is imperative that the study findings are shared and further investigation is conducted.

There are concerns about the effect TALK ASD will have on students with ASD, since these affections will come as an indirect result of implementation applied to the parent-teacher relationship. Results of the findings indicated that rural schools need additional training and that TALK ASD will fill that need, but variations in the implementation may be necessary as parents are as diverse as their students, and the same can be said of teachers. For example, it could be necessary to change instruction to accommodate others. Also, teacher support could necessitate more facilitation within the PLC portion of the study. This study mainly addressed a need specific to a rural high school; therefore, differentiations may be nectary to make the study applicable to other factions.

Future research should be conducted to determine the effectiveness of TALK ASD to improve teacher-parent relationships so that all stakeholders view the post-school transition processes of students with ASD as optimally implemented. Conducting a program evaluation study would provide insight into how participants and stakeholders perceive the program. In addition, future research could also expand this study to larger school districts located in other urban areas with similar socioeconomics and demographic levels.

Conclusion

Findings from this basic qualitative research study can be used to change the current approach to post-school transition processes of students with ASD implemented in schools. It was important to understand whether parents and staff perceived the post-school transition process produced optimal post-school outcomes for students with ASD. Findings indicated a need for more teacher training and greater support for parents of students with ASD in understanding the process and potential post-school outcomes. As there are many teacher training opportunities and workshops given through the district, my primary focus is finding a way to maximize the effects of the postschool transition process for students with ASD. Therefore, I developed TALK ASD professional development and corresponding parent reference guide, *TALK ASD: Preparing for Postschool Outcomes*. The PD focuses on helping teachers to become the catalysts for parents to understand the process, and the guide provides parents a steady support to reinforce their knowledge.

This project provided PD to supplement the current postschool transition process. TALK ASD could also be used by other schools to improve the postschool transition processes for their students with ASD. Furthermore, the publication of the findings may increase the awareness of the special education program, supplemental resources for students with ASD, and building collaborations between home, school, and the community. While this project concludes my doctoral journey, it begins my future towards supporting my local district, community, and state in helping to advocate for

self-actualization of all of our students with ASD so that they can become the adults they were meant to be regardless of their label.

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    Publications.

Appendix A: Project

Professional Development 3-Day Face-to-face Trainings and Corresponding PLC

This project is a professional development training program that focuses on closing the perceived gap in practice between teachers and parents of students with ASD in terms of the post-school transition processes of these students.   Findings from the research conducted at the high school indicated the need for professional development for case managers and a reference guide designed for parents that explains the post-school transition process and potential post-school outcomes for students with ASD. The Taking Advocacy and Localizing it for Kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder (TALK ASD) Professional Development Program and corresponding reference guide for parents *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes* were developed in response to these reported needs. According to Henniger and Taylor (2014), families need more support in terms of communication from schools and support agencies so that they can understand what options their students might have. In turn, special education teachers who serve as case managers need support in understanding how to build better relationships with parents so that miscommunication regarding transitions does not occur.

Purpose

The purpose of the TALK ASD Professional Development Program and transition reference guide for parents, *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes* is to address the perceived gap in practice related to perceptions of parents and teachers regarding the transitions of students with ASD. Special education teachers will be provided with a three-day intensive professional development training and corresponding PLC designed to improve teachers' abilities to create positive relationships with parents of students with ASD.   The trainings will imbue teachers with an understanding of *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes*, multicultural and social justice perspectives, counseling techniques, and building relationships. As a result of these trainings and corresponding PLC, special education teachers will be able to invoke more trusting relationships with parents of their students with ASD so that they will be able to better guide parents and students through the post-school transition process.

Program Goals

The mentor training goals include:

- staff development of a professional learning community concerning the creation of positive relationship-building through communication
- staff demonstration of basal knowledge of positive communication and best practices within communication.
- staff application and analysis of positive communication in a controlled setting.
- staff increase of their efficacy in building relationships through positive communication.

- staff understanding of the basic components of *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Options* so that they can offer parent support on an as-needed basis

- staff understanding of the expectations of the distance-learning component.

The parent training goals include:

- understanding of the content of *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Options*

Learning Outcomes

The learning outcome for the professional development training sessions and corresponding PLC is for special education teachers to gain skills necessary to strengthen relationships between themselves and parents of students with ASD so that transitions for these students are bettered. TALK ASD will supplement the current transition program by helping teachers to better train parents as to the transition needs and potential post-school outcomes of their students with ASD.

Target Audience

- Special education teachers of students with ASD. Special education teachers at the high school will attend the training as a part of their professional development requirement. The PLC component will continue throughout the rest of the year, and the moderator will continue to post with the PLC members.

- For the first year of the program, all high school special education teachers will attend as part of their professional development requirement for the

academic year. In the following years, teachers who have attended the initial training will only be asked to maintain the moderated PLC component. As new teachers are hired, they will be required to attend the three-day intensive face-to-face professional development trainings and the corresponding PLC.

Timeline

The three-day TALK ASD professional development training session for special education teachers will be held during August inservice. The PLC will continue throughout the year and will serve as a constant support forum throughout the rest of the participants' careers. I will be the facilitator of the trainings and the PLC for the first year. However, the objective of the PLC is for the special education teachers to become support for each other and for my facilitator role to subside. As facilitator, I will help special education teachers who serve as case managers to students with ASD become more vested and communicative in their relationships with parents of their students with ASD in order to help improve the gap between parents' and teachers' understanding of the transition plans of students with ASD (Clay County Schools, 2016). Attention will be placed on fostering the development of parent-teacher relationships through the discovery of counseling techniques and muticultural and social justice training (Loizos, Roussounido, & Michaelides, 2012). Teachers will also discover ways toincrease parent self efficacy (Earley & Porritt, 2014; Morningstar & Mazotti, 2014). The agenda for the initial 3-day professional development training for special education teachers is presented first with its supporting documents and this is followed by the agendas for the corresponding PLC and supporting documents.

Materials and Equipment

- Name tags for each participant

- Pencils and paper

- Post-it chart paper

- Markers

- Evaluation forms

- PowerPoint Presentation

- Laptop (Internet-capable device with word processor and keyboard)

- SMART BOARD or any audio visual presentation device

Professional Development Training

Day 1

7:00AM-9:30AM	Introduction to TALK ASD during which the facilitator will guide the group in the following:
	 • Introduction to the topic and each other (PowerPoint Slides 1-4):
	     o The facilitator will state the following: "Welcome to TALK ASD: An Introduction to the Program! We appreciate greatly your taking time out of your busy schedules to attend this training, regardless of the fact that it is mandatory, because helping students with ASD and their parents through transition planning and, ultimately, transition itself is crucial. In way of introduction and starting with the person to my left, please state your name and school location so that we can all get to know each other better."
	     o The facilitator will state the purpose of the training: "The purpose of the training is to give you all tools and strategies to develop positive relationships with parents of students with ASD and to help all better understand

	the post-school transition process and potential outcomes."
	• Activity 1: Whose Fault is It Anyway? (PowerPoint Slides 5 and 6)
	    ○ Q & A
	    ○ Discussion
	• Why Is TALK ASD Necessary? (Slides 7-17)
	    ○ Discuss obligations under ESSA.
	    ○ Discuss obligations under IDEA.
	    ○ View TED Talk *The Danger of Single Story.*
	        ■ Group Post Discussion
	    ○ Discuss characteristics of successful communicators.
	    ○ Introduce problem questions prior to the break.

9:30AM-11:00AM	In an effort to increase buy-in, the facilitator will discuss the research that led to the problem, which is the perceived gap in practice related to the post-school transition processes of students with ASD: • Beginning thoughts occurred prior to the break, but discussion continues (Slides 20-21). • Introduce participants to the gap in transition (Slide 21). • Discuss the problem with communication regarding transitions of students with ASD (Slide 22). • Define the problem (Slides 23-24). • Discuss evidence of the problem (Slides 25-26). • Discuss significance of the study (Slide 27). • Discuss the research questions that guided the study (Slide 28). • Discuss the review of current literature which led to the study (Slides 29-32). • Discuss the current site transition practices for students with ASD (Slides 33-36). • Discuss potential post-school outcomes for students with ASD (Slides 37-39). • Discuss implications (Slide 41).
11:00AM-12:00PM	Lunch
12:00PM–1:00PM	In an effort to increase buy-in, the facilitator will discuss the following research methodology used in the study to determine the content of TALK ASD: • Discuss the research design and approach (Slides 43-

	44).
	• Discuss participants (Slides 45-49).
	• Discuss data collection (Slides 50-55).
	• Discuss analysis of data
1:00PM–1:30PM	The facilitator will discuss the findings of the research that led to TALK ASD (Slides 59-64).

1:30PM-4:00PM	Since buy-in has been achieved, facilitator will address what can be done to help students with ASD and their families through post-school transition process:
	• Discuss how students can be helped.
	   o Planning for PLC (Slides 66-70)
	   o Multicultural and Social Justice Perspectives (Slides 71-72)
	   o Counseling Techniques (Slides 73-80)
	   o Building Relationships (Slides 81-85)
	   o Preparing for Post-school Outcomes

4:00PM	The facilitator will distribute the following: reflection sheet, evaluation sheet.

Professional Development Training

Day 2

7:00AM-11:00AM	Introduction to TALK ASD's Communication and Collaboration Issues during which the facilitator will guide the group in the following:
	• Introduction to Gmail Groups
	• Introduction to communication and collaboration:
	   o The facilitator will state the following: "Welcome to Day 2 of TALK ASD! I appreciate your continued attendance, dedication, and concentration."
	   o The facilitator will state the purpose of the training: "The purpose of the training is to give you all tools and strategies to develop positive relationships with parents of students with ASD and to help all better understand the post-school transition process and potential outcomes."
	   o Communication and Collaboration (PowerPoint Slides 1-4

	• Communication from a Multicultural and Social Justice Perspective (Slides 5-8)
	    o Discussion
	    o What is your multicultural and social justice perspective
	• Compile a confidential list, or profile, of multicultural and social justice perspectives of the parents on your caseload.
	• Discussion

11:00AM-12:00PM	Lunch
12:00PM–4:00PM	In an effort to increase parental receptivity, special education teachers will learn counseling techniques as related to TALK ASD: • Discuss counseling techniques, such as active listening and reflection (Slides 1-6). • Discuss positive communication (Slides 7-10). • Role playing by presenter and volunteer (Slides 11-12). • Discuss analysis of role playing example.
4:00PM	The facilitator will distribute the following: reflection sheet, evaluation sheet.

Professional Development Training

Day 3

7:00AM-11:00AM	Introduction to TALK ASD's Building Better Relationships:
	
	• The facilitator will state the following: "Welcome to Day 3 of TALK ASD! I appreciate your continued attendance, dedication, and concentration. I truly hope that, after today, we have accomplished our purpose, which is to give you all tools and strategies to develop positive relationships with parents of students with ASD and to help all better understand the post-school transition process and potential outcomes."
	• Review and Reflection (Slides 1-10)
	• Assign role playing partners and scenarios (Slide 11)
	    o Role playing practice and preparation
	    o Role playing exercise
	    o Discussion and analysis

11:00AM-12:00PM	Lunch
12:00PM–4:00PM	Special education teachers will receive direct instruction in the application of the TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes.
4:00PM	The facilitator will distribute the following: reflection sheet, evaluation sheet.

TALK ASD PLC

PLC Topic 1	Topic will be available in the TALK ASD Google Group on September 1. The first response will be due on September 15, and the two replies to colleagues will be due by September 30.
PLC Topic 2	Topic will be available in the TALK ASD Google Group on November 1. The first response will be due on November 15, and the two replies to colleagues will be due by November 30.
PLC Topic 3	Topic will be available in the TALK ASD Google Group on February 1. The first response will be due on February 15, and the two replies to colleagues will be due by March 2.
PLC Topic 4	Topic will be available in the TALK ASD Google Group on April 1. The first response will be due on April 15, and the two replies to colleagues will be due by April 30.

Evaluation of *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes*

Evaluation	After the one-hour Spring IEP group training for parents, parents will complete the reference guide survey

Reflection Sheet for Special Education Teachers

Date_____

Topic _____

3
What are three things you've learned?

_____
_____
_____
_____

2
What are two new things you are going to try?

_____
_____

1
What is one question you still have?

_____

Evaluation of Professional Development Introductory Training Session for TALK ASD
Please Indicate Training Day#_____ or PLC #

Thank you for participating in the Professional Development I Training Session. Please take a few minutes to complete the following evaluation since your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help prepare for future training sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

This professional development activity's objectives were clearly stated.
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

This professional development activity's objectives were met.
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

This professional development activity helped me better understand the post-school transition process for students with ASD.
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

This professional development activity helped me better understand my role in the post-school transition processes of students with ASD.
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

This professional development activity has taught me my role as a case manager to students with ASD.
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
5	4	3	2	1

This professional development activity has taught me how to establish a relationship with parents of students with ASD.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

This professional development activity helped me understand the collaboration between the parents, students, and teachers.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

Overall, this professional development activity was a successful experience for me.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
   5   4   3   2   1

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development activity.

What support will you need in order to implement TALK ASD?

Please make any suggestions as to how you can receive the support you've requested.

Evaluation of *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes*

Thank you for participating in the Professional Development ITraining Session. Please take a few minutes to complete the following evaluation since your feedback will provide valuable information to the facilitator and help prepare for future training sessions.

Use the following rating scale when marking your response:
5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2= Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree

TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes has helped me better understand the IEP process for my student with ASD.
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
     5   4   3   2   1

TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes has helped me better understand the post-school transition process for my student with ASD.
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
     5   4   3   2   1

TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes has helped me better understand potential post-school outcomes for my student with ASD.
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
     5   4   3   2   1

Th *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes* helped me better understand my role in the post-school transition process of my student with ASD.
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
     5   4   3   2   1

TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes has helped me to better help my student with ASD.
Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
     5   4   3   2   1

This professional development activity has taught me how to strengthen my relationship with teachers of my student with ASD.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
      5   4   3   2   1

This professional development activity helped me understand the collaboration between the parents, students, and teachers.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
      5   4   3   2   1

Overall, *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes* was helpful to me.

Strongly agree   Agree   Neutral   Disagree   Strongly disagree
      5   4   3   2   1

List any suggestions you have for improving this professional development activity.

What support will you need in order to implement TALK ASD?

Please make any suggestions as to how you can receive the support you've requested.

Face-to-face and PLC Agenda

Day	Content	Format of Delivery	Time	Asynchronous PLC
Day 1	Introduction to TALK ASD	Face-to-face delivery	7:00 AM- 4:00 PM (1-hour lunch)	N/A
Day 2: Part 1	Multicultural and Social Justice Perspective	Face-to-face delivery	7:00 AM- 11:00 AM (1-hour lunch)	Initial Repsonses Due September 15, Responses to Colleagues Due September 30
Day 2: Part 2	Counseling Techniques	Face-to-face delivery	Wednesday 12:00 PM- 4:00 PM	Initial Repsonses Due November 15, Responses to Colleagues Due November 30
Day 3: Part1	Building Relationships	Face-to-face delivery	Wednesday 7:00 AM- 11:00 AM (1-hour lunch)	Initial Repsonses Due February 15, Responses to

				Colleagues Due March 2
Day 3: Part 2	*TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Options*	Face-to-face delivery	Wednesday 12:00 PM- 4:00 PM	Initial Repsonses Due April 15, Responses to Colleagues Due April 30

Activity 1: WHOSE Fault Is It Anyway?

Jackson is a student who has a diagnosis of ASD-Mild, which is more commonly known as Asperger's Syndrome. Although he is typically a happy child who laughs frequently at appropriate times, Jackson got off the bus this morning frowning while twirling his hair and making little eye contact. Let's take five minutes and brainstorm at least four ideas about what could be bothering Jackson.

5

Activity 1: WHOSE Fault Is It Anyway?

1) Each of you place one of the potential issues on one of the pieces of chart paper on the wall to your left.
2) Pretend you are Jackson's case manager, and formulate a response to your potential issue
3) DISCUSSION

6

Why is TALK ASD Necessary?

- Broadness of the spectrum means broadness of needs
- Student needs in relation to parent needs
- ESSA (2016)
- IDEIA (2004)

7

Every Student Succeeds Act (2016)

- ESSA mandated the following in response to parents and families:
  - Conduct outreach to families
  - Distribute written policies
  - Provide support for educators to use effective practices
  - Conduct an annual evaluation of school's implementation

8

Individual with Disabilities Education Act (2004)

- Parent participation
  - Obtain parent consent for evaluation and placement
  - Partner with parents in the development of the IEP
  - Provide parents access to records
  - Extend due process rights to parents
  - Ensure parent representation on state advisory committee

9

How Do IDEA and ESSA Impact the Transitions of our Students with ASD?

Group Pre-discussion

10

- Think of a time in which you or someone you know received guidance from an educator you trusted and that guidance proved successful.
- Make a list of the characteristics that you believe made this educator successful. Be as detailed as you can, but star the five most important characteristics.

11

- Now, think of a time when you received some very unprofessional advice from an educator.
- Make a list of the characteristics that you believe made this educator unsuccessful. Be as detailed as you can, but star the five most important characteristics.

12

TED Talks

⟠We are about to watch a Ted Talk entitled The Danger of A Single Story.

⟠Please keep your definitions of successful and unsuccessful educators in mind as we view it.

13

The danger of a single story

http://www.ted.com/talks/chim_amanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en

8

How Do IDEA and ESSA Impact the Transitions of our Students with ASD?

Group Post-discussion

15

How Do IDEA and ESSA Impact the Transitions of our Students with ASD?

- Characteristics of Successful Communicators:

16

What is the Problem?

- What does the literature say?
- What do your colleagues say?
- What do you say?

17

Break 1

18

Section 2: The Research

Research on Transitions of Students with ASD

The problem shouldn't be a problem if our purpose is true!

20

Introduction to the Gap in Transitions

- There is a gap in the equitable transitions to post-secondary training and/or the workforce of those who are disabled and those who are nondisabled
- Proof in statistics:
  - Only 26% of students with disabilities in comparison to 45% of non-disabled students enrolled in post-secondary education within four years of high school (Brand, Valent, & Danielson, 2013).
  - Individuals with disabilities suffered greater unemployment rates (16.2%) than did those who were non-disabled (8.8%) (Brand, Valent, & Danielson, 2013).
  - 45% of those with disabilities are living independently as opposed to 59% of those without disabilities (Cobb, Lipscomb, Wolgemuth, & Schulte, 2013)

The Problem with Transitions in Juxtaposition to ASD

- In comparison to those with disabilities such as orthopedic and intellectual disabilities, those with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) are more likely to experience unsuccessful transitioning because of their difficulties with communication processing (Robinson, Curwen, & Ryan, 2012).
  - Since, transitions are measured through outcomes in education, employment, living arrangements, and relationships, students with ASD are at a distinct disadvantage

Definition of the Problem

- IDEIA (2004) Mandates:
  - Create IEP for those who qualify ages 3-21
    - Educational guide/plan for students with disabilities.
    - Developed at a meeting at which the following have input: parent, special education teacher, general education teacher, local education association representative, and someone who can interpret the results.
    - No later than age 14, a student should have a transition plan in place that denotes activities and efforts to prepare the student for post-secondary training and/or the workforce.

Definition of the Problem

- Over the last 3 years, the Clay County School District's Special Education Tracking Software's (SETS) Report of Parental Concerns indicated that **100% of parents of students with ASD surveyed have concerns about their students' IEPs in regards to transition planning** (Clay County Schools, 2015) even though **100% of these students were successful in their post-school goals of entering the workforce or post-secondary training** (ALSDE, 2015).
  - ASD transitioners with administrative support through additional staff resulted in the following to no avail:
    - 67% enrolled in junior college
    - 16% enrolled in a four-year university
    - 16% achieved gainful employment

Evidence of the Problem from Professional Literature

3) **Proper transition planning is necessary to any transition.**
  - Chiang, et al. (2012) and Shattuck, et al. (2012) found that students with ASD who maintained good grades in high school were more likely than those who did not maintain good grades to enroll in college or university.
  - Wei, et al. (2015) asserted that there have been few studies as to how these students accomplished their transitions; therefore, more study is needed in this area.

Rationale: Evidence at the Local Level

STATE and LEA CHANGES:
- According to Alabama Senator Dial, over the last three years, there has been pressure by advocacy groups in Alabama Legislative Sessions to strengthen the accountability and transition services for students with special disabilities (personal communication, April 22, 2015).
- Changes have been made to the Alabama Administrative Code and are reflected in the following documents:
  - ALSDESES's *Mastering the Maze* (2015)
  - ALSDESES's *Preparing for Life: Transition Planning Guide* (2015).
- These changes included the implementation of college or career preparatory classes, mandatory introduction to Alabama Vocational Rehabilitation, vocational assessment, proactive services, and the establishment of more structured IEPs with additions focusing on the inclusion of a separate transitions page detailing plans and concerns (ALSDESES, 2015).

Significance of the Study

- 65% of the ASD population who enter college or university adopt an additional Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-5 (DSM-5) diagnosis during their tenure at the institution due to lack of transition skills; and this increases the dropout risk for said students (Pinder-Amaker, 2014).
  - There is research on support for the importance of transitions.
  - There is little research on parent and teacher perceptions of current transition models.
    - What do each believe success entails?

Guiding Research Questions

1. What are the **experiences** of parents, teachers, administrators, and special education support staff with the current transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace?
2. What are the **recommendations** of parents, teachers, administrators, and special education support staff for the transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace?
3. How do teachers, administrators, and special education support staff perceive district and campus **training and support systems meet their needs related to the transition of students with ASD** to society and the workplace?

Review of Literature Related to Students with ASD and Their Transitions to Post-secondary Training and/or the Workforce

- Conceptual Framework
  - Began with Tinto's Theory of Epistemological Development (1987, 1993) and was expanded into and infrastructural framework by Tinto and Pusser in 2006.
    - details institutional divisions between **academic systems**, which encompass all formal education of students and **social systems**, including the teaching of soft skills and attendance to daily and personal needs through the formal and informal interactions between all individuals within an institution.
  - Tinto and Pusser (2006) expanded Tinto's theory through application to an institutional framework designed to help college and university leaders prosper student transition success through maintaining a structure of **(a) commitment, (b) expectations, (c) feedback, and (d) involvement**. When applied to a primary or secondary school or district, Tinto and Pusser (2006) indicated that the same principles are applicable.

Review of Literature Concerning the Larger Problem

- Federal Mandates:
  - Legislation concerning transition planning for students with disabilities began in the mid-1970's with the passage of the **Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA, PL 94-142)**.
  - The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1997)** clarified in specific terms that students age 14 and older were required, active participants of their transition-related IEP that must be in place by the time the student is 16 years of age (Alabama State Department of Education Office of Special Education Services (ALSDE OSES), 2015

Review of Literature Concerning the Larger Problem (cont.)

- Federal Mandates:
  - **Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004)**.
    - changed transition language in the law to emphasize that the "student with a disability" should be referred to as a "child with a disability" [34 CFR 300.43] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)]
    - and the purpose of the IEP should be to prepare the child for "further education, employment, and independent living" [34 CFR 300.1(a)] [20 U.S.C. 1400(d)(1)(A).
  - The reauthorization further clarified that the child with a disability should be invited to any IEP meeting that discussed transition services [34 CFR 300.43 (a)] [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)]

Review of Literature Concerning the Larger Problem (cont.)

- ALSDE and Local Compliance:
  - ALSDE OSES (2015) created a companion volume, *Mastering the Maze*, to accompany mandates of IDEIA and required that all inclusions within the IEP be entered into the Special Education Tracking System (SETS).
  - However, ALSDE OSES Director, Richardson, noted that there is not enough clarification in federal legislation to indicate exactly how federal legislators intended for states to enact their transition mandates, and this has caused confusion in local agencies in which differing practices breed the potential for lawsuits (personal communication, June 28, 2015).
  - The Transition Verification Report for Clay County Schools (ALSDE, 2013, 2014, 2015) indicated this confusion.

Current Transition Practices for Those with ASD

IDEIA (2004) and *Mastering the Maze* (2015) mandated that current transition practices for students with ASD in Alabama are differentiated through each IEP; however, in addition to mandates, researchers have made efforts to find patterns within post-school outcomes and the strategies used to achieve them.

Current Transition Practices for Those with ASD

- Strategies implemented in Clay County Schools are discussed here:
  - Experimental design has proven that there is a need to include **strategic social skills interventions** to prosper post-school outcomes of students with ASD (Westbrook, Fong, Nye, Williams, Wendt, & Cortopassi, 2014; Haber et al., 2014).
  - Haber, et al. (2015) found that **multi-stakeholder collaboration within curricular choices within transition planning** has the largest implications on post-school outcomes.
  - The authors also found that **inclusion in vocational education classes** related more strongly within employment than in other outcomes, and transition programs and interagency collaboration were more related to education outcomes (Haber et al, 2015).

Current Transition Practices for Those with ASD

Strategies implemented are discussed here:
- Wei et al. (2013) found that immersion within Science, Technology, and Math (STEM) classes fully benefitted those with ASD and prospered entrance into college because the scientific language appealed to the pragmatic nature of most students with ASD.
- Carter, Brock, and Trainor (2015) purported curricular decisions made by multi-stakeholder collaborations within IEP meetings must be driven by the appropriate transition assessment
- Morningstar, Lombardi, Fowler, and Test (2015) posited that a college and career-readiness framework is necessary to any post-school outcome for those with ASD

Current Transition Practices for Those with ASD

Strategies implemented are discussed here:
- Small, Raghavan, and Pawson (2013) found that academic and nonacademic factors must be given equal credence to prosper engagement.
- Kucharczyck et al. (2015) used a multi-state focus group study to explore interventions for students with ASD and found that professional development in the form of coaching for teachers is crucial to transition planning.

Potential Post-school Outcomes and Predictors of Success

Students need high expectations to successfully transition
- Bouck and Joshi (2014) furthered the tenets of Tinto's (1987, 1993) theory of epistemological development when they found that success in post-secondary outcomes for those with mild intellectual disabilities is primarily based on the students' transition planning which must include high quality preparation and expectations from state post-secondary transition facilitators.
- Lee et al. (2015) found that aspirations are a key factor in the success of any post-secondary outcome, but aspirations cannot be developed without high expectations and support from all available stakeholders.

Potential Post-school Outcomes and Predictors of Success

Students need on-site advocation at each level
- According to Madaus, Grigal, and Hughes (2014) and Lee, Rojewski, Gregg, and Jeong (2015) low socioeconomic status largely affects the success of transition planning through limiting access to continuing education.
- However, Shepherd (2015) argued the necessity of helping students with ASD find balance with their typical peers because those who achieved such balance showed greater intent in pursuing further education.

Potential Post-school Outcomes and Predictors of Success

Parents' quantifications of success:
- Rosetti, Lehr, Lederer, Pelerin, and Haung (2015) defined parental perceptions of time spent meaningfully by young adults with pervasive disabilities as being independently active in the community away from one's parents and in the company of age peers and doing a variety of interest-based, age-appropriate, purposeful, and relevant tasks that resulted in the student seeming happy.
- Lee et al. (2015) found that aspirations are a key factor in the success of any post-secondary outcome, but aspirations cannot be developed without high expectations and support from all available stakeholders.

Implications

- The most telling discovery from the literature is that parents' perceptions are not unreasonable because they simply want for their children to be able to be active within their surroundings (Rosetti et al., 2015).
- However, there is still a disconnect within perceptions of what is done among stakeholders even though well-developed transition plans are in place (Cheak-Zamora, Teti, & First, 2015 & Henninger & Taylor, 2014).
- Cheak-Zamora, Teti, and First (2015) found that 100% of caregivers studied within their focus groups exhibited fear and anxiety over their students with ASD entering post-secondary life regardless of the scope of their students' transition plans.
- Although dissatisfactions with the transition process are evident when the scope of the process is studied, there is recourse in focusing the future research on the gap between what the transition process entails and what parents perceive as reasonable outcomes (Lee et al., 2006; Shepherd, 2015).

Slide 1:

LUNCH

Slide 2:

Section 3: The Methodology

Slide 3:

Research Questions

- What are the **experiences** of parents, teachers, administrators, and specialeducation support staff with the current transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace?
- What are the **recommendations** of parents, teachers, administrators, and special education support staff for the transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace?
- How do teachers, administrators, and special education support staff perceive **district and campus training and support systems** meet their needs related to the transition of students with ASD to society and the workplace?

Slide 4:

Research Design and Approach

- A qualitative design, collective case study approach
  - is most closely aligned with the relevant research questions because a qualitative approach offered the best means of collecting and analyzing interview and survey data (Creswell, 2009).
  - would allow me to analyze the breadth of the interview and survey data and would not limit me to specified numbers as quantitative research would (Creswell, 2009).
  - will allow me to compare several different case studies in an effort to fully investigate the central phenomena (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).
- Therefore, a collective case study in which homogeneous sampling was utilized to investigate the central phenomena, perceived differences in staff and parents' perceptions of the transitions services afforded to students with ASD (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Slide 5:

Participants

- **Setting—small, public, rural high school** in East-Central Alabama:
  - **715 total students**
  - **56 participants of the special education program**
  - **10 parents of students with ASD** (Clay County Schools, 2015).
- **The 25 case study participants:**
  - 4 high school special education teachers,
  - 4 classroom aides,
  - 4 administrative staff,
  - 3 general education teachers who have experience teaching students with ASD and implementing their transition plans.
  - 10 parents of students with ASD who are located at Central High School and have transition plans in place.

Slide 6:

Criteria for Selection of Participants

- The primary criteria for selecting the staff participants was as follows:
  - (a) staff had access to pertinent knowledge of the transition process of students with ASD, and
  - (b) staff had direct experience with the implementation of the transition process of students with ASD for at least one full year prior to the inception of the study.
    - Since I utilized all high school administration and special education staff as participants, there is no need to further limit these case studies.
    - Three general education teachers were selected dur to experience.
  - Parents were limited to the first 10 affirmative participants. Homogeneous sampling will allow me to purposefully select parents and staff that meet the criteria necessary for this study (Creswell, 2012).

Access to Participants

- Application for local study completed October 2015 and approved November 2015.
- Principal signed letter given him by superintendent in January 2016
- IRB approval in March 2016 completed the process.

Researcher-participant Relationship

- I adopted a researcher-participant relationship
  - to safeguard all individuals that ensures participants are comfortable in sharing their perceptions and beliefs with me prior to, during, and post interview and observation.
  - to play an integral, equal part of the researcher-participant relationship in order to be able to support instrumental changes for administrators, special education teachers, parents, and students with ASD in the district (Creswell, 2012).
  - by ensuring the participants understand their responsibilities as outlined in the informed consent process if they choose to become a participant within this project study.
- I affirmed my goal of a researcher-participant relationship by obtaining approval to conduct research from the local school and Walden University IRB and informed consent from potential participants.

Protection of Participants

- I obtained a **certificate from The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research.**
- **This research study was a low risk level to participants**
  - even though these employed participants have worked with me because I am no longer employed as their direct supervisor.
    - I served as Clay County Schools Director of Special Education; 504; Gifted; Curriculum; Nursing and Health, Counseling and Guidance, Library/Media; Textbooks; Response to Instruction (RtI); Alabama College and Career Readiness Standards (ALCORS); Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative (AMSTI); and Alabama Reading Initiative (ARI).
    - However, I held no supervisory authority over the teachers in question because my role in the district focuses on programmatic concerns, such as professional development and compliance. It's the principals job to supervise and ensure compliance to the measures I put in place regarding state and federal regulations.
- **In addition, participation will be voluntary**
  - A meeting was held with the school principal to reiterate the voluntary nature of the study, discuss the purpose of the study, and address any questions or concerns raised by the principal.
- Overall, the **safety, well-being, and confidentiality of all participants was priority**
  - When reporting the findings within this project study, **pseudonyms were used in** order to protect participants further.
  - All **electronic data collected from each participant is still being kept secure** through storage in password-protected files on my home computer, and all non-electronic data will be stored securely in my home desk. I will store these data for 5 years as per Walden University protocol.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data consists of interviews, observations, and documents (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010)

Data Collection Methods (cont.)

- **Observations**
  - Were non-participatory within each participant's classroom for one class period during which transition plan was being implemented.
    - Field notes were numbered consecutively to correspond with the identifying number of the participants during the interview process and will be recorded on an observation protocol (Appendix H) as suggested by Creswell (2012).
    - After the culmination of each observation, I electronically recorded the data in a narrative format to be included within my database for ease in coding, analyzing, and/or retrieving post research (Bogdan & Biklen, 2009).
  - Items on Observation Protocol Checklist (Appendix H)
    - Demographic: Date, Duration, Length of Class, Number of Students, Race,
    - Seating Arrangements/Description of Room
    - Transition Objective/Demonstration of Learning/Resources Used
    - Student Activities/Questions and Feedback to Students
    - Student Behaviors/Teacher Redirection Techniques

Data Collection Methods (cont.)

- **Interviews**
  - According to Creswell (2012), data collected through interviews are the most integral of the information discovered because the researcher is able to shape the data that is gathered.
  - One-on one interviews were semi-structured and open-ended in nature and were designed in such a way as to promote targeted discussion about the implementation of and perceptions of the transition process of students with ASD (Creswell, 2012).
    - Staff were asked to express their perceptions regarding the instructional supports and methods used to instruct students, district professional development, and use of manipulatives in implementation of the transition plans of students with ASD.
    - Parents were asked similar questions, and interviews for them will be scheduled at mutually agreeable times and locations.
  - Participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of the study and in their answering of each question.
  - Audio recordings were transferred to transcriptions for closer analysis.

Data Collection Methods (cont.)

One-on-One Interview Session Questions

1. How do you help students prepare for the transition from high school to post-secondary training/education or the workforce?

2. What seems to be the most effective part of the current transition process? The least? Why?

3. What are your thoughts on support provided to parents related to understanding the transition process? What are your training needs? Explain.

4. If you could do anything differently for our students to better help with transition, what would you do? Why?

5. What are your thoughts on perceptions of the transition process that parents, teachers, administrators, and students may have? Explain.

Data Collection Methods (cont.)

- **Documentation**
- Parent data in the form of state reports and surveys were used to determine and help address the perceived gap in communication concerning perceptions and realities of the transition plans of students with ASD.
  - previous administrations of the *Alabama Post-School Outcomes Survey for Clay County*
    - Includes parents' thoughts on their students' post-secondary successes through multiple choice answers (ALSDE, 2015).
    - Valuable when triangulated with interviews and observations in showing the perceived gap in practice between parents' and staff's ideas of transitioning.

Data Collection Methods (cont.) Appendix E

Survey Questions

Role of the Researcher

- Even taking on the role of a researcher, **it was impossible for me to immerse myself in the data without becoming affected** (Creswell, 2012).
- Supporting our staff, parents, and students in implementation of our programs is my ultimate goal; therefore, I endeavored to **minimize the influences of my experiences and biases by acknowledging them within a personal research journal** (Ortlipp, 2008).
  - Ortlipp (2008) maintained that keeping a personal research journal would **allow me to see the biases** that I might infringe upon the study.
  - Therefore, I will **consciously acknowledge any thoughts, actions, and feelings I have during the data collection processes** and analyze their meaning within the study in an effort to exclude any bias.
- In addition, **I worked to exclude my thoughts and impressions from my nonverbal communication cues** by focusing solely on the recording process.

Data Analysis

- **Qualitative analysis with a constant comparative approach influenced by Kaleidoscope Theory**
  - Analytic techniques, such as **coding and categorizing**, will **organize the data**.
  - Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, and Coleman's (2000) report that the **Kaleidoscope Theory based on the constant comparison method** involves the following three steps:
    - comparing incidents applicable to each category based on the research questions,
    - integrating similar categories, delimiting the theory,
    - and writing the theory
  - Kaleidoscope Theory (Dye, et al. 2000), which is grounded in the constant comparison method, will be utilized to compare, integrate, and delimit categories of the data collected so that a pervading theory relevant to the perceived gap in communication between staff and parents concerning transition processes of students with ASD can be made.

Data Analysis (Cont.)

- **Steps of Implementation:**
  - **Step 1** Transcribed verbatim all conducted interviews and codify these interviews in conjunction with additional pertinent documents, observations, and data from surveys as themes become evident throughout the exploration of the data collection (Dye et al., 2000).
  - **Step 2** Engaged in close reading of the transcriptions to code through emergent themes or patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) and triangulate to corroborate, increase the accuracy and credibility, and reduce researcher bias of the observational and interview data (Creswell, 2012).
  - **Step 3** Participants conducted member checks to make certain that the information transcribed is accurate in terms of content.
  - **Step 4** I conducted a cross-case analysis of the interview transcripts and categorize the information garnered from the transcriptions according to emergent themes (Creswell, 2012).
  - **Step 5** Refinement for All Data Sets
    - During the first refinement of the kaleidoscope of information, I delimited the data by checking my categorizations, and the kaleidoscopic pattern changed its pattern due to the revision of rules of inclusion for each category.
    - During the second and third refinements, I delimited the data by rechecking and implementing member checking to further ensure validity (Dye et al., 2000).
    - During my final refinement, I rechecked the data to make certain that I had not delimited the categories as such so that they do not appropriately fit the data and were allowing the themes to emerge.

Section 4: Results

61

Findings

- Parents and teachers have different ideas as to what should be included in the transition plans of students with ASD
- Ongoing PD is necessary for special education teachers so that they can provide support to parents

62

Findings

Parents and teachers have different ideas as to what should be included in the transition plans of students with ASD.

- Ongoing PD is necessary for special education teachers so that they can provide support to parents.
- No such PD has been offered in the last ten years

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Recommendations

1) PD that focuses on helping teachers acquire or refine communication skills to help parents foster self-efficacy.

2) Creation of a transitions manual for parents of students with ASD.

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Section 5: TALK ASD

65

How can I help my students with ASD?

Form the following bonds with parents of students with ASD:

- Communication
- Professional Competence
- Respect
- Commitment
- Equality
- Trust

66

So, the Plan is…

"Oh, that? We don't know what that is. The plan is to just ignore it and hope it goes away."

69

What Activities Surround Planning?

- Be conscious of social justice and multicultural perspectives the family have.
- Employ counseling techniques during times of engagement.
- Talk through situations with a trusted mentor.

70

Multicultural and Social Justice Perspectives

- Become self-aware because you can't understand others if you don't know yourself.
- Understand the client's worldview, too.
  - Equally as important as becoming self-aware
  - Involves understanding the family's different backgrounds and interactions

71

Multicultural and Social Justice Perspectives

This will be covered in-depth in next week's webex and corresponding PLC.

72

Counseling Techniques

Active Listening: Instead of listening for an answer to which you can respond, you have to listen for the whole.

73

Active Listening

74

Counseling Techniques

Nonverbal cues: powerful visual cues that have meaning that needs to be interpreted

75

Nonverbal Communication

76

Nonverbal Communication

VERBAL 35%

NONVERBAL 65%
Facial Expressions
Tone of Voice
Movement
Appearance
Eye Contact
Gestures
Posture

77

Nonverbal Communication
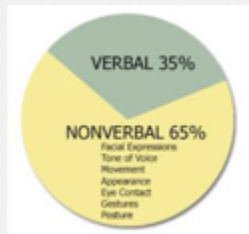
Negative Body Language Signals

- Rocking motion of torso
- Leg or foot swinging
- Foot or finger tapping
- Short breaths
- Tightly clenched hands
- Wringing hands
- Clearing throat
- Fidgeting in chair
- Scratching or rubbing back of hands
- Runner Stance

- Closed eyes
- Lowering of chin
- Hunching of shoulders
- Arms crossed
- Fists clenched
- Legs crossed
- Downcast eyes
- Face turned away
- Body turned slightly away
- Grooming
- Yawning

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Counseling Techniques

Tending: Making it obvious to the speaker that you are paying attention

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Counseling Techniques

These will be covered in depth within the second webex and corresponding PLC.

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Building Relationships

- Commit yourself to building the relationship.
- Consider worldviews of the entire family.
- Communicate with the parent. Transparency is a sign of communication that breeds respect
- Respect the parent by listening attentively.
- Foster GROWTH within the parent, your relationship, and our student.

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The Good?

82

The Bad.

83

The Ugly!

84

Building Relationships

o It's important.
o It's difficult.
o It's rewarding!

85

TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-school Outcomes

o A guide to which parents can refer for questions they may have about the transition process and potential post-school outcomes for their students.

o Created to help support teachers, not to replace their guidance.

86

TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-school Outcomes

- Introduction
- Transition Process
- Potential Post-school Outcomes
  - Post-secondary Training/College
  - Work
  - Residential/Day Programs

87

Summary

- Perceived gap in perception of parents and teachers regarding what services should entail.
- Qualitative Study
- PD that supports teachers in building relationships with parents so that they understand the what and why of the transition process.
- Guide to support parents' understanding of transition process and potential post-school outcomes.

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THANK YOU

TALK ASD

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Definition

- Collaboration—Friend and Cook (2013) define collaboration as an activity synonymous with teaming, consultation, co-teaching, and inclusion that includes both formal and informal interactions and is necessary in successful school reform.

- The basic premise= It takes a village working cohesively to raise a child, but what does the village look like?

Characteristics of Successful Collaboration

- Collaboration is Voluntary—You have to want to work together for the sake of the kids. Nothing will work if one party decides it will not!

- Collaboration Requires Parity Among Participants— The relationships must be equal in give and take, respect, power, and outcome accountability.

- Collaboration is based on mutual goals—Goals must be kid-centric and agreeable to all parties.

Perspective and Perception

- Perspective is all the experiences, attitudes, beliefs, values, personal qualities, professional preparation, and expectations a person possesses.

- Perception is an active process of becoming aware through the five senses, attending and selecting the senses necessary to organize though so that it can be interpreted.

Multicultural and Social Justice Perspectives

- Effective communication is key to any collaboration; but communication isn't always effective because we process different elements of communication differently

- Ex) "I am SO EXCITED!" could be taken as a happy or sarcastic sentiment, and the speaker/ author's meaning isn't always easily discerned; therefore, a study of communication is necessary.

Multicultural and Social Justice Perspectives

- PERCEPTION is key and can be influenced through internal or external negotiations so be wary of other's perceptions clouding your own negatively.

- Everyone's PERSPECTIVE is different because everyone has a different cultural background. Even within the same culture everyone has intra-cultural differences so be sensitive to others' viewpoints.

- Adapt your communication to match the co-teaching task and relationship.
  - Ex. If you know someone has a volatile temper, don't give him a catalyst. After all, you wouldn't poke a rattle snake....I hope!

Multicultural and Social Justice Perspectives

Cultural perspective: A combination of experiences and beliefs that inhabit one person within a culture.

KEY: Identify your cultural perspective. Analyze yourself deeply.

Multicultural perspective: an understanding that, while everyone is different, there is a great possibility that "culture" (environment and beliefs) shapes each person and gives each person characteristics indicative of a grouping. Using this insight can greatly help relationships.

Activity

- Mentally compile a list of parents and their cultural backgrounds using some of the following questions and others, if necessary:
  - What are the parents' occupations? Where do they live?
  - Who are the grandparents? What are/were their occupations? Where do the grandparents live?
  - How involved are the parents with their work? Community? School? Child?
 - What can you glean from the physical appearance of the family?

TALK ASD: PLC #1

- Please answer the following questions and respond to at least one other colleague's answer on this PLC topic with another question or insight:
  - Without revealing private information, share an experience in which you or a colleague met with a disgruntled parent. With what you now know about communication, how could you have better handled the meeting?

TALK ASD:

Day 2, Part 2: Counseling Skills

Listening, Responding, and Giving Feedback with Counseling Skills
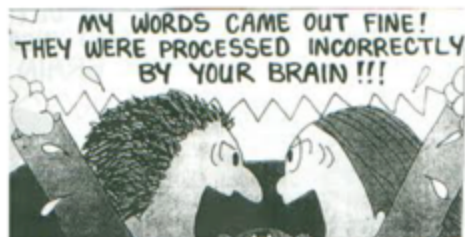
Communication

Communication–

- can occur in verbal and nonverbal forms.
- IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO NOT COMMUNICATE.
- Since you have to communicate, do it well and make it positive!

Listening

- LISTENING PROCESS
  - Hearing—receiving sound transmissions of a message
  - Attending—perceiving the information and maintaining interest in order to receive it
  - Understanding—making sense of the information you are attending
  - Responding—verbal and nonverbal responses that indicate hearing, attending, and understanding (looks of concern, head nods, verbal responses, etc.)
  - Remembering—the ability to recall information in the message

Active Listening

- Involves the entire listening process.
- The listener must listen for understanding, not just to give a response.
- Make certain the talker knows you are listening.

Factors that are Detrimental to the Listening Process

- Insufficient time for communication—
  - We are all rushed all the time, but communication can keep us from hurt feelings and lawsuits so invest this time into your parents/colleagues because it pays off exponentially!
- Filtering messages—If you don't listen entirely, you will miss something
- Faulty assumptions—assuming you know the intent of the message and tuning out is not good. For the most part, people don't talk to hear themselves talk. Typically, there is a reason; and, even if it is repetitive, they are repeating for a reason so try to be understanding of that reason and listen for any differences that need to be attended.

Useful Nonverbal Cues for Listening

- Make eye contact.
- Lean forward
- Use head nods or verbalize "uh-huhs"
- Uncross your arms/legs
- Concentrate

Responding Effectively

While all of these are not appropriate for all conversations, a good blend is always useful

- While listening, prompt the messenger for more details
  - Uh-huh, okay, etc.
  - Pregnant pauses to allow for more information
- Paraphrasing—
  - Shorten and repeat important parts of information beginning with the words, "So, if I am hearing you correctly..."This will prompt more discussion or an exhibition of understanding.
  - Or repeat after admitting that you agree. "I agree we (repeat/paraphrase what was said)."
- Reflecting—similar to paraphrasing, but involves more inferences.
  - Ex) After hearing what she perceives to be nervous laughter, Marsha said "I can tell you're nervous about this. Is there some way I can help?"
- Questioning—
  - Questions can be used to ask for clarity or more information or to look for agreement

Feedback

- Should be the following:
  - **Solicited**—if someone does not want feedback, don't waste your time (unless you have no legal/ethical choice in the matter)
  - **Direct**—be concise and clear in what you want to say
  - **Culturally sensitive**—be sensitive to that person's culture, and note that each person has a different culture so you should take into account everything you know about that person when crafting feedback.
  - **Well-timed**—timing is crucial. When momma and daddy were having bad days, you never hit them up for money so keep the same principle for feedback;0

Communication Foundation for Interaction Skills

Other Processes
- decision making, persuading, resolving conflict, managing resistance

Problem Solving

Interviewing
- structured interaction process for seeking information

Responding Skills
- Prompting, paraphrasing, reflecting, questioning

Nonverbal Attending Behaviors
- Attentive body position, eye contact, gestures, and paralanguage

Professional and Ethical Considerations
- Intercultural competence, honesty, respect, openness, responsibility, collaborative ethos, and growth

Role Playing #1

- My helper will be playing the role of an angry parent who is overprotective of his student with ASD and wants to know why his child hasn't received transition services to teach him how to cut wood on a lathe.

- I will be playing the role of the special education teacher.

Role Playing #2

- My helper will be playing the role of a docile parent who is not as actively involved in the IEP process as the IEP team would like.

- I will be playing the role of the special education teacher.

TALK ASD PLC: #2

- Please answer the following questions and respond to at least one other colleague's answer on this PLC topic with another question or insight:
  - What did you learn about positive communication from the demonstrations?
  - How can you apply what you have learned in your meetings with parents of students with ASD?

TALK ASD:

Day 3, Part 1: Building Better Relationships

Relationships

HOW I THINK I LOOK WHEN I'M ANGRY

HOW MY BOYFRIEND THINKS I LOOK WHEN I'M ANGRY

Relationships

Friendship is so weird...
you just pick a human
you've met
and you're like
"yep, I like this one"
and you just do stuff
with them.

Relationships

- You have a relationship with every single person with whom you come in contact.
  - Since you can't control the other person's emotions, the only portion of the relationship you can control is yours.
  - You are the determiner of whether the relationship is good or bad.

Barriers to Learning

ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES			PERSON VARIABLES
Neighborhood	Family	School and Peers	Individual
• economic deprivation • community disorganization, including high levels of transience and crime • violence, drugs, etc. • gangs • racial and ethnic conflicts	• chronic poverty • conflict, disruptions, violence • substance abuse • modeling problem behavior • abusive caretaking • inadequate provision for quality child care • challenges related to status	• enrollment and attendance • poor quality school • negative encounters with teachers • negative encounters with peers and/or inappropriate peer models	• medical problems • low birth weight, neurodevelopmental delay • psychophysiological problems • difficult temperament and adjustment problems • inadequate nutrition • English language challenges • learning and mental disorders

Barriers to Relationships

ENVIRONMENTAL VARIABLES			PERSON VARIABLES
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Acknowledgement

- Involves realizing that there is a problem.
- Involves understanding of the problem.
- Involves maintenance of the problem.

Factors that are Detrimental to the Listening Process/Relationships

- Insufficient time for communication—
  - We are all rushed all the time, but communication can keep us from hurt feelings and lawsuits so invest this time into your parents/colleagues because it pays off exponentially!
- Filtering messages—If you don't listen entirely, you will miss something
- Faulty assumptions—assuming you know the intent of the message and tuning out is not good. For the most part, people don't talk to hear themselves talk. Typically, there is a reason; and, even if it is repetitive, they are repeating for a reason so try to be understanding of that reason and listen for any differences that need to be attended.

Responding Effectively

While all of these are not appropriate for all conversations, a good blend is always useful

- While listening, prompt the messenger for more details
  - Uh-huh, okay, etc.
  - Pregnant pauses to allow for more information

- Paraphrasing—
  - Shorten and repeat important parts of information beginning with the words, "So, if I am hearing you correctly..."This will prompt more discussion or an exhibition of understanding.
  - Or repeat after admitting that you agree: "I agree we [repeat/paraphrase what was said]."

- Reflecting—similar to paraphrasing, but involves more inferences.
  - Ex) After hearing what she perceives to be nervous laughter, Marsha said "I can tell you're nervous about this. Is there some way I can help?"

- Questioning—
  - Questions can be used to ask for clarity or more information or to look for agreement

Feedback

- Should be the following:
  - **Solicited**—if someone does not want feedback, don't waste your time (unless you have no legal/ethical choice in the matter)
  - **Direct**—be concise and clear in what you want to say
  - **Culturally sensitive**—be sensitive to that person's culture, and note that each person has a different culture so you should take into account everything you know about that person when crafting feedback.
  - **Well-timed**—timing is crucial. When momma and daddy were having bad days, you never hit them up for money so keep the same principle for feedback;0

Role Playing

- Pick one of the following scenarios and embody that character. Take turns implementing the skills we have discussed in the last few weeks.

R1: A rural white parent who wants meals provided to her student for free because she makes only $2.00 over the maximim and wants this put in the IEP.

R2: A rural Hispanic parent who has trouble understanding English and wishes to better understand what transition entails.

R3: A rural African American father who believes that his daughter will be violated in an institution. He has previously admitted that he was abused.

R4: A white grandparent who is angry about her grandchild's lack of progress in speech with respect to transition skills. Grandmother has previously admitted that she wants her baby to be able to go to college to become a teacher, but the child is nonverbal.

TALK ASD PLC: #3

- Please answer the following questions and respond to at least one other colleague's answer on this PLC topic with another question or insight:
  - How did you feel when you were faced with your parent conflict?
  - How did your knowledge of positive communication help you to resolve the conflict?

TALK ASD:

Day 3, Part 2: *TALK ASD: Preparing for Post School Outcomes*

TALK ASD

Taking Advocacy and Localizing It for Kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder (TALK ASD) is a program designed to help teachers become better case managers so that they can help parents of students with ASD and the students themselves transition appropriately. This manual was developed for a project study because research determined that parents need a localized reference guide to assist them in asking case managers pertinent questions related to potential post-school outcomes and the transition process itself. Hopefully, this reference guide helps build foster bettered IEP meetings and transitions.

CONFIDENTIAL

THANKS!

I'd like to thank the staff of Walden University as well as the staff and parent participants and our cover model, my beloved King Bradley, who shows me ever day the ability within disability through our adventures with ASD!

Walden University

TALK ASD: Preparing for Post-School Outcomes

Charla DeLeo

Introduction and Disclaimer

Taking Advocacy and Localizing it for Kids with Autism Spectrum Disorder (TALK ASD) is provided to help explain special education and transition services available to students with ASD (ages 3-21) under Part B of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. The targeted audience of this publication is parent(s) and/or guardian(s) of students with ASD who are of transition age and who live in East-central Alabama. I also hope that this reference guide will be helpful to anyone who seeks to better understand the transition process for students with ASD.

Disclaimer:
The information presented in this publication is written plainly so as not to discourage anyone unfamiliar with special education acronyms and/or terminology. In addition, this publication only generally describes special education and transition services and is not intended to interpret, modify, or replace any procedural safeguards or requirements of federal or state law. If you are a parent or guardian of a child who has been referred for or is receiving special education services, you must, at least once a year, be given a copy of the *Special Education Rights* form. A copy of this form is available through your local school system or at http://www.alsde.edu/sec/ses.

Legal Foundations of Special Education

Special education began in 1975 with the creation of the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act*. However, this piece of legislation evolved into the law currently known as the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*, which is also commonly called IDEA. IDEA requires public schools to provide special education for children with qualifying disabilities, which will be covered on p.5. There are two sections of IDEA: Part B and Part C. Part C of IDEA is for children from birth to age 2. Part B is for children ages 3-21. TALK ASD focuses only on Part B, which is regulated through *Alabama Administrative Code* (Chapter 290-8-9).

Special education refers to the individualized instruction and related services that are specially designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. These services are provided at no cost to the parent(s) and/or guardian(s), and the right to these services is called a free appropriate public education, which is sometimes referred to as FAPE. The plan for providing a FAPE for a child is known as an Individualized Education Plan, or IEP. The IEP is reviewed and revised at least once per year.

In order to ensure that all of the requirements for IDEA are met each year, Part B provides the child with procedural safeguards, which are protections for rights and the process itself and right associated with the process. Among these safeguards are access to formal dispute resolution, confidentiality, parental notice and consent, and transfer of rights at age 19.

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

The IEP for your student with ASD indicates the specially designed instruction that is appropriate for your child and the additional supports required to provide the specially designed instruction. Your student with ASD must have an IEP before any special education services can be provided. Unless the IEP team states otherwise, the IEP must be in place for at least the length of the school term and day. The IEP must be reviewed annually and cannot have duration of more than 365 days. You should be given a copy of your student's IEP. The school is responsible for informing personnel about their responsibilities in providing the special education services indicated in the IEP.

Disability Areas in IDEA:

Autism (AUT)
Deaf/Blindness (DB)
Emotional Disability (ED)
Hearing Impairment (HI)
Intellectual Disability (ID)
Multiple Disabilities (MD)
Orthopedic Impairment (OI)
Other Health Impairment (OHI)
Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)
Speech or Language Impairment (S/LI)
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
Visual Impairment (VI)

Parts of the IEP: Student Profile and Transportation

The **student profile** is the part of the IEP in which the IEP team uses words to paint a visual picture of your student with ASD. Information in the student's profile will directly link to other areas of the IEP. The profile includes information about the student's strengths, preferences, and interests. A description of relevant evaluation results, which is written in meaningful and clear terms, is provided so that the IEP team shares an understanding of evaluations. Finally, information about the academic, developmental, and functional needs of the student are included so the IEP team can understand how the student's disability affects participation in the general education curriculum or with age-appropriate peers. For students with ASD, the profile should "paint" a clear picture of the child in such a way that it explains for anyone who needs to read the document exactly what a person needs to understand about your child in order to help him or her.

Transportation is the section of the IEP that identifies how your student will be transported to school. Some students are car riders, and some are bus riders. If transportation is needed as a related service for your student with ASD, this section will also need to include information to specific transportation supports, services, or equipment. For example, if your student is confined to a wheelchair, a wheelchair ramp and lock will be specified as needs for transportation in this section.

Parts of the IEP: Extracurricular Activities and Method/Frequency of Reporting Progress of Attaining Goals to Parents

The section of the IEP that indicates **Nonacademic and Extracurricular Activities** refers to the section of the IEP that indicates the extent to which the child will have an opportunity to participate in nonacademic and extracurricular activities with his/her nondisabled peers. If supports are required for participation, they are described here. If the student does not have the opportunity to participate in these activities, an explanation must be provided.

The **Method/Frequency for Reporting Progress of Attaining Goals to Parents** explains how often and by what means the school will report to you about the progress of your student with ASD in meeting annual goals included within the IEP.

Measurable Annual Goals refer to the annual goal, which is a statement describing the academic or functional skill and specially designed instruction that will enable the child to achieve within the duration of the IEP. The annual goal must include the following:
- the academic or functional content area that is targeted.
- a direct link to needs identified in the child's profile or special instructional factors
- statement about the child's present level of academic achievement and functional performance.
- means of measurability, or determination of mastery
- criterion for mastery
- means of evaluation
- MAY include benchmarks for students working on the Alabama Extended Standards.

Parts of the IEP: Special Education and Related Services, State Testing, and Extended School Year (ESY), Least Restrictive Environment (LRE), Signatures

Special Education and Related Services refer to the specially designed supports, modifications, accommodations, and/or services that the student with ASD needs in order to make progress toward meeting his/her annual goal(s), participate in school activities, and be educated with his/her peers. The frequency, time, duration, and location of the services will be listed in this section, as well.

Alabama requires that all students in specific grades participate in **standardized state testing.** If your student with ASD requires accommodations to participate in this testing or requires an alternate test, this section of the IEP will list those conditions.

Extended School Year (ESY) Services are something that all teams must consider, but these services are provided based on a demonstration that the child regressed, during a break in services, on one or more critical skills.

Least Restrictive environment, or LRE, refers to the amount of time your student with ASD will receive educational services with his/her nondisabled peers. Any student with disabilities should only be removed from the regular education environment if the nature and severity of the disability is such that meaningful educational benefit cannot be achieved in the regular education environment. Team must consider options.

Signatures from all team members are taken; however, if you choose note to sign, your attendance will be noted. You have a right to ask for another meeting to be held within 30 days.

Parts of the IEP: Transition

For students with ASD and their families, the transition process can be the most important part of the IEP. The State of Alabama requires that measureable post-secondary goals and transition services must be addressed within the student's IEP no later than the IEP to be in affect when the student turns 16.

The following are applicable goals categories, which must be included within the IEP:
- Postsecondary Education/Training
- Employment/Occupation/Career
- Community/Independent Living

The goals in the student's IEP must align with the following diploma pathways for students with disabilities:
- General Education Pathway
- Essentials/Life Skills Pathway

*Students may graduate with an AHSD with a combination of the General and Essentials/Life Skills Pathway Courses. They may also substitute equivalent CTE/IB/AP courses.

Transition and the Diplomas

*Students with and without disabilities may take Essentials/Life Skills courses. These courses are not appropriate for students who are planning to attend a four-year college. These courses are not accepted by four-year colleges or the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA). Students taking these courses may be eligible to attend a community college if they meet the institution's admissions requirements. Community college admissions requirements typically include a minimum ACT score.

- Alabama Alternate Standards (AAS) Pathway

*A diploma option that does not include a work component is currently in development!

Preparations the Teacher(s) Make for the Transition of Your Student with ASD form High School to Post-secondary Training and/or the Work Force

General Education teachers will work with your student with ASD to learn the content within their curricula, which can be found at the following web address:
http://alex.state.al.us/browseStand.php

Special education teachers will be responsible for implementing activities in response to your student's IEP transition goals that are in place so that your student can smoothly transition from high school to post-secondary training and/or the work force. These may include more than the following:

1) **Updated Intelligence/Achievement Testing**— These updated tests will more accurately help determine what kind of work level your student with ASD can reasonably be expected to complete.
2) **Interests/Abilities Testing**—This testing from https://www.onetonline.org/ or https://www.kuder.com/ will be used to further select from what your student is capable, what he or she might like to do.
3) **Creation and Implementation of IEP Goals**—
   - Postsecondary Education/Training
   - Employment/Occupation/Career
   - Community/Independent Living
4) **Connections to Outside Agency Providers**—These connections will help parents to help plan for their students' post-school outcomes.

*Individualized goals and plans are created by the IEP team based on the information gathered from the testing.

Preparations the Parent(s) Make for the Transition of Your Student with ASD form High School to Post-secondary Training and/or the Work Force

Your student with ASD is and will always be your baby, but **your student needs to become as independent as is possible so that he or she can live a happy, full, and productive a life participating within society to the maximum amount.** This means you must consider potential post-school outcomes for your student.

Before considering what you believe your child's post-school outcome should be, you must understand the available options for your child. **The following post-school outcomes will be discussed:**

1) **Post-secondary Education**
2) **Work**
3) **Independent Living: Home and Community Based**

Post-secondary education has come to mean college for far too many people. Not everyone is meant to go to college, not everyone wants to go, and not everyone should go. As caregivers, we tend to want what is best for our children, and many of us believe that college is what is best. Sometimes this is true, and sometimes work training sites, independent living programs, or day programs are more appropriate forms of post-secondary training for our students with ASD. Some students even feel confident enough upon leaving high school to go straight into the work force. There are many options for your student with ASD, and these are explained in the following pages.

Post-secondary Education: College Options

If your student with ASD graduates with an Alabama High School Diploma (AHSD) through the **General Education Pathway**, which is what we once called Advanced or Standard, **and receives a qualifying score on TheACT**, he or she is eligible to go **straight to a 4-year university**.

If your student with ASD graduates with an AHSD through the **Essentials Pathway or a combination of Essentials Pathway and General Education Pathway classes and receives a qualifying score on TheACT or the collegiate entrance exam chosen by the junior college**, he or she is eligible to attend a 2-year institution. Once he or she completes a two-year degree at this institution, he or she may apply to a four-year university to receive a bachelor's degree or simply work with his or her associate's degree.

When to start preparing for college:
- No later than 9th grade, the student with ASD needs to attempt The ACT and work toward maintenance of his or her grades so that a credit is received for each course taken. Since students need 26 to graduate, that does potentially leave room for two make-up credits within the traditional four years if the master schedule permits.
- The student with ASD should take The ACT once per year until 12th grade to try to raise his score.
- In October of the student's completion year, you may complete your students FAFSA at www.fafsa.gov. This application is used to help your student apply for any and all financial assistance, including scholarships.
- Work closely with your student's guidance counselor to help your student apply to the college of his or her choice and to any scholarship or financial assistance that may be available.

Post-secondary Education: Work Training at School

Students with ASD who **complete three consecutive, electives through career/tech credential program** while on the General Education, Essentials, or AAS Pathways are eligible to receive a work credential in this program if they **also pass WorkKeys** in the twelfth grade. Credentialed programs offer training that readies a student with ASD for immediate entry into the workforce.

Credentialed Programs at Central High School of Clay County:
- Agriscience
- Food Services
- Emergency Medical Technician
- Health Services--
- Business Administration and Management
- Engineering
- Career Readiness
- Teaching and Training
- Family and Consumer Sciences

*Welding (dual enrollment, requires a 2.5 GPA)

Students with ASD who require more assistance in achieving independence within their work choices after graduation may need further training or support. If this is true of your student with ASD, the IEP team should consider further training and/or supports through Alabama's Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Our contact for these services is Alan Yates , and he can be reached at the following number: (256) 362-1300.

Post-secondary Education: Work Training Preparation through Vocational Rehabilitation Services

- **Assistive technology/accommodations** – to enable students to participate in post-high school training or employment.
- **Career exploration** – may include investigating occupational interest areas through real or simulated job experiences job shadowing.
- **College preparation** – training to enter into post-secondary education, including learning study skills, using accommodations, and managing college life.
- **Financial assistance** – for college training, work-related equipment, and other needs based on family financial resources.
- **Job coaching** – services on the job to learn the essential functions of the job and retaining employment
- **Job placement and retention** – to assist with obtaining and maintaining employment.
- **Job readiness training** – to prepare for seeking employment, preparing for interviews, and completing applications.
- **Personal work adjustment** – services designed to assist with teaching and training appropriate work habits and job skills.
- **Post-employment services** – short-term services provided after employment related to your vocational goal.
- **Social skills training** – assist students with learning appropriate behaviors on the job and in the community.
- **Vocational guidance and counseling** – provided throughout the process to assist students and families make informed decisions regarding employment.
- **Vocational needs assessments** – measures an individual's strengths and limitations, consider interests and abilities, and provide the individual with information that can be used in vocational planning for the future.
- Other rehabilitation services based on individual need.

ALAN YATES, (256) 362-1300

You do not need to have an IEP team meeting in order to request services.

Post-secondary Education: Work Training Preparation through Vocational Rehabilitation Services' Specialized Transition Programs

- **Alabama Governor's Youth Leadership Forum (YLF)** – an innovative, intensive, five-day career leadership training program for high school juniors and seniors with disabilities throughout Alabama.
- **Disability Mentoring Day** – Students with disabilities (mentees) are matched with workplace mentors according to expressed career interests. This event is handled locally in a variety of ways. Contact your local VRS office.
- **Learning Disabilities Project**
- **Prison Transition Initiative** – a collaboration with the Special Education Division of the Alabama Department of Education and the Department of Corrections serving youth with disabilities who are incarcerated in adult prisons.
- **School-based Jointly Funded Job Coaches** – a collaboration between VRS and participating local school systems to provide job coaching, readiness, and placement in their schools for VRS consumers.
- **Summer Employment Program** - comprehensive, job-oriented curricula and work activities for transition developed by participating community rehabilitation programs (CRPs).
- **Supported Employment** – provides community-based assessments, job development, job coaching and extended support to meet the employment needs of individuals with the most- significant disabilities.
- **Teen Transition Clinic** – a team clinic for youth with special health care needs from ages 12-21 who are eligible for Children's Rehabilitation Service and are beginning to plan for transition to adulthood. This clinic is a partnership among CRS, Vocational Rehabilitation Service (VRS), the State of Alabama Independent Living (SAIL) Service, and other community providers.
- **Transition Day** for students who are visually impaired and their families. These are local events throughout the state designed to prepare students and family members for transition. Contact Debbie Culver at 1-800-441-7607 for more information.

For more information about transition services, contact Karen Jenkins at 1-800-441-7607 or (TTY) 800-499-1816.

If your student with ASD has needs such that he or she may not be able to work, there are options for your student past high school.

Post-secondary Outcome Home or Community-Based Living

MISSION: *To enhance the quality of life by providing service(s) to individuals with severe disabilities allowing for the achievement of maximum independence in the home environment.*

Since its creation in 1992, the SAIL Home and Community Based Waiver has provided services to hundreds of individuals with the most severe individuals allowing them to avoid institutional placement through the provision of in-home services.

ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible, an individual must:

- meet the nursing home level of care criteria
- meet the Alabama Medicaid Agency financial eligibility
- at least 18 years of age
- the onset of disability must have occurred prior to age 60
- disabled for reasons other than aging

SERVICES

- Case management
- Personal care
- Prescribed assistive technology
- Prescribed medical supplies
- Personal Emergency Response System (PERS)
- Environmental modifications
- Prescribed minor assistive technology
- Personal assistant services (for those employed at least 40 hours per month)
- Service coordination

ALABAMA HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED WAIVER SERVICES

ALABAMA HOME AND COMMUNITY BASED WAIVER SERVICES

Please contact April Jones Hobbs to begin the referral process.

(256) 240-8816

Post-School Potential Habilitation Arrangements through Cheaha Regional Mental Health

Residential Habilitation Services

A program, which includes habilitative training and provides residential care 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. Individuals with intellectual disabilities live in homes located within the four-county catchment area. This service provides transportation each day to a day habilitation program, work, or public school and as needed for social activities and community events. Some examples are the McKinney Day Center or Gentry.

OLA (Other Living Arrangement) Residential Services

A program which provides integrated living arrangements, such as their own apartments or homes, for individuals with intellectual disabilities. These services are delivered in the context of routine day-to-day living and may include assistance/training in daily living activities such as shopping for food, meal planning and preparation, housekeeping, personal grooming, and cleanliness. Some examples are Gentry and Sunrise Apartments.

Please contact April Jones Hobbs for in-take and referral to the following:

Ann Cunningham, Coordinator
Intellectual Disabilities Division
1661 Old Birmingham Hwy
Sylacauga, Alabama 35150
Phone: (256) 245-2141
Fax: (256) 245-2299
acunningham@crmhc.org

Other Services Provided

Medical Supplies
This service includes medical equipment and supplies that are not covered in the Medicaid State Plan. This service must be necessary to maintain the individual's ability to remain in the home and prevent institutionalization.

Importance of Knowledge and Timing

It is always important for parents of students with ASD to be aware of all of their options so that they can make informed decisions. However, it is also important for parents to have options. These options may include placing your student with ASD on a state waiver list.

A student with ASD who might qualify for a state waiver should be referred by his or her parents as soon as the parents become aware of the need so that the waiver is applicable when IDEA services end at age 21. These waivers have extensive wait lists, which are need-based. This means that those with immediate needs are escalated, and those who do not have immediate needs must enlist as soon as is possible in order to be granted waiver status by their 21st birthdays.

While it may be true that your student with ASD can live at home with you for the duration of your lives, you simply cannot know what the future may hold, and being prepared for all possibilities only makes sense because if you were to become unable to give care to your child, he or she might not be able to be served by the waiver until this need is proven to the state, and this could take many months or years.

A very dear friend and colleague likes to say this: This is very much a post-school outcome, just like college, and it will be good for your baby! If not, the family can always turn down the waiver because reception of the waiver is an option.

The Story of King Bradley

When Bradley Coleman was born, he became the light of our family's world. He was a happy baby, and we were all delighted with the potential he held. With an avid imagination and a fearlessness on any wheeled vehicle, King Bradley was a "sight." But, when he turned three and didn't use as much language or eye contact as we'd like, I started to worry. I expressed my concerns to my aunt and my grandfather, but they were dismissed. I really think they felt I might have been jealous, and I am positive they were in denial because they could see their hopes and dreams for Bradley waning.

The struggle to help Bradley continued into his preteens, and my grandfather finally began to see what I was saying—Bradley was different, but he was also the first to realize that, although assimilation was harder for Bradley, he could accomplish anything he wanted with assistance from those he loved. Puberty was further compacted for Bradley by the fact that his parents divorced, and he was finally formally diagnosed with ASD-Mild, which was then known as Asperger's Syndrome. Bradley seemed to use this time to revert into himself, and his mother allowed him to revert because she had a real need to see him safe and happy.

Sadly, three years later, we lost our grandparents. Bradley graduated high school and began attending Southern Union in their honor, but his freshman year was fated to be his mother's last. She passed on 27 November, 2015, and the young man I worried had retreated far too far into himself came out of his shell and defended his adult cousin from as much grief as he could. He and my husband, DJ, moved his things into our home, and I worried that he'd hate it us, his life, etc. But, Bradley championed in his time of need. He decided to quit school, and, after some job training with DJ, filled out his own job application and secured employment at the local Piggly Wiggly, which he loves!

I could not be prouder of him, and I am especially proud of the fact that he wanted me to take the cover photo of him and his check because he was proud of himself! That said, parenting isn't easy-even for those of us who are supposed to know! I wanted Bradley to go to Gentry and more work training, but Bradley convinced me he was ready when I wasn't! I am still scared every day: Did he take his medicine? Are people treating him well? Does he understand what is asked of him? Is he giving 115% like we Spurlins are supposed to give in any job? I could easily be a nervous wreck all of the time! But, I am reminded that kings to feel good about being in their kingdoms, and I love seeing that on his face! Please know I understand (at least somewhat), I love you, and I will help in any way!

Sincerely,   Charla DeLeo

TALK ASD PLC: #4

- Please answer the following questions and respond to at least one other colleague's answer on this PLC topic with another question or insight:

- Discuss your perceived growth in terms of relationship building.

- What gains do you feel you have made?

Appendix B: Application to Conduct Research

Application to Conduct Research

Name of Researcher(s)/Principal Investigator(s):	Phone Number(s):
Charla DeLeo	256-276-9161

Mailing Address:	Email Address:
83 Barfield School Drive; Lineville, AL 36266	charladeleo@waldenu.edu

Title of Study:

Transitioning Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder from School to Society

Duration of Study
2-3 months

Proposed Start Date:	Proposed End Date:
Pending IRB Approval Spring 2016	Summer 2016

Structured Abstract (Limit to 275 words). Please include your research design, methodology for data collection, and analysis. See Section I of the Research Proposal Template: Element Descriptions.

The purpose of this study is to This study will hopefully contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by exploring the transition process and the perceptions of parents interposed with those of staff relating to this process. Current research asserts that there is a gap in practice between the perceptions of parents and staff where transitions of students with ASD are concerned. Since this problem has achieved state and local attention, a qualitative study of the perceived gap in practice based on guiding questions that delve into experiences, recommendations, and support necessary for parents and staff to become focused on understanding and eliminating the gap in practice so that students with ASD can transition will be implement will be conducted. The qualitative study will be a case study conducted with interviews, observations, and surveys that is analyzed through coding and verified through member checks. Hopefully, this study will provide information resulting in a training that will help better the transitions of students with ASD.

Date Submitted: 10/19/2015

Name of Principal Investigator: Charla DeLeo

ASSESSMENT, RESEARCH, AND ACCOUNTABILITY DEPARTMENT ONLY

Date received: *10/19/2015*

Date Reviewed: 10/19/2015

Type of Submission:		Action Taken:	
[x] New		[x] Approved as Submitted	
[ ] Amended		[ ] Conditional Approval	
[ ] Continuation		[ ] Declined	
[ ] Resubmitted		Notes:	
[ ] Other:			

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

Letter of Cooperation from a Research Partner

'Board of Education
Superintendent

Email: ;

20 October 2015

Dear Charla DeLeo.

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled "Effectively Transitioning Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder from School to Society" within the (;   · As part of this study, I authorize you to recruit participants with my assistance in sending the initial e-mail; collect data through means of staff and parent interviews, teacher observations, and data study; create validity through member checks, etc., and conduct results dissemination activities. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: sending out initial participation queries via e-mail and to allow access to willing participants and the facilities therein. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the organization's policies.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Superintendent

Appendix D: Letter of Cooperation from Principal

ı School Principal's Permission for Research

I. Research Background (to be completed by researcher)

Title of the Study Effectively Transitioning Students with Autism Spectrum Disorder from School to Society

Name of Researcher _Charla DeLeo_ Organization_____ Walden Univeristy

Street address: _83 Barfield School Drive_ City: Lineville_State: _AL____ Zip:_36266____

E-mail:____charla.deleo@waldenu.edu_____ Phone____(256)276-9161_____

II. Description of Research Proposal

    My work consists of a qualitative research study of the perceived gap in practice related to the difference in parent and staff perceptionsof the transition process for students with ASD in this district. The purpose of this study is to (a) provide school administrators and teachers with a better understanding of the implementation and the perceptions of the transition plans of students with ASD and (b) develop a well-organized and planned transition program that is understood by all stakeholders.

III. Agreement (to be completed by principal)

I____ _____ principal of ʹ____ _____ ____, _____ty, understand

   ❖ the study and what it requires of the staff, students, and/or parents in my school,

   ❖ that the privacy and confidentiality of any staff or student will be protected,

   ❖ that I have the right to allow or reject this research study to take place in my school,

   ❖ that I have the right to terminate the research study at any time,

_x__ I grant permission to the researcher to conduct the above named research in my school as described in the proposal.

____ I DO NOT grant permission to the researcher to conduct the above named research in my school as described in the proposal.

_____ _____ Signature ofPrincipal

Appendix E: Alabama Post School Outcomes Survey

Alabama Post-School Outcomes Survey

Demographics

Former Student's Name: _____ _____ SSID: _____
                            (First Name)   (Last Name)   (State Student ID Number)

Race: _____ Gender: _____ Date of Birth: __ __ / __ __ / __ __ __ __
                                                    (Month)   (Day)   (Year)

Telephone Number: ___ ___ ___ - __ ___ ___ - ___ __ __
                      (Area Code)   (Local Number)

Primary Disability: _____

Student's Educational Setting (LRE): _____
(Percent of class time spent INSIDE the general education environment)

School Program

Post-school goals in this former student's last IEP include (check all that apply):
- ☐ Attend a postsecondary school, training, or education
- ☐ Secure employment
- ☐ Other

Former Student's Exit Status (check only one):
- ☐ Graduation Certificate
- ☐ Occupational Diploma
- ☐ High School Diploma
- ☐ High School Advanced Diploma
- ☐ Maximum Age
- ☐ Dropped Out
- ☐ Other

The former student's high school program included instruction/services from (check all that apply):
- ☐ General education teacher
- ☐ Special education teacher
- ☐ Career/tech teacher
- ☐ Job coach
- ☐ Rehab counselor

Documentation of Efforts to Locate Student

☐ Interviewer was able to either locate the former student or a person knowledgeable of his or her post-school status. (If this box is checked, skip down to the "School Program" section.)

  OR

☐ Interviewer was NOT able to either locate the former student or a person knowledgeable of his or her post-school status. (If this box is checked, the information below must be completed).

  I certify that at least three attempts have been made to locate the former student or a person knowledgeable of his or her post-school status, according to the following information:

First Attempt: Date: ___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ Time: ___ ___ : ___ ___ AM or PM
(Month)   (Day)   (Year)   (Hours) (Mins.)

Reason no contact was made (select letter A-F from the list below): _____

Second Attempt: Date: ___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ Time: ___ ___ : ___ ___ AM or PM
(Month)   (Day)   (Year)   (Hours) (Mins.)

Reason no contact was made (select letter A-F from the list below): _____

Third Attempt: Date: ___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___ Time: ___ ___ : ___ ___ AM or PM
(Month)   (Day)   (Year)   (Hours) (Mins.)

Reason no contact was made (select letter A-F from the list below): _____

Interviewer was unable to locate and interview this former student or a person knowledgeable of this student because (for each attempt choose only one reason from the list below):

    A. Former student and/or family declined to participate
    B. Former student and/or family had moved and left no forwarding address
    C. Phone was disconnected
    D. Former student was deceased
    E. Former student was incarcerated
    F. Other reason
       (If the interviewer "was NOT able" to locate the former student, and has filled in all the information concerning the attempts made to locate him or her, then the interviewer may close the survey.)

Interviewer's Name: _____   _____
                        (First Name)   (Last Name)

Date this Post-School Survey Interview was Completed: ___ ___ / ___ ___ / ___ ___ ___ ___
                                            (Month)   (Day)   (Year)

Person Interviewed (check only one):
    ☐ Former Student
    ☐ Parent or Guardian
    ☐ Adult Service Provider
    ☐ Spouse, Sibling, Other Relative
    ☐ Other

Survey Questions

Employment

1. Did you have a paying job when you left high school? (Check One)
   - ☐ Yes, I worked an average of 20 or more hours per week.
   - ☐ Yes, I worked less than 20 hours per week.
   - ☐ No, I did not have a paying job when I left high school.
   - ☐ No answer

2. At any time since leaving high school, have you ever worked? (Check One)
   - ☐ Yes, I worked an average of 20 or more hours per week.
   - ☐ Yes, I worked less than 20 hours per week.
   - ☐ No, I have not worked since leaving high school.
   - ☐ No answer

3. If you have NOT worked at any time since leaving high school, is it mainly because you... (Check One)
   - ☐ Are in school training to prepare for work
   - ☐ Are looking for a job, but can't find one
   - ☐ Do not want to work
   - ☐ Have transportation problems
   - ☐ Have some other reason
   - ☐ This question does not apply to me. I am currently working.
   - ☐ No answer

4. Since leaving high school, have you worked longest in . . . (Check One)
   - ☐ Competitive work (I had to apply for the job)
   - ☐ Self-employed work (I have my own business)
   - ☐ Supported employment (paid work in the community with helping people always around)
   - ☐ Sheltered employment (where most workers have disabilities)
   - ☐ Other type of job setting
   - ☐ No answer

5. Since leaving high school, how many days have you worked at your job (or jobs)? (Check One)
   - ☐ 90 days or more
   - ☐ Fewer than 90 days
   - ☐ No answer

6. How much are you/were you usually paid for your job? (Check One)
   - ☐ More than minimum wage
   - ☐ Minimum wage
   - ☐ Less than minimum wage
   - ☐ No pay, it is volunteer work
   - ☐ No answer

14. To assist you in your education or training program after leaving high school, have you requested any accommodation from the program office that is supposed to help persons with disabilities?   (Check One)
    ☐ Yes, I sent a written request for an accommodation.
    ☐ Yes, I spoke with someone about getting an accommodation.
    ☐ No, I did not request an accommodation.
    ☐ No answer

15. Have you received the accommodation requested for your education or training program attended since leaving high school? (Check One)
    ☐ Yes, I received the accommodation as I asked for it.
    ☐ Yes, I received part of the accommodation.
    ☐ No, I did not receive any accommodation.
    ☐ No answer

16. If you have NOT received any type of training or education at any time since leaving high school, is it mainly because you: (Check One)
    ☐ Did not graduate
    ☐ Do not want further training or education
    ☐ Can't afford further training or education
    ☐ Have transportation problems
    ☐ Don't meet admission requirements
    ☐ Have some other reason
    ☐ This question does not apply to me. I have received some type of training or education.
    ☐ No answer

Student Satisfaction

	Much	Some	None	NA
17. How satisfied are you with your employment?	☐	☐	☐	☐
18. How satisfied are you with your postsecondary education?	☐	☐	☐	☐
19. Did your high school help prepare you for what you are doing now?	☐	☐	☐	☐
20. During high school, were you involved in developing your IEP?	☐	☐	☐	☐

21. If you DID NOT graduate from high school, did you leave without graduating because you… (Check One)
    ☐ Lost interest
    ☐ Could not meet the requirements of the course work
    ☐ Could not meet the requirements of the AHSGE
    ☐ Began work
    ☐ Had personal or family reasons
    ☐ Other
    ☐ I did graduate, so this question does not apply to me.
    ☐ No answer

22. How satisfied are you with…

	Much	Some	None	NA
Your work	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your education or training	☐	☐	☐	☐
Where you live	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your friends	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your family life	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your community life	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your free time	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your transportation	☐	☐	☐	☐
Your decisions	☐	☐	☐	☐

Appendix F: Staff/Parents Letter of Invitation to Participate in Research Study

LETTER TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Parent or Staff Member:

I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree, and I would like to invite you to participate. In addition to being a doctoral candidate at Walden University, I am also a central office administrator within the district. I believe that the results from this study may benefit your student(s). The purpose of this study is to determine the practices necessary to negate the gap in perceptions of parents, staff, related to students and the post-school transition process. This study may be essential to find ways to support parents, staff, and students in the implementation of their students' transition plans. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to: (a) participate in a one-on-one interview, lasting no longer than 60-minutes, with me about your perceptions regarding the post-school transition process and (b) review the transcription of the interview to provide feedback for change or clarify any misconceptions.

You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. Participation is voluntary and confidential. Your identity will not be revealed. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Taking part in this study is your decision. Only I will know whether you choose to participate, and I will be fine with whatever decision you make regarding participation.

If you would like to participate, please go to the link, https://www.surveymonkey.com/ , by copying and pasting the link in your browser if the shortcut does not work, and complete the demographic survey. You may skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering within the demographic survey. Your consent to participate, should you choose to participate in the study, will only be determined by your signing a printed consent form when we agree to meet. You may also contact me at any time to answer questions or to address concerns by email at charla.deleo@waldenu.edu or by phone at ###### Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Charla DeLeo
Walden University Ed.D. Candidate

Appendix G: Teacher Letter of Invitation to Participate in Research Study

LETTER TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

Teacher:

I am conducting a research study as part of the requirements of my degree, and I would like to invite you to participate. In addition to being a doctoral candidate at Walden University, I am also a central office administrator within the district. I believe that the results from this study may benefit your student(s). The purpose of this study is to determine the practices necessary to negate the gap in perceptions of parents, staff, related to students and the post-school transition process. This study may be essential to find ways to support parents, staff, and students in the implementation of their students' transition plans. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to: (a) participate in a one-on-one interview, lasting no longer than 60-minutes, with me about your perceptions regarding the post-school transition process and (b) participate in an observation in which you are implementing a transition objective, and (c) review the transcription of the interview to provide feedback for change or clarify any misconceptions

You may feel uncomfortable answering some of the questions. You do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer. Participation is voluntary and confidential. Your identity will not be revealed. You may withdraw from the study at any time. Taking part in this study is your decision. Only I will know whether you choose to participate, and I will be fine with whatever decision you make regarding participation.

If you would like to participate, please go to the link, https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/, by copying and pasting the link in your browser if the shortcut does not work, and complete the demographic survey. You may skip any question that you do not feel comfortable answering within the demographic survey. Your consent to participate, should you choose to participate in the study, will only be determined by your signing a printed consent form when we agree to meet. You may also contact me at any time to answer questions or to address concerns by email at charla.deleo@waldenu.edu or by phone at ###### Thank you so much for your time and consideration.

Charla DeLeo
Walden University Ed.D. Candidate

Appendix H: Interview Protocol for Staff

One-on-one Interview Guide

Introduction:

I would like to talk with you about your experiences in working with ASD students and their transition plans. Before we start, I want to remind you that your participation is completely voluntary and that the comments that are made will be kept confidential. If any questions make you uncomfortable or you do not want to answer for any reason, please do not feel obligated to answer. If for any reason at any time you wish to discontinue your participation in the one-on- one interview, you may do so without explanation. May I have your permission to tape record the interview and take notes on your comments? Do you have any questions before we begin?

One-on-One Interview Session Questions
1. How do you help students prepare for the transition from high school to post-secondary training/education or the workforce?

2. What seems to be the most effective part of the current post-school transition process? The least? Why?

3. What are your thoughts on support provided to parents related to understanding the post-school transition process? What are your training needs? Explain.

4. If you could do anything differently for our students to better help with transition, what would you do? Why?

5. What are perceptions of the post-school transition process that parents, teachers, administrators, and students may have? Explain.
6. The 2013 Alabama Post School Outcomes Survey indicates that 100% of students from Clay County Schools effectively transition to post-secondary training and/or the workforce, but parents still note concerns about the post-school transition process on their student's IEP. What are your thoughts on why this is so?

Appendix I: Interview Protocol for Parents

One-on-one Interview Guide

Introduction:

I would like to talk with you about your experiences in working with ASD students and their transition plans. Before we start, I want to remind you that your participation is completely voluntary and that the comments that are made will be kept confidential. If any questions make you uncomfortable or you do not want to answer for any reason, please do not feel obligated to answer. If for any reason at any time you wish to discontinue your participation in the one-on- one interview, you may do so without explanation. May I have your permission to tape record the interview and take notes on your comments? Do you have any questions before we begin?

One-on-One Interview Session Questions

1. How do you and your family help your student prepare for the transition from high school to post-secondary training/education or the workforce?

2. Based on your experience, how would you describe the strengths of the current post-school transition process are at your student's school? Why?

3. How would you describe the weaknesses of the current post-school transition process at your student's school? Why?

4. Describe how the school staff has helped you to understand the transition planning process at your student's school. Are there areas related to the post-school transition process at your student's school that you feel need more information? Is there any additional training you can think of that would help you and your student related to transition planning? .

5. If anything could be done differently for your student to better help with transition, what would you do? Why?

6. What are perceptions of the post-school transition process that parents, teachers, administrators, and students may have? Explain.

7. The 2013 Alabama Post School Outcomes Survey indicates that 100% of students from Clay County Schools effectively transition to post-secondary training and/or the workforce, but parents still note concerns about the post-school transition process on their student's IEP. What are your thoughts on why this is

Appendix J: Observation Checklist

Observation Protocol Checklist

Date of Observation: _____

Duration of Observation: _____

Total Length of Class Period: _____

Number of Students: _____

Seating Arrangement:

Rows: _____   Groups: _____   Semi-Circle: _____

Description of the Room Décor/Organization:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Transition Lesson Objective:

_____

_____

Demonstration of Skill Learning:

_____

_____

Description of the Transition-related Instructional Resources Provided (Texts, Graphic

Organizers, Videos, Images, etc):

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Description of Student Activities: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Participant's Questions and Feedback to Students: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Student Behaviors (Engagement, Participation, Questions--Only general observations of

student behaviors, not attributable to any particular student, will be recorded as an overall

classroom observation.): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Teacher Redirection Techniques (Rules and Procedures): _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix K: Demographic Survey for Staff/Parents of Students with ASD

1. Please select your relationship to students with ASD.

2. Please select the years of experience you have in aiding students with ASD.

3. Please select your gender

4. What is your highest level of education?

5. What other experiences related to students with ASD do you have?

6. Thank you for your decision to participate!
Please include your contact information complete with name, address, and a daytime telephone number so that I can contact you to schedule the necessary components of the study.