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# Understanding Administrators' Perceptions on Transition Education

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*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Education

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Jessica Samples

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Understanding Administrators' Perceptions on Transition Education

by

Jessica R. Samples

MEd, Southern Arkansas University, 2006

BS, Southern Arkansas University, 2004

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

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## Abstract

Transition education is a required component of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Information Act of 2004, and all students who have disabilities must have a transition education plan to prepare them for life after high school. However, there are no definitive standards for transition programs, and it is unclear how administrators with successful transition education programs support those programs to make them successful. The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine how administrators of successful programs perceive transition education programs. Systems theory provided the framework for this study because administrators can impact the entire special education system by acting on their beliefs. The participants were 6 administrators from 2 different schools with successful transition programs. Two interviews with each participant were used to gather data. Data were coded using open coding and analyzed to find emerging themes. Results indicated that administrators at these 2 school sites provided various support to help their programs be successful, including funding and decision-making assistance. The administrators had a positive perception of transition education outcomes, with the belief that such programs are important and needed by students with disabilities. This study contributes to research by indicating that administrators with successful transition programs make the programs' success a priority, working to gain various support for the programs and benefiting the students who need these programs.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this work to my family, who has sacrificed greatly the last several years as I have worked. They have given up family time and have supported me through it all. I appreciate their willingness to understand the time and effort I have put into this and the sacrifices they have made that have allowed me to achieve my goals. To my husband, who has been through so much in the last 3 years, I am grateful for your love and support. While this journey has not been easy, I would not want to do life with anyone but you. To my children, I dedicate this work. Always know that with hard work and determination, you can reach your goals. Never give up, even when the end seems too distant. Push yourself and become what you dream.

## Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my sister, who has read and reread all of my work. Without her, this dissertation would not have been possible. Her willingness to help me achieve my dream means more to me than I can express. I will never be able to repay her kindness. I would like to thank my parents for their love and support they gave to me as both a child and adult. They taught me to believe in myself and to work hard. This work ethic and the determination to never give up have inspired me to finish what I started.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

Transition education is required by law and must be taught to students with disabilities from 16-years-old through their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday (Individuals with Disabilities Education Information Act [IDEA], 2004). Transition education is determined by the transition plan that must be in place for each student with disabilities by the age of 16 (IDEA, 2004). While the law says that a transition plan must be in place and that transition education must be done according to the transition plan, there is not a mandatory approach that tells schools how to deliver this education or to ensure the quality of the transition education. The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand school administrators' opinions of transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood; these administrators' programs were deemed as successful by meeting the state set requirement for the transition Indicator 14. Within this chapter, I examine the problem and purpose of this study along with background information for this study.

### **Background**

Transition education for high school students with disabilities is required by federal law (IDEA, 2004). While this is a federal requirement, research shows that the quality of that transition education varies from school to school (Collet-Klingenberg & Kolb, 2011; Hagner, May, Kurtz, & Cloutier, 2014; Wells, Sheehey, & Moore, 2012). Transition education refers to teaching students who have a disability the skills they will need to obtain and maintain a career, participate within their community, and live as

independently as possible (Collet-Klingenberg & Kolb, 2011; Riesen, Morgan, Schultz, & Kupferman, 2014; Robick, 2010; Wells et al., 2012). Each year, a student's transition plan must be reviewed by a committee to ensure that the student is making steps to meet transition plan goals with the proper transition education. This helps to ensure that students are involved in the transition education program at school. This committee consists of the student, parents, general education teacher, special education teacher, administrator, local education agency representative, service providers, and any community partners necessary (IDEA, 2004). All of these people are required team members and must be present to ensure that the student is meeting their transition goals and that their transition needs are being met. It takes all team members to help transition planning be successful (Wells et al., 2012). Each member makes decisions and provides opinions that affect those in other positions.

Administrators' decisions have a direct impact on the actions of those under their leadership (Muse & Abrams, 2011; Young, Austin, & Growe, 2013). Administrators are an important part of the team because they provide a viewpoint that is somewhat removed from day-to-day teaching activities (Wells et al., 2012). Administrators decide how policies and programs, such as transition education programs and policies related to those programs, are accepted in their schools because they can act as mediators and/or leaders for setting rules and regulations for policies and programs. According to Muse and Abrams (2011), administrators lead by specific leadership styles, which can affect the attitude of others in a school. Attitudes can decide how a program is embraced and how hard people will work to make it successful or determine if a program will be viewed as

one that is not necessary. When administrative support is strong, the programs or activities being implemented are more successful than when administrators do not support nor had a noncommittal attitude toward the program (Muse & Abrams, 2011). For transition education programs, success can be determined by how many students graduate, go on to postsecondary education, and/or begin a career (IDEA, 2004). Administrators often do not have enough knowledge or information to make policy decisions when it comes to special education and related services (Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012). A lack of knowledge about transition could impact the perception of an administrator related to transition education.

### **Problem Statement**

Transition education is required for students ages 16 and older who receive special education services (IDEA, 2004; Wells et al., 2012). While transition education is required by the federal government, researchers have found that transition education is often ineffective in helping students with disabilities succeed once they leave high school (Canha, Owens, Simeoes, & Gaspar de Matos, 2013; Riesen et al., 2014; Wells et al., 2012). Students often do not have the necessary skills to fully participate within their communities, home, or workplace after graduating from high school or leaving the high school setting (Wells et al., 2012). Transition education for students with disabilities is important so that these students can become contributing members of society in the workplace, community, and the home (Brewer et al., 2011).

Transition education programs are developed within a school. The transition team is supposed to decide what is needed by students and develop a program based on student

needs. Transition education programs may take many forms such as students following a vocational path in agriculture, business, or family and consumer science; students may also be involved in school-to-work programs, community partnerships, or internships (Reisen et al., 2014; Shogren, & Plotner, 2012). The type of program provided depends on school resources, community involvement, and committee determination of what will be provided within the school. Programs within the schools rely on administrative support for implementation and use, especially relying on administrators to provide guidance, knowledge, networking, and general support of the program (Bakken & Smith, 2011; Berry, Petrin, Gravelle, & Farmer, 2012). Transition education requires the entire transition team to be involved in the process for it to be successful (Brewer et al., 2011).

With transition education being required in schools, support is needed for the programs to be successful (Bakken & Smith, 2011; Berry et al., 2012). While researchers have found that this type of support is needed, there has been minimal research completed to determine the perceptions of the administrators, which includes principals, superintendents, curriculum coordinators, and/or supervisors of programs within a school. When looking for research, I found little information on administrator opinions about transition education, though I did find a lot of research on the barriers to transition success, what transition education was, and the type of support needed to help transition education be successful. I did find one study on administrator perceptions of the transition process, but the researchers focused on barriers that are viewed as a hindrance to the transition process rather than the attitudes and opinions of administrators regarding transition education (Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012). Another study

by Webb Repetto, Seabrooks-Blackmore, Patterson, & Alderfer (2014) was on student perceptions of transition but did not include administrator perceptions. Administrator attitudes and opinions about transition education need to be explored to fill this gap in the literature so that their attitudes and opinions can be understood along with the other stakeholders involved in transition education.

In many studies, teachers point to lack of support from the administrators as a problem in implementing and maintaining successful transition education programs within the school (Bakken & Smith, 2011; Berry et al., 2012; Wells et al., 2012). Successful transition programs can be defined as those that have students who are enrolled in postsecondary training either at a technical school or 2- or 4-year college or university or are employed (Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit, 2014). These successful programs are possible with administrator support, which is why I chose to examine administrators' opinions on transition education programs; these administrators have supported programs that were deemed as successful, which may help enlighten other schools on attitudes that may help the implementation of effective transition programs.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand school administrators' attitudes and opinions of transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood; these administrators' programs were deemed as successful by meeting the state set requirement for the transition Indicator 14.



### **Research Question**

What are the opinions and attitudes of administrators who work in schools with successful transition education programs towards transition education programs for high school students with disabilities?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I used systems theory as the conceptual framework for this study. Systems theory is based on the understanding that any group is a complex system and within the system, there are many sub-systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bruce-Davis et al., 2014; Williamson, Robertson, & Casey, 2010). These systems can be countries, communities, schools, clubs, families, and more. There are many different types and parts to a system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). An example of a system is an ecosystem. If one thing changes within the ecosystem, it affects all other parts of the ecosystem. In the same way, the school district is a system; therefore, decisions made at any level affects all other levels of the school (Williamson et al., 2010). The premise of systems theory helped provide direction and understanding of how the workings of a system can influence outcomes of a program.

### **Nature of the Study**

This study was conducted using an interview study design. An interview study design allows researchers to delve into participants' beliefs and values. In this study, the participants were administrators. This design was chosen so that attitudes and opinions of administrators could be reviewed to determine if a theme arose among successful transition programs.

Purposeful sampling was used to determine the participants in this study.

Purposeful sampling allowed me to choose participants based on specific criteria so that the attitudes and opinions could be studied in more detail (Patton, 2002). Two schools were chosen based on the requirement that the school was meeting the goal of 60.15% as reported on the Arkansas Annual Performance Report (APR). The APR includes the percentage of students who are determined to be attending postsecondary training at a vocational/technical school or 2- or 4-year college or who are employed (Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit, 2014). Interviews were the method used for data collection for this study. Multiple interviews with administrators allowed me to gather data on personal perceptions of administrators on the transition programs in their schools.

### **Definitions**

*Administrator:* The person or people in charge of the local school that provide guidance for academics, manage programs and policies within the school, make decisions dealing with financial policies that provide funding to programs, and ensure a positive school climate is in place (Leader-Jansee, Swain, Delkamiller, & Ritzman, 2012).

*Individuals with Disabilities Education Information Act (IDEA):* The 2004 act that provides rules and regulations to ensure that all students from birth to age 21 with disabilities are provided with an education that is appropriate and the least restrictive. Guidelines are set within the law to assist schools in providing services to student with disabilities. This law deals with children from birth until age 21 to provide services from birth until transition (IDEA, 2004).

*Special education teacher:* A teacher who provides special education services to students who qualify for services under IDEA (Prather-Jones, 2011).

*Transition:* a move from one area to another, especially from high school to postsecondary education or career (Wells et al., 2012).

*Transition education program:* A program within a school that provides transition services to students with disabilities (Wells et al., 2012). These services can be presented embedded within a classroom or within a subject-specific course designed to focus only on transition education. The type of setting varies from school district to school district.

*Transition planning team:* A group of people who meet together to develop the transition plan for a student with disabilities that has reached the age of transition (prior to their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday). This group includes “the student, parents, special education teacher, general education teachers, related service providers, administrators and representatives of relevant community organizations” (Wells et al., 2012, p. 30). The purpose of the transition planning team is to make a plan that helps the student prepare for post-school outcomes in the areas of education, employment, and independent living.

### **Assumptions**

For this study, I worked under the assumption that the information given to me by the participants was truthful and honest. I assumed that each participant provided accurate information during his or her interviews. I worked under that assumption that opinions were shared as thoroughly and precisely as possible.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

The participants for this study were school administrators from two public schools across Arkansas chosen by purposeful sampling from the ARP. Using only two schools allowed for in-depth focus on administrator perspectives.

### **Limitations**

Only two schools were chosen for this study. This provided a limited view of transition programs in Arkansas schools. The study was only being done in an Arkansas school, which may not transfer to other state schools with regard to transition education. The scope of this study was relatively small; therefore, the results were not able to be applied to larger settings. It would need to be replicated with a larger sample size to see if results are confirmed or disconfirmed.

### **Significance**

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand school administrators' attitudes and opinions of transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood; these administrators' programs were deemed successful by meeting the state set requirement for the transition Indicator 14. Transition education seems to vary from school to school, with many different types of programs being implemented (Cavanaugh & Giesen, 2012). Some schools provide transition education programs with many opportunities through school/work components, community involvement, self-determination education, problem-solving education, and more for students to meet their transition education goals, while some programs provide only the basic opportunities for those goals to be met

with only general education classes (agriculture classes or home economics classes; Reisen et al., 2014; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). In this study, I highlight administrator attitudes and opinions in regard to transition education. Administrators may not even be aware of their attitudes and perceptions of transition education. This study may bring to light the perceptions that may cause administrators to change their view of the importance of transition education. If administrators understand their perceptions that they have about a program, it may be possible for them to monitor their reactions to a program and how they set policies that impact those programs. If administrator support is strong, the education and opportunities provided within transition education programs could help educators provide students with skills needed to have better postschool outcomes of either postsecondary education or a career.

### **Summary**

Transition education is a federal requirement that must be met by schools, yet the quality and type of transition education program varies by school (Collet-Klingenberg & Kolb, 2011; Hagner et al., 2014; Wells et al., 2012). Transition education is required, yet there is no consistency in the types of services given to students with disabilities who have a transition plan (Cavanaugh, & Giesen, 2012). The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand school administrators' attitudes and opinions of transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood. Data was collected from administrators with successful transition programs from two different school districts in Arkansas through interviews. In Chapter 2, I provide the conceptual framework and current literature used in the study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Transition education is a required component of a student's individual education plan (IEP) by the time the student turns 16 (IDEA, 2004). Transition must be provided for students with disabilities until they graduate high school or until their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday (IDEA, 2004). Schools are required to provide transition education and services to students with disabilities to help prepare them for life beyond high school; however, schools are not regulated in how or what services and education they provide for these students (Canha et al., 2013; Riesen et al., 2014; Wells et al., 2012). While schools are required to provide these services, many students are still not prepared for life beyond high school, indicating that what is being provided for students is not successful (Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch, 2011; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Trach, 2012; Wells et al., 2012). The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand the attitudes of school administrators—whose programs are deemed as successful by meeting the state set requirement for the transition Indicator 14—on transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood. In the literature review, I describe my research process to gather background information, a review of the conceptual framework, and a review of the literature currently available on transition education programs, showing a gap in the research to support my study. I end the section with a summary and conclusion.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

The literature for this study was found from dissertations, books, and peer-reviewed, scholarly journal articles using the following databases: ProQuest Central,

Education Research Complete, and Academic Complete through the Walden University library portal as well as the Questia database and the library at Southern Arkansas University. There were many key search words and phrases used including *transition*, *transition education*, *students with disabilities and transition*, *students with disabilities and transition barriers*, *transition barriers*, *secondary transition*, *school leadership*, *administrators*, *administrators and special education*, *administrators and transition education*, and *Individuals with Disabilities Education Information Act*.

ProQuest Central was the database used the most during the search. The search terms *transition education* and *transition education barriers* were used to begin the search. Through those searches, other key words such as *students with disabilities* and *transition and students with disabilities* and *transition education* were used to seek additional information. After finding relevant articles that provided information on basic transition requirements and barriers to successful transition, the search shifted to school leadership, administrators, and their involvement in special education. To ensure correct information involving special education law, the search was focused on IDEA.

Education Research Complete and Academic Search Complete were used from the Walden library database to look for peer-reviewed, scholarly journal articles on transition education, transition barriers, leadership styles of administrators, and administrators and special education. Many of the same articles retrieved on these databases were also found on ProQuest Central. These databases were helpful in providing some articles on leadership style that were not available on the other sites used during the search.

Questia provided an additional avenue to search for articles that were not in the ProQuest database. Questia is a paid site; therefore, some articles were available that were not available in the databases on the Walden University library site or at the Southern Arkansas University library. The Questia database provided more articles about school leadership and administrator leadership styles, along with additional information on transition education barriers.

The Southern Arkansas University library provided access to print journal articles along with books on systems theory. The library provided a platform to find books that I did not have in my own personal collection or could not access online. I found books by Bronfenbrenner (1979), Meadows (2008), and Seligman (1991, 2007) that describe systems theory, which was used to develop the conceptual framework for this study.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Systems theory was the conceptual framework on which this study was based. Systems theory is based on the understanding that any group is a complex system and within the system there are many subsystems (Meadows, 2008; Meadows, Randers, & Meadows, 2004; Seligman, 1991; Seligman & Darling, 2007). These systems can be countries, communities, schools, clubs, families, and more. In the following paragraphs, the basic constructs of systems theory and how this theory has been used in previous research as a conceptual framework will be discussed.

There are many different types and parts to a system (Meadows, 2008). According to Seligman (1991) and Bronfenbrenner (1979) a system is comprised of a microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The microsystem is comprised of what



happens within the group and the relationship between the members (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Seligman, 1991). The mesosystem refers to the settings that the system operates in (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Seligman, 1991). The exosystem consists of the outside forces that have an impact on the system without the system being an active member in the setting or interactions (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Seligman, 1991). The macrosystem consists of the beliefs of the system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Seligman, 1991). All of these components make up the whole system.

For this study, the system was the transition education program and the transition education planning team that consists of the following members: special education teacher, general education teacher, parents, student, service providers, administrators, and others as needed (IDEA, 2004). These are all required members of the planning team. This team, or system, has individual members that interact among themselves in different settings, an ideology that drives the entire group, and is influenced by outside forces such as funding and community participation (Cherciov, 2013). This system operates together to develop a transition plan that drives the transition education program that the student will participate in.

To make major changes to a whole system, the macrosystem is the area in which the biggest change needs to be made (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Since the macrosystem deals with the ideology of the system, major changes to the function of the system must start there. Changes to a system do not come easily; however, if the system is not producing desired results, then a change must be made to the system or it will continue to operate in an undesirable way (Meadows, 2008).

One aspect of systems theory that is important is that what happens to one part of a system affects the other parts of the system (Meadows, 2008). An ecosystem is an easy example of this principle. If one thing changes within the ecosystem, it affects all other parts of the ecosystem. If the stream in which the animals drink begins to dry up, the animals must move away and find another source of water. This change can cause a chain reaction that causes the ecosystem to change in a multitude of ways. In the same way, the school district is a system; therefore, decisions made at any level affect all other levels of the school (Meadows, 2008). Strnadova & Cumming (2014) conducted a study using systems theory. Data was collected through survey questions completed by participants who were teachers. They determined that moving from one school environment to another affected all parts of the system for the individual involved. Thus, the change that happened (moving from one environment to another) had affected other areas of the individual's life and processes (Strnadova & Cumming, 2014).

Meadows (2008) stated that for changes to happen within a system, the thinking of those in the system needs to change. Decisions in a system are often based on the information that the members of the group have; therefore, it is vital that all members of the group understand the information needed to make important decisions (Meadows, 2008). For a transition education planning team, all members need to understand what transition education is and why the federal government requires that transition plans be in place and that students with disabilities need to be involved in transition education programs that prepare them for their futures. Meadows stated that making a change at the top of the system can have a dramatic impact on the rest of the system, as this can change

the ideology of the system. For transition planning teams, this change can simply be a change of thinking by the administrators within the system. Transition education programs rely on administrator support for funding and resources (Bakken & Smith, 2011; Berry et al., 2012). The administrators are the ones that control what can happen within a system based on the amount of support they provide the program; thus, it is vital to ensure that administrators that are part of the team have the knowledge they need about transition education so that they can make informed decisions during the meeting (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014).

Systems theory has been used in several research studies over the last few years. Harris, Hines, Kelly, Williams, & Bagley (2014) used systems theory for their conceptual framework in their study—examining the layers of academic engagement and the success of black male student athletes in high school—because it allowed them to look at different parts of a system to determine the affect those layers had on a system. Cherciov (2013) used systems theory for her study because it allows that all parts of the system are interdependent and a change within one part of the system can cause a change other parts of a system. Systems theory allowed these researchers to look at how changes within a system affect other parts of the system. For this study, systems theory was used to examine the attitudes and opinions of administrators on the transition education programs. While none of the studies I found using systems theory as a conceptual framework were used on topics related to my study, the studies did involve administrators and their leadership within a school system, which related to the administrator component of my study.

## **Literature Review**

Transition and transition education are widely researched topics. The following is a review of the literature that covers different topics that relate to transition, transition education, stakeholders involved in transition education, stakeholder perspectives and what perspectives are missing, administrators and transition education planning, and the gap in the literature.

### **Definition of Transition from High School to Adult Life**

In order to provide transition education to students with disabilities, it is important to understand what transition means and how transition education is supposed to help these students be prepared for life after high school. Transition, in relation to students with disabilities, simply means a move from one segment of life to another (Trach, 2012). For high school students, this move is from high school to postschool life. The goal of transition education should be to help students attain the skills needed to be successful adults who have careers, thus providing them with a quality of life that can be compared to their peers without disabilities and reducing their dependence upon government assistance (Burgess & Cimera, 2014). The success of adults is often determined by the career and education they have (Lindstrom et al., 2011). To help ensure that students with disabilities have the opportunity to reach their fullest potential and become successful adults, schools must provide transition education to these students.

Transition planning for students with disabilities is required by age 16 and must last until the student leaves high school or until the age 21 (IDEA, 2004). Transition planning should be based on individual student needs and focus on areas of employment,

education, and, as necessary, independent living (Canha et al., 2013; Lindstrom et al., 2011; Roth & Columna, 2011; Wells et al., 2012). Transition planning determines what students will do to gain skills to get from high school to postschool life (Marshall et al., 2012). The plan determines what skills and activities the student needs to meet the goals that are set during the planning (Canha et al., 2013). This planning determines what courses and activities these students participate in during for their transition education while they are in high school, possibly up to the age of 21.

Transition planning determines what transition education should look like for students with disabilities to help them meet their needs (Marshall et al., 2012). Transition education programs are the activities and courses are offered by the local school to help students meet their transition plan goals. These education programs should include services and activities that are designed to provide the student with access to ways to meet the goals set forth in their transition plan (Canha et al., 2013; Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Daviso, Denney, Baer, & Flexer (2011) conducted a study on 416 students with learning disabilities and how planning affected their transition outcomes. Participants completed the Alabama Post-School Transition Survey, which is completed by phone interviews in which those administering the survey ask the participants the questions and enter the responses into a computer program. The survey used *yes/no* responses as well as a 3-point Likert scale of *much*, *some*, and *none* (Daviso et al., 2011). The researchers found a correlation between those students who received high grades in school as those who participated in postsecondary education at a higher rate. The students who received more job training and work experiences in school were the students who

responded with higher incidences of employment or career satisfaction (Daviso et al., 2011). This led researchers to the conclusion that the student's goals should be directly tied to the courses and activities the student participates in during high school (Daviso et al., 2011).

Another example of a study showing the importance of the type of activities in transition education is by Canha et al. (2013), who conducted focus groups with parents and found that parents believe that effective planning includes work experiences, paid work experiences while in school, teaching specific vocational skills, and activities that help prepare students for life beyond high school. The activities and services can be offered in a variety of ways: through classes already offered at the school through the general education curriculum or through community partnerships that provide work and socialization activities (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010; Riesen et al., 2014; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Another exploratory study was done by Iver, Epstein, Sheldon, & Fonseca (2015) to determine how transition programs help students with other areas in their high school experience. They found that when students participated in transition activities, they had higher success rate with their academic work than other students with disabilities who did not participate in transition activities in high school (Iver et al., 2015). The researchers concluded that transition activities need to happen early in high school, in the ninth grade if possible, with many different activities being done to help meet the student's individual needs (Iver et al., 2015).

There is no set way to provide a transition education program within schools, but it is federally mandated that all students with disabilities over the age of 16 be provided

with transition education (Roth & Columna, 2011). The quality of the services provided can make a major difference in the success of students with disabilities once they graduate high school (Hagner et al., 2014). The services that are provided for the students need to be such that students have ample opportunity to meet the goals set forth in their transition plans.

### **Transition Assessment**

Effective transition planning is imperative for schools to be able to provide the appropriate transition education programs for students with disabilities (Wells et al., 2012). Transition planning should be based on the individual student's needs (Cheong & Yahya, 2013; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Whitby, Marx, McIntire, & Wienke, 2013). Transition planning starts with the student taking assessments to determine individual needs in the areas of education, employment, and independent living so that the team knows a student's strengths and weaknesses before setting goals (Wells et al., 2012). Based on the assessment results, an appropriate transition plan can be developed using vocational courses, transition courses, community-based work programs, or school-to-work programs.

Within each of the tested areas, there are many choices that are available for use in student testing. According to a literature review of assessments available for transition planning, Rowe, Mazzotti, Hirano, & Alverson (2015) stated that a comprehensive look at a student's strengths and weakness need to be determined through a variety of transition assessments. There are free assessments that can be used online or in print version (Rowe et al., 2015). Others may cost but can be valuable sources of information

when it comes to helping develop a plan for a student's transition services. These tests indicate the student's strengths and weaknesses in each domain (Cheong & Yahya, 2013; Gothberg, Peterson, Peak, & Sedaghat, 2015; Rowe et al., 2015). From these strengths and weakness, the transition planning team can use the results to determine what areas most need improvement to help the student be successful after graduation (Gothberg et al., 2015; Rowe, Mazzotti, Hirano, & Alverson, 2015). It is important that a variety of different assessments are given so that the student's interests, strengths, and weaknesses can truly be determined (Laron, Saddler, Thoma, Bartholomew, Nora, & Tamura, 2011).

The assessments should be a guide for the committee during transition planning (Gothberg et al., 2015; Rowe et al., 2015). The team must determine what areas the student has needs in so that the appropriate services and activities that will help them work towards proficiency in those areas will be provided (Daviso, Denney, Baer, & Flexer, 2011). The student's needs should be the first thing the team determines before planning transition services and activities (Peterson, Burden, Sedaghat, Gothberg, Kohler, & Coyle, 2013). These assessments should also be given over the course of the time the student is in school and involved in transition education.

### **Transition Program Options**

For this study, the transition programs were those that are offered within the high school setting, meaning that even if the programs offer internships or supported employment or other off-site services, all services and programs begin at the high school where the student attends. The administrators and teachers at the high school who are involved in the transition planning are the ones that help provide the transition education



for the student beginning in the high school setting where the student attends for their academic education (Peterson et al., 2013). There are many different types of transition program choices available as there is no mandate or regulation that specifically dictates how transition education should be offered to students (Cease-Cook, Fowler, & Test, 2015; Rowe, Mazzotti, Hirano, & Alverson, 2015). Cease-Cook et al., (2015) reviewed several different types of programs that can be used by schools, including career exploration, job shadowing, work sampling, service learning, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. The researchers reviewed the different types of programs used to determine which programs worked best. They found that one program does not necessarily work for all schools or all students. The researchers reviewed literature and created a timeline to help teachers with planning. They stated that it is important for the school to determine the best option according to their resources and the needs of the individual student. Hoover (2016) conducted a literature review and determined that many different options are available but that one program type or activity may not be the best for another student. The determination should be based on student need (Hoover, 2016). Wehman, Chan, Ditchman, & Kang (2014) conducted a study on supported employment for students with disabilities. They reviewed rehabilitations services database report for the 2009 school year, which included data on 23,298 students who were in school and involved in a transition education program. In their study, they found that those students who were involved in supported employment had better post-school outcomes than those students who did not participate in supportive employment (Wehman et al., 2014). The overall finding of their study was that being involved in some

type of transition education program yielded better post-school outcomes than those who did not participate in any type of transition program (Wehman et al., 2014).

Some schools simply use existing vocational courses already available at their school to provide students with opportunities to learn the skills indicated as needed within their transition plan. Vocational training through academic courses already offered at a school has shown to help students meet their transition goals (Jorgensen, 2013). Jorgensen (2013) looked at a dual-system in the Danish education system that allowed students to receive vocational training while in school. According to his study, students had better transition from school-to-work when they were allowed to participate in apprenticeships but those who received vocational training in the classroom also had improved outcomes over their peers who did not receive training (Jorgensen, 2013). The quality of the vocational courses does play a role in the success of the student; as does student motivation, and desire to learn a specific trade (Jorgensen, 2013). This method allows students to learn skills in a broad career area that may lead them in the direction of what occupation they want to have after high school. One strength of this study is that it followed students who had participated in a transition program at school into the workforce and monitored their progress. This allowed the researcher to see how the participation in the program affected the student's ability to be successful in the workplace. One limitation of this study is that the researcher did not follow those students who began in the program but did not complete it (Jorgensen, 2013). The students were allowed to drop out of the transition program, thus they were not followed to see if any of

the skills learned while they did participate in the transition program were beneficial to their success in the workforce (Jorgensen, 2013).

Other programs can be offered such as a specific transition course that is designed to cover self-determination skills, employment, career readiness, and independent living skills (Lindstrom et al., 2011). Lindstrom et al., (2011) used a case study to look at career success of students who had been in the workforce for 7-10 years after graduation. The researchers used interviews and questionnaires to gather data on personal traits, career traits, family background, and family support. Through the interviews, the researchers asked the participants about what prepared them best for the world of work. The participants in the study indicated that the self-determination skills they gathered in high school helped them in being as successful as they were (Lindstrom et al., 2011). Researchers have found that when students with disabilities participate in self-determination education, they are more prepared for life after high school, whether in the workforce or post-secondary education (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Lee, Williams-Diehm, & Shogren, 2011; Wehmeyer et al., 2012).

Other studies show that being involved in transition education programs early is beneficial to student success after high school (Cimera, Burgess, & Wiley, 2013). In their quantitative study, they found that student who participated in transition education programs beginning in early high school had better post school outcomes than those who participated later or did not participate in any type of transition education program. Cimera, Burgess, & Bedesem (2014) determined that over half of the students who participated in transition education programs by age 14 were gainfully employed versus

less than half of their peers who started at a later date. Providing good transition education programs as early as possible is needed for student to be successful as adults.

### **Community-based Work Programs**

Another option schools may use are community-based work programs or school-to-work programs that provide students with hands-on activities and work experience while still in high school (Cease-Cook et al., 2015). Researchers have found that these programs allow the student to gain on-the-job experience (Cease-Cook et al., 2015). In the case study by Lindstrom et al., (2011), the participants stated that the work experiences they had while in school helped them gain the skills needed for them to have continued success after graduation. These programs may include supported employment or internships. Jorgensen (2013) found that students who participate in apprenticeships while in school have better work outcomes after graduation. It is important to allow students with disabilities opportunities to experience how the work place will be so that they can be better prepared when they become adults and have to work to support themselves (Alias, 2014). According to Alias (2014), school-to-work programs provide on the job training with supports that help students with disabilities navigate the nuances of the workplace and allow them to gain knowledge on careers and working with other people. Alias (2014) also found that students who are involved in school-to-work programs gain skills necessary for them to move into the workforce after high school. According to another study, school-to-work programs allow students to have skilled trade when they leave high school (Packard, Leach, Ruiz, Nelson, & DiCocco, 2012). When students have a skilled trade, they are more likely to become employed following high

school than their peers with no training (Packard, et al., 2012). Another set of researchers found that involvement in work related transition programs have better post-school outcomes than those student with disabilities who did not participate in a work-related transition program (Jun, Kortering, Osmanir, & Zhang, 2015).

### **Mentoring**

Mentoring can be another program option schools can use to link adults in specific careers or community positions with students with disabilities (Leake, Burgstahler, & Izzo, 2011). Leake et al., (2011) found that if students with disabilities engage in a mentoring program between themselves and an adult, they are provided with skills they need to develop relationships in work and community settings, thus making their transition from high school to adulthood easier. Mentoring programs, in relation to transition education, would be a pairing of a community member with an individual with disabilities (Leake et al., 2011). These pairings may be based on career interests or behavior needs, depending upon what is best for the individual student. Mentoring should be used to help student understand how to be a productive community member and develop skills necessary to become a good co-worker. Mentor relationships may or may not focus on careers, however, they do focus on how to maintain relationships with adults and should teach valuable life lesson how to deal with the day to day issues that adults face (Leake et al., 2011). Whatever type of transition program that is used at a school, the program needs to address the strengths and weaknesses based on the individual student who is receiving the transition education (Peterson, et al., 2013).

### **Stakeholders/Team Members**

Planning a transition education program is not an easy task and is one that involves many team members. Team members that should be present and part of the planning process are the student, parents, special education teacher, general education teacher, an administrator, related services providers such as speech-language pathologist, occupational or physical therapists, local agency representatives, and any others as needed (Trach, 2012; Wells et al., 2012). Team members need to have knowledge about the student so that the team is able to work together to determine what is best for the student (Whitby et al., 2013). Team members need to be committed to the team to help develop and ensure that the student is receiving the transition education they need to become successful adults (Wells & Sheehey, 2012).

Team members must collaborate throughout the whole process (Shaw, Dukes III, & Madaus, 2012). Frequent changes of team members can cause a breakdown in the collaborative process that must be present during the initial planning and throughout the student's remaining years of high school (Marshall et al., 2012). Marshall et al. (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study where administrators participated in surveys where the researchers asked basic background information such as age, grade level of students in the program, and other basic information. They also participated in interviews where researchers asked them to define transition, identify the biggest influence on transition and the biggest barrier to transition (Marshall et al., 2012). Quantitative data gathered through the survey were analyzed using SPSS but were not used for statistical information as the purpose of the study was to describe their perspectives on transition

and barriers to transition. Qualitative data gathered through the interviews were coded by the researchers and analyzed for common themes found within. They found that administrators perceived a lack of collaboration among team members as being a major barrier for the success of transition planning and, ultimately, the success of the student's transition from school-to-work (Marshall et al., 2012). The team must collaborate and in a way that reviews the transition program so that it ensures that the student's needs are continually being met (Webb et al., 2014). As the student progresses through the transition process through school, their needs may change, as they determine specific career goals and become more proficient in different skill areas (Peterson, et al., 2013). The team must work together to ensure that the student has access to different activities that change as they progress through school (Webb, et al., 2014). They should not continually participate in the same activities or services. The experiences and services need to be embedded in the academic process and be connected to real-world situations (HartBarnett & Crippen, 2014). The team decides which activities and courses the student will take over their final years of high school and must be able to work together successfully to ensure that the transition education program is structured in a way that will provide the student with the opportunity to access the skills needed to be successful. Continual collaboration is needed to ensure that students are continuing to work towards meeting their transition goals.

It is important that all team members understand federal requirements for transition education and also be familiar with what is available in the local school district and community (Cawthon & Caemmerer, 2014; Flannery & Hellemn, 2015; Whitby et

al., 2013). Without this knowledge, developing a transition plan for a student could become difficult. The plan could be useless for fostering student growth as the services and skills that are determined as being necessary for the student may not be available to be taught or experienced in the way the team intended when making the plan. Each team member has a specific job during the planning and should have a solid knowledge of what their role is and what they are to do (Menear & Davis, 2015; Riesen et al., 2014; Trach, 2012). According to research done by Menear & Davis (2015), when each team member understands their roles, the outcomes for the student are better. In a look at team member roles, Menear & Davis (2015) discovered that when team members are unclear on their roles, they are unable adequately plan for a student's future. The following few paragraphs contain a brief description of each team member's role.

### **Special Education Teacher**

The special education teacher should provide the paperwork and guidance in the area of special education issues and provide assistance to the student as they lead the meeting (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2015; Wells et al., 2012). The special education teacher should do all he or she can to ensure that everyone is comfortable at the meeting and understands what their role is in transition planning and the transition program (Wells & Sheehey, 2012). The special education teacher provides information on supports needed by the student, learning styles, data from assessments, and other important information (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2015).



**Student**

The student should be the focus of the team (Wells & Sheehey, 2012). In a case study involving a Japanese-American male student, aged 13, Wells et al. (2012) found that while the student was a part of the planning team, the student did not participate in the planning for his future. The student should be engaged in the planning process from start to finish. Hagner et al. (2014) did a mixed-methods study on person-centered planning with the purpose of providing more information for students that explains the value of their participation in their transition planning and IEP team meetings. Person-centered planning involves having the student as the centered focus in the planning process, with the student playing a major role in the planning (Hagner et al. 2014). In their study, Hagner et al., tier (2014) used observations and team meeting to gather data. They found that students who participate in their planning meetings feel like their plans are more meaningful and reflect their goals for their future. While this is often difficult to make happen, the student is who the plan is about and should always be a major part of creating the plan and providing input on what activities they feel will assist them in reaching their goals. IDEA (2004) mandates that students be invited to their individualized education plan (IEP) meetings, if appropriate. At transition age, the student should always been involved, as the plan is focused on their wants, wishes, desires, and hopes for their future (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2015).

**Parents.**

The parents are a required member of the team (IDEA, 2004). Parents have information on their child that educators may not be privy to (Center for Parent

Information and Resources, 2015). Parents help guide the team in making decisions about the student's future. Parents provide insight to what their child says and does at home and can voice concerns they have about their child's future.

### **General Education Teachers**

General education teachers should provide information on how the student performs academically (Wells et al., 2012). Wells et al., 2012), did a case study to determine how well the transition education team and/or the individualized education team worked together to plan the students education and transition plan. The case study used a questionnaire that asked questions based on a 5-point scale (Wells et al., 2012). Through the study, the researchers found that the general education teacher provided some information about the student but did not offer vast input for the plan (Wells et al., 2012). They did, however, provide a look at how the student was doing in the general education classroom. IDEA (2004) mandates that at least one general education teacher should be a part of the team. The teacher should have knowledge of the student's abilities and provide information on what helps the student function best in the general education setting (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2015).

### **Service Providers**

The service providers provide information on different therapies the student is involved in and can provide information to help the team understand what services may be appropriate for the student, based on physical abilities (Wells et al., 2012). Service providers are those who provide speech therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, or any other services or therapy that the student receives while in school (Center for

Parent Information and Resources, 2015). In the case study done by Wells et al., (2012), the speech pathologist provides vast information about the student's strengths and weakness in communication. This information was vital in the plan that the team made for the student (Wells et al., 2012). Service providers can provide information that may not be accessible or known to the special education or general education teacher. They are a valuable part of the team that provides a look from a service standpoint versus an academic perspective. Not all student receive services at school, thus not every team will have service providers.

### **Local Agency Representatives**

Local agency representatives should be invited and included as part of the team because they provide information about community/school partnerships that could assist the student in meeting their goals through programs that can be done within the school and outside the school (Wells et al., 2012). Local agencies are a major resource when looking at transition education program options. Many local agencies have resources readily available to help students meet their transition education goals (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2015). These agencies may provide information about adult services that can provide assistance to the student after they leave high school, information on different education or training opportunities for the students, or information on independent living skills (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2015). Local agencies can help schools set up school-to-work programs, mentorships, job training, and many other programs that can aid students in meeting their transition goals.

**Administrator**

Another required member of the team is a representative of the school system (IDEA, 2004). For most schools, this is an administrator (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2015). Administrators provide guidance about what services and programs are available at the school and provide funding, time, and approval of activities and programs (Lynch, 2012; Trach, 2012; Wells & Sheehey, 2012; Wells et al., 2012). Administrators have knowledge of the financial constraints of the school, along with what curriculum and programs are already in place (Center for Parent Information and Resources, 2015). This allows them to guide the decision-making when it comes to determining if new programs are needed and how much money can be invested into new and current programs at the school (Trach, 2012). All of the team members are equally important and members should be knowledgeable about the student, transition planning, and what type of services and activities are available at the school so a program can be developed to help the student meet their transition plan goals.

**Perceptions of Team Members on Transition**

Effective transition planning should drive what services and activities the student participates in as they go through high school (Daviso et al., 2011). The entire team needs to have a clear view as to how the transition program will aid the student in having a successful future. Perceptions of most team members are positive when it comes to the transition program the students' are participating in. Several researchers found that teachers perceive the support of their administrators as vital to the success of the program (Riesen et al., 2014). The perceptions of both teachers and administrators on the process

and program are essential to how the program operates (Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Swedeen, & Owens, 2010). Teacher perceptions have been seen as positive towards transition education, although some teachers indicated that additional support is needed from administrators in order for their programs to be more successful (Pickens & Dymond, 2015). The perceptions of the team are crucial to the success of the student. Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehring (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study to determine student and administrator perceptions of the transition process for students with disabilities placed in alternative settings. In their study, they found that both students and administrators often focus on the barriers that hinder the transition process, with administrators citing lack of collaboration as the biggest barrier. Students cited lack of relationships among peers and adults as the major hindrance to successful transition planning. These students felt that when they had positive relationships with those around them, their chances of success in school-to-work transition were greater. Administrators perceived the collaboration among team members as being the key to success for transition of students with disabilities. Webb, et al. (2014), found that if the student had a positive perception of the transition process and transition program, they appear to have higher success rates than those students who have a less favorable perception of the transition process.

### **Administration and Transition Education Programs**

One team member that is crucial to the success of the transition education program is the administrator. In a case study conducted by DeMatthews & Mawhinney (2014), they found that administrators are able to enact change by the way they respond

to issues as they come up and how they lead the school. DeMatthews & Mawhinney (2014) studied how administrators' actions, values, and beliefs affected how they deal with conflicts and change within their schools. The researchers found that the decisions that administrators make directly affect how change is dealt with in schools (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). The administrator is the person who handles budgets and funding for different programs and curriculums in a school (Leader-Janssen et al., 2012; Lynch; Muse & Abrams, 2011). Administrators guide the school climate (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). The administrator sets the tone of how something is accepted and viewed (Bakken & Smith, 2011). According to Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns (2013), administrators have a major influence over decisions that are made within the school. Administrators have authority when it comes to funding for programs and projects, acceptance or rejection of programs, people, ideas, values and more (DeMatthews, & Mawhinney, 2014). Administrators control what kinds of programs and curriculum is offered within a school, thus they can determine what transition activities and services are available within the school (Lynch, 2012; Muse & Abrams, 2011).

The values and ideology of the administrators in charge of a school can have influence on how administrators view programs and activities within their schools (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). Sullivan & Downey found in their study that a program makes changes when the leader is a promoter of change. Their qualitative study focused on changing educational paradigms in a school (Sullivan & Downey, 2015). Administrators and teachers were interviewed to determine their perspectives of barriers and successes could be found when a program experiences a major change (Sullivan &

Downey, 2015). They found that for the change to happen, others needed to have a strong leader that promotes change and is not afraid for people to be angry with them (Sullivan & Downey, 2015). In their study, one study participant said that everyone needs someone to be angry at when a change is taking place (Sullivan & Downey, 2015). This helps them cope with what is happening.

Administrators are held accountable to meet federal and state mandates; therefore, they are accountable for ensuring that students with disabilities have access to a transition education program that provides them the skills they will need to be successful (Muse & Abrams, 2011). All members of the transition planning team are equally important but administrators hold a key place in that they control what happens at the school and can determine what activities and services are actually available to the students.

Administrators are a major part of the transition planning team (DeMatthews, & Mawhinney, 2014; Muse & Abrams, 2011). With this influence, they can determine what is and is not available for students. If administrators do not have a clear understanding of what transition is and how crucial these experiences are that students are supposed to be receiving in the transition education program, then, they may not see specific services or curriculums or partnerships as important. They must have a clear understanding of what is needed for the students to be successful and the importance of transition education (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Flannery & Hellemn, 2015; Wells & Sheehey, 2012). Administrators need to have knowledge of what they are being asked to support and provide funding for (Gulcan, 2011). Administrator support is crucial and is often cited as

one of the top reasons programs do not succeed (Berry et al., 2012; Cancio, et al., 2013; Gulcan, 2011; Pickens & Dymond, 2015).

Administrators provide support to teachers in providing services and programs to students (Bettini, Cheyney, Wang, & Leko, 2014; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014). DeMatthews & Mawhinney (2014) found that administrators provide support by being engaged in the programs offered at their school and being prepared by understanding what the programs are about. Administrators can have an effect on student performance, depending upon the support the administrator provides and the importance the administrator places on specific activities (Green, 2015). Administrators need to show flexibility (Green, 2015). Flexibility and willingness to learn information about what programs are available and what could be done differently or added could assist the administrators when they attend transition planning meetings and when they are approached by teachers to add or create a new program or activity in their schools. Researchers have found that leaders of any kind of organization need to show flexibility in understanding personal beliefs and values, personal needs, and varying environments within the organization for effective planning and leadership (Castaneda & Bateh, 2013).

Administrators are a vital part of the transition team; a part that often determines what services are available to the students. Administrators often lack understanding of the roles of teachers in special education and what needs to be provided to students with disabilities to help them succeed (Ruppar, Roberts, & Olson, 2015). Administrators often do not understand the needs of the students, thus creating a barrier to being able to provide proper services (Manthey, Goscha, & Rapp, 2015; Williams, Pazey, Shelby, &



Yates, 2013). Administrators need to understand students' needs and how important transition planning and programming is for the students' future.

Administrator perceptions of situation can play a major role in decision-making. According to Williams, Pazey, Fall, Yates, & Roberts (2015), principal perceptions play a major role in what decisions are made. Their study focused on discipline, however, they found that how the administrators are perceived by others and how the administrator perceives who they are working with, either parent, student, or teacher, affects what decisions are made and why they are made (Williams et al., 2015). Administrators' perceptions can have a major effect on what happens within a school.

Support from administrators for transition education programs is critical so it is vital to understand why administrators are not giving more support to transition education programs. There has not been much research done to determine what administrators think about transition education and how important it is for students with disabilities. Teachers have indicated that they feel they are not receiving the support they need from their administrators (Cancio, et al., 2013). The perceptions of students, parents, and teachers have been studied but little is available about the perceptions of administrators on transition, other than the research done by Marshall et al. (2012). While administrators are viewed as an important member of the transition team, little research has been done to determine their perceptions of transition programs. The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand school administrators' perceptions of transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood. To make a change in what is happening, it is important to

understand where administrators stand on transition education and see what their perceptions are on transition education. In order for a change to be made, a baseline of where administrators stand needs to be found.

### **Transition Issues**

With the transition plan in place and the team working towards ensuring that the student receives the right transition education program to help them meet their goals, students with disabilities should be receiving ample education to help them be successful as adults; however, this is not the case. Students with disabilities are often behind their peers in academics and life skills (Brewer et al., 2011; Lindstrom, et al., 2011; Riesen, et al., 2014; Laron, et al., 2011). According to Shogren & Plotner (2012), schools are not meeting requirements in actual transition service delivery, even though they appear to be compliant on paper. They found that many schools have transition goals that are uniform among students and the services provided are not meeting the individual needs of the students (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). While schools may appear to be meeting federal requirements on paper, the actual practices in the schools are often very different than what is being reported.

Trach (2012) found that students who have a transition plan in place and receive transition education are still not prepared for life beyond high school. When their employment status or educational enrollment is compared to that of their peers without disabilities, they are performing significantly below their peers (Webb, et al., 2014). Many students with disabilities are without employment or are not achieving in higher education or vocational training (HartBarnett & Crippen, 2014). These students are more

likely to be unemployed or at least be underpaid (Bartholomew, et al., 2015; Burgess & Cimera, 2014). Flannery & Hellemn (2015) found that students with disabilities are showing improved outcomes in employment and education, but are still performing at levels way below their peers without disabilities. In fact, students with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed or employed but working for much less money and/or benefits than their peers without disabilities (Flannery & Hellemn, 2015). This indicates that despite federal mandates that say students with disabilities must receive transitional education while in high school those students are not prepared to face life after high school. They are unprepared for the workplace or for vocational, technical, or higher education. They are unemployed, underemployed, or failing out of higher education (Carter et al., 2010; Williamson et al., 2010). Despite years of federal and state mandates, problems still exist in getting students with disabilities equipped to be successful after high school.

Researchers cannot agree on a specific cause as to why students are not prepared; however, they do agree that there is a problem (Riesen et al., 2014; Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Trach, 2012; Williamson, Robertson, & Casey, 2010). One reason may be a lack of knowledge of transition education and planning (Test et al., 2015). Test et al., (2015) found in a review of literature that knowledge of transition planning, activities, and programs along with best practices is crucial when it comes to implementing transition plans and programs that help students with disabilities be successful.

Some researchers say communication among team members is not strong; therefore, causing a breakdown in the success of the team (Marshall et al., 2012). In the

mixed-methods study done by Marshall et al. (2012), a lack of effective communication among team members was a major barrier according to administrators. The mixed-methods study asked administrators to identify what they perceived as the major barrier to successful transition (Marshall et al., 2012). Most administrators cited the lack of effective communication among team members about a student as the biggest barrier (Marshall et al., 2012).

Another researcher points to perceptions of team members as a reason that transition education is not successful for students (Carter, et al., 2010). Other researchers mention that lack of training and time impedes the effectiveness of transition planning and program delivery (Luft & Huff, 2011). Another group of researchers pointed to lack of administrator support as the reason for programs not being successful in education (Carter et al., 2010; Gulcan, 2012; Pickens & Dymond, 2015; Riesen, et al., 2014).

The lack of effective programs and services available in the school and community can be a barrier to creating an effective, individualized transition plan (Whitby, et al., 2013). There are times when special education teachers must approach administrators to ask for support for new programs or services that will help a student meet their transition goals; however, many of these teachers feel uneasy about asking their district to provide additional services (Whitby et al., 2013).

Administrators look at what is best for the whole student body versus what is best for individual students (Green, 2015). This lack of individualization, due to lack of support from administrators, causes difficulty in planning for effective, individualized transition education (Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Whitby et al., 2013). Manthey et al.,

(2015) determined that barriers often exist for administrators in terms of not enough funding to go around. Administrators are often unable to find enough funding to begin or continue a practice or program (Manthey et al., 2015). This alone can keep a needed service out of a school. Each of the reasons can cause the team to lose cohesiveness, thus losing effectiveness in planning and providing the transition education that the student needs. For the objective of this study, the focus was on administrators and the support they provided to the transition education programs.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Transition education is required by federal law and is an important component of a student's with disabilities transition plan (Canha et al., 2013; Well, Sheehey, & Moore, 2012). Transition education programs are the way that the students receive access to the services and skills indicated in their transition plans as needed for success after high school (Canha, et al., 2013; Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Key stakeholders must collaborate together to create and maintain a proper program that provides what the student needs. Administrators are a major part of the team and provide funding and programming decisions that can dictate what services and activities are available to the student within a school (DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Leader-Janssen et al., 2012). Perceptions of most stakeholders have been positive about transition programs; however, teachers, in particular, have pointed to a lack of support from administrators as being a major barrier to successful planning (Berry et al., 2012; Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Pickens & Dymond, 2015). Teachers have indicated that administrators can determine

what services they can offer to their students and if the administrators do not provide much support, then the services they can offer may be limited (Green, 2015).

There has been limited research on how administrators view transition education programs in their schools. To fill the gap, I examined administrators' attitudes and opinions about transition education. Gaining this understanding may add to the understanding of how all team members view transition education. The perceptions of parents, teachers, and even related services providers have been investigated but not administrators. Once administrator attitudes and opinions are understood, team members can then understand what needs to be done to foster good working relationships for all team members involved in transition planning, as gaining understanding as to why another person feels the way they do can open communication to foster change.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand the attitudes of school administrators—whose programs met the state set requirement for the transition Indicator 14—on transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood. This chapter contains an explanation of the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, issues of trustworthiness, and a summary.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The research question was “What are the opinions and attitudes of administrators towards transition education programs for high school students with disabilities?” This study was conducted using a qualitative interview study design. An interview study allowed me to ask in-depth questions that provided participants’ views and beliefs about a specific idea or experience (Turner, 2010). For example, one group of researchers used an interview study to get an in-depth depiction of interactions between parents who had lost an infant and the hospital staff (Downes, Schmidt, Kingdon, & Heazell, 2013). I used an interview design to get an in-depth understanding of how six administrators felt about transition education programs. A phenomenological study was considered but rejected because the study required a focus that a phenomenological case study could not provide. Other qualitative methods were considered but rejected as the best fit for this study to determine beliefs and perceptions of participants was an interview study. Other qualitative methods such as a case study or grounded theory did not provide the

flexibility in design to obtain the information that was sought through this study.

Quantitative methods would not have worked for this study because the purpose was to determine perceptions of participants, which are difficult to be derived from numbers.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher in an interview study is to gain knowledge from the participants. I recruited participants from selected school sites after gaining IRB approval and site approval from superintendents for each district. I was responsible for observing body language and participant behavior during interviews. I asked probing questions that elicited ample information from the participant to fully understand the participants' perceptions of transition education. I was responsible for transcribing all the material from the interviews. I analyzed all data and accurately reported the conclusions that were derived from the data.

### **Methodology**

In this section, I discuss participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection, and the data analysis plan. These components are important to discuss to show how the study was done. These provided a roadmap for me to follow in conducting the study.

#### **Participant Selection**

I used purposeful sampling to determine the participants for this study. Purposeful sampling allowed me to choose participants based on specific criteria so that the attitudes and opinions could be studied in more detail (see Patton, 2002). I used statistical data showing how many students were receiving postsecondary education or were employed



to determine which schools would be chosen for this study. Two schools were chosen according to the percentage of students who are determined to be attending postsecondary training at a vocational/technical school, attending a 2- or 4-year college, or who are otherwise employed based on reported data from the ARP (Arkansas Department of Education, Special Education Unit, 2014). I chose school districts from the ARP, then I identified administrators by finding those who oversee schools with transition education programs. In Arkansas, the target percentage of students who were employed or pursuing a postsecondary education was 60.15%. The school sites were chosen by selecting two schools that have met the state target percentage and have a similar rate of at least 60.15%.

The goal was to interview all administrators who are involved with transition education at each school site, with a target goal of three to four administrators from each site. Two school sites were chosen for participation. At each site, I interviewed at least three administrators who were involved in or oversee a school with a transition education program. While the sample size was small with six participants, the purpose of the study was to determine attitudes and opinions of administrators on transition education programs in their schools. The administrators at each site provided data on their attitudes and opinions of transition education programs. Understanding the administrators' attitudes helped answer the research question for this study. The data collected from the two sites was enough to provide the opinions of the administrators on the programs in their schools. While the sample size was small, the goal was to get in-depth information on the opinions of administrators at these schools. In an example study, researchers were

able to collect enough data from 20 participants, using purposeful sampling to determine how well teachers at three South African schools understood standards that they were implementing (Lungi & Nomlomo, 2014). Though I had a smaller sample size for my study, it allowed me to dig deeper into the perceptions of the few participants to get a better understanding of administrator beliefs and perceptions.

### **Instrumentation**

Interviews were the primary method of data collection for this study. The interviews were broken up into two different face-to-face interviews. Doing two separates allowed me to delve deeper with each administrator while not taking up too much time at a given session. A follow-up interview to answer any remaining questions or for any clarifications was considered but not deemed necessary after data analysis. The interview questions were produced by me. Interviews with administrators were used to determine their opinions of transition education programs for high school students with disabilities. These interviews allowed me to gather data on attitudes of administrators about the transition programs in the schools.

The interview questions were open-ended questions that allowed for the participants to expound on what they know about transition education. Both interviews began with basic questions about the participants' knowledge of transition and transition education programs. There were specific questions that were asked to all participants, and probing questions were used to provide a clarification to an answer or to gather a deeper understanding of what the participant was trying to say in his or her response. Questions were based on how the interviewees viewed transition education and how their school

does with transition education. These questions were designed to determine administrators' attitudes and opinions on transition. Here are the questions I asked participants:

Interview 1 Questions:

1. When you think of transition education, what do you think of?
2. Explain which students you think need transition education.
3. Thinking about those students you said need transition education, what is it about those students that make you think they need transition education?
4. What is your view on how important transition education is for students with disabilities?
5. Thinking about the transition education program in your school, what kinds of things are students taught in that program?
6. What skills do you believe should be included to have a perfect transition education program?
7. Explain what most students do once they graduate from high school or leave the high school setting.

Interview 2 Questions:

8. How successful do you think your transition education program is?
9. Thinking about your answer to question 8, what makes you think that?
10. What kind of support do you provide for the transition education program in your school?

11. Explain how you are involved with the transition education program?  
What kind of input do you provide?
12. What improvements do you think your transition education program needs?
13. What are the strengths of your transition education program? What are some weaknesses?
14. What barriers do you encounter when dealing with your transition education program?
15. What do you view your role is within the transition education program?
16. Explain your value as a member of the transition education program.

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

Once I chose the school sites and IRB approval was given by the university and the local IRB (Approval #03-14-17-0060555), I contacted the superintendent via phone call to receive permission to interview the administrators who oversee schools with transition-age students in the school. The administrators were middle school and high school administrators that may not work directly with the students with disabilities but are in charge of the daily operations of the school and over the programs within the school. Participants were recruited through e-mail invitations and follow-up phone calls. There was no monetary compensation for participating in this study. I explained that the purpose was to help further transition education in the state of Arkansas through continuing research on how to improve transition education based on attitudes and opinions of stakeholders, in this case administrators.

Upon receiving permission from the superintendent of the selected school district, I contacted the participants and set up an interview time within a 2-week time frame. The participants were contacted through an e-mail invitation that was sent to their school district e-mail address retrieved from the district website. Within the e-mail invitation, a brief description of the study was given along with what was expected of the participant (i.e., interview). Phone calls were used to follow up with participants to establish a researcher-participant relationship and to inform the participants of how data was to be collected.

The interview protocol was divided into two interviews. In interview 1, I covered questions 1 through 7, which gathered basic knowledge of the participants' understanding of transition education and what skills they felt should be involved in a transition education program. In interview 2, I reminded the participants of their answers from the first interview and then continued with questions 8 through 16. These questions were more focused on the participants' perceptions of the transition education program at their schools and their views of the level of support they provide for that program. The participants were informed of the interview location, which was quiet and private for the interview. I explained to each participant that participation in this study may advance research on transition education and help provide information that may further delineate roles in the transition education team and help provide a better transition education experience for students with disabilities. Participants were provided with a consent form prior to the start of the interview. This structure was so that data could be

collected in a timely manner and the participants were not asked to give up much of their time. The timeframe for total data collection was no longer than a month.

Data was collected through two face-to-face interviews. The purpose of using face-to-face interviews was so I could speak directly to the participant to not only hear what they were saying but to also record their body language during the interview. Each interview was recorded with an audio device after permission was gained from the participant so that I could ensure complete data collection from each interview. I took notes during the interview on what was said, participant body language, and any other conditions that arose during the interview (i.e., interruptions, weather, etc.). According to Patton (2002), body language is as important to qualitative data collection as the verbal data. Body language can speak to how the participant is feeling throughout the interview and provide another level of understanding of what the person is thinking. Once the participant completed the interview, they were thanked for their participation and offered the opportunity to review the data once it has been synthesized and reviewed. Each individual could only review information that they provided. Participants were provided a summary of the study once it was completed. The school sites were provided a one-page summary of the study once it was completed.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

The data was reviewed through transcriptions of recorded interviews as well as reviewing notes taken during the interviews. As I reviewed the data it was analyzed using codes that were developed by me to organize information. Codes were developed during the analysis of the data. Several different types of codes were developed, including value

codes that allowed codes to be developed based on the beliefs of the participant, and process codes, which were used to code the overall basis of the interviews (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Codes came from information found during the interviews and were based on commonalities that emerged during the analysis of the data. I used codes to help organize data into emerging themes as they arose. I coded by hand, as this was my preferred method. Using codes allows the research to be organized into smaller areas of information that are easier to report on and allow for assumptions to be made about that data (Miles et al., 2014). Some data did not fit into a specific code that was similar to the other data collected. This discrepant data was described as such and given its own code for reporting. While there are many programs that are useful for coding data, my preference was to hand code using highlighters and note cards to place the data into different categories as the themes arose. Once the data was coded, I organized the information into themes that emerged and drew conclusions from those themes. Any outliers were explained.

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

The data collected was based on individual attitudes and opinions of participants. The assumption for this study was that the participants were truthful in the information they provided during interviews. The data was analyzed by the researcher and the researcher put aside personal opinion and biases and analyze the data according to what was said during the interviews.

Credibility of results is important when doing a qualitative study. Credibility refers to the information from the participants being believable by those who read it

(Patton, 2002). To help ensure that the participants were all satisfied that the results are what they believe, they were asked to review the data analysis after completion to ensure that I accurately reported their perceptions as garnered in the interview. Using this member check helped guarantee that correct information was reported to help establish credibility of the research.

Transferability refers to how well the results of this study can be transferred or used in another setting (Moustakas, 1994). In order to allow for transferability, I needed to use explanations that provided descriptive information to describe what I did and how. By using the same selection criteria, the results from the study were able to be transferable to other similar programs in other southern states. The data collected was described using as much detail as possible so that accurate information was reported.

Dependability of a qualitative research study relies on the research accounting for the constant changes within the research environment (Moustakas, 1994). I provided audit trails that could be followed and records of every interview that was done during the study. Journals detailing each interview, along with my reflections were kept and stored. In the journal, I described the interview settings for each interview as completely and richly as I could. I provided as much detail about the atmosphere and body language as possible.

Confirmability means that I need to be able to show that I was not biased while gathering data or analyzing that data during this study (Moustakas, 1994). I kept an ongoing reflective journal that documented how I collect data and did analysis. I provided reflections before, during, and after data collection and analysis to document my process,



procedures, thoughts, and ideas. To add in providing confirmability, I documented the procedures used to check data. I used both self-analysis and member check to ensure that I was accurately reporting the data given by participants.

### **Ethical Procedures**

I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval before doing any data collection. Upon approval, I contacted participants as described above. Any data obtained from participants during the study was stored in a locked file cabinet in my in-home office for safe keeping for five years before being destroyed. An electronic file was kept on a jump drive which will require a password before being viewed, which will be kept and will be destroyed after five years. My goal for this study was to honestly report what information was given to me during data collection. All names of districts and participants was identified by code names only. There was a list presented to the IRB with original school names along with identifying code names. This list was stored in a locked file cabinet to which I am the only one who has access or a key.

### **Summary**

Choosing the correct methodology for this study was critical in the success of the research. The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand school administrators' attitudes and opinions of transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood, whose programs are deemed as successful by meeting the state set requirement for the transition Indicator 14. In order to gather data and examine it for understanding, the proper population had to be chosen to provide an appropriate amount of data to be studied. Using the current data

available on post-school outcomes from Arkansas schools, I found a population that was similar to one another to help ensure validity and stability of results. While there was no set amount of data that was needed, the goal was to gather enough data to provide a picture of what was happening in transition programs at each school and what the administrator attitudes and opinions were at each school. The data was coded and analyzed to see if any common themes emerged and conclusions were drawn from the analysis. Codes were developed as needed during data analysis. As a researcher, it was my duty to honestly report the findings from the data collected. The next chapter will report the data collection and analysis.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand the opinion of school administrators—with successful programs as determined by the state requirement for the transition Indicator 14—on transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood. Indicator 14, a transition indicator from IDEA that must be followed, uses data to determine if schools are successful in transition education based on how many students are in the workforce or postsecondary education 1 year after high school graduation. Two separate interviews were completed with six different administrators to determine their attitudes and opinions of transition education programs for students with disabilities. The results of the interviews were analyzed to determine what the administrator attitudes and opinions were. This chapter includes an analysis of those results along with a description of the setting, demographics, data collection procedures, data analysis process, and evidence of trustworthiness of the study.

### **Setting**

In this qualitative study, participants were high school level administrators at schools where the transition education programs were deemed to be successful based on the annual performance report data from the state. The data were determined by looking at Indicator 14 and the 60.15% that Arkansas used to determine if schools were meeting the requirements of that indicator. These administrators were interviewed in their offices at their schools to ensure convenience and comfort for the administrators. The

administrators set the time of each interview so that the interviews were at a time suitable for them to cause them the least amount of disruption to their days. The offices were quiet and there were few interruptions during each interview.

### **Demographics**

From each school site, three administrators agreed to be interviewed. The sites were average sized school districts, with between 800-1,000 students in grades 9-12. The sites were located in urban areas. The schools were both low income schools with over 75% of the school population living at or below the poverty level. Each of the administrators interviewed were in some way involved with the transition education program at their school. Six administrators, who have been administrators at their schools for more than 2 years, participated in this study.

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected from six different administrators, three from each school site, using two different interview sessions. Each interview lasted approximately 20-30 minutes, with seven questions asked during the first interview and nine questions asked during the second interview. Probing questions were asked to clarify information or when an answer of “I don’t know” was given. Data were recorded on an audio recorder that is also a thumb drive, which is where the data will be stored until it is destroyed after 5 years. Collection went smoothly, with all participants seeming at ease during interviews. Data were collected according to the data plan detailed in Chapter 3, with the exception of interview question 13. This question was asked during the second interview. While interviewing the first participant, I found that asking the question as written was too

much, as it had to be repeated for the participant to answer both parts. The first participant answered the second part of the question about program weaknesses first and then said, “Can you repeat the question?” This question was broken into two questions instead of being asked together because it addressed strengths and weaknesses of the transition education program. After the first interview this question became question 13, part 1 and question 13, part 2 for the remaining interviews. During data collection, I took notes on participant body language throughout the interview. The data on body language is discussed during data analysis. This data was written in a notebook, as described in data collection procedures in Chapter 3.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis involved listening to the data and writing down information to develop codes. For each interview question, I developed codes. Some codes were used for multiple questions because they stood for the same information. Other codes are specific to the interview question. These codes were developed as the recorded information was listened to. The codes that were developed were:

- S = support
- T = talking, communication
- AS = all students
- SS = skills needed
- SWD = students with disabilities
- OAG = outcomes after graduation
- BG = before graduation

- Con = consistency
- DN = don't know, no answer, no idea
- F = families
- HV = high value
- LV = low value

Each comment for each interview question received a code from the list in above. These codes allowed for the data to be organized according to administrator thought or opinion. The codes are discussed throughout the next paragraphs to define what each stood for through data analysis.

Support from administrators to teachers or the transition education program was coded with an S. Items were coded with S if support of any kind of was mentioned. Support may have referred to financial support, physical support, emotional support, or any other kind of support that was mentioned by participants. This code helped bring all support data together, where it was further broken into groups based on the type of support offered. Students with disabilities was coded as SWD whenever mentioned by participants, while AS was the code used when participants mentioned all students. This helped to determine when participants were talking specifically about students with disabilities and when they were talking about all students in general. Using these two codes helped organized the data into specific groups. Before graduation was coded BG. This was mentioned several times by different participants; therefore, I felt that it was important enough to provide a code for. The information in this group was all about before graduation. The real world was another word mentioned several times. I coded this

RW. The information in this group talked about life in the real world, preparing the students for the real world, and so on. Three of the participants brought up the personnel they have in place at their schools during the interview. With the frequency of personnel being mentioned, I used the code P for personnel. Whenever a participant made a comment about their personnel, it was placed in the group coded P.

The answer of “don’t know” was given by three different participants. These answers were coded at DN and considered outlier data. The participants answered questions but some did not have an answer at the time or simply did not know something about the question being asked. I did ask probing questions, trying to get the participant to provide some kind of information. One participant stated that they would get back to me with an answer later but never responded to the e-mail. The other two participants did not have knowledge of the part of the program for which they provided the answer of “I don’t know.”

The code F was used for families. Anytime a participant mentioned families in any way the comment was coded with an F. This allowed me to look at the perceptions of administrators on the family’s involvement in transition education. In one question I asked participants to describe their value on the transition education team. The codes of HV for high value and LV for low value were used to code this information. One code may have worked, but I wanted the information to be broken down so two different codes were used. Talking was coded as T; this stood for any comment that mentioned communication. This referred to communication among team members, between families and the school, families and the administrator, or any other communication that was

mentioned. Skills needed was coded at SS; this code allowed me to group comments that mentioned skills that students need to learn through transition education programs or what participants felt that students needed to know after high school. This group contained items such as soft skills, adaptive behavior skills, communication skills, and more. Outcomes after graduation was coded at OAG; this grouping allowed me to organize the data that mentioned all the different outcomes that the participants said their former students were involved in after graduation. In this grouping, I placed data about postsecondary education, military involvement, careers/work, sheltered workshops, homemakers, and other comments about outcomes for students after graduation. Consistency was coded as Con. I used this code to organize data that talked about being consistent with the program. Some data in this grouping talked about consistency within the program, consistency with personnel, or consistency with participation in the program. Using this code helped me analysis this data into specific groups.

Some data collected fell into several different coded groups. This information was placed in the different groups, regardless of how many times it was used. Using codes helped me organize the data into understandable, analyzable information. As the codes were organized, general themes began to emerge. These groups became larger groups, with support becoming the biggest area of comments. Using the codes assisted with being able to see how all the data was connected and to determine what the administrators felt about transition education programs. Themes such as administrators being in support of transition education programs and most perceiving that transition education is important emerged quickly. Other themes included administrators looking at ways to improve their



transition education programs. All of the administrators indicated that their programs could use improvement. The administrators all declared that they provide support to the transition education programs and appeared to be supportive of the program in their school based on the answers to the interview questions. All administrators interviewed had knowledge of transition education and felt that transition education was important.

### **Body Language**

Throughout data collection, body language was recorded. All of the participants were interviewed in their own offices at their schools. Four of the administrators seemed at ease, while two appeared nervous. Those two exhibited body language such as rubbing their hands together, nervously wiping their hands on their pant legs, and looking anxious. The other four exhibited body language that was relaxed such as sitting back in their chairs, placing their hands on their stomachs, and looking at ease. Those administrators seemed to enjoy sharing their answers while the administrators who were nervous appeared to just want to get the interview over with.

### **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

Credibility refers to reported data from participants being realistic by those who read it. To establish credibility in this study, after interviews were completed the participants received a summary of their interview. Participants had the opportunity to provide feedback on their interview summaries to add information or to clarify something. None of the participants provided feedback; however, all participants did receive a summary of their interviews.

Transferability refers to the results being able to be shifted to another setting. To help establish transferability, the selection criteria for participants was described clearly. Data collection methods are clearly stated in this chapter to provide a rich understanding of how data was gathered. Data analysis methods are explained to give someone else the roadmap to complete data analysis in the same manner.

Dependability allows for the changes that happen during a study. For this study, I kept a journal that recorded body language, environments, atmosphere, and recorded any interruptions that happened during interviews. Through these records, I was able to account for any changes in the tone or demeanor of the participant.

Confirmability requires that the researcher remain unbiased throughout data collection and analysis. To ensure confirmability, I kept reflective journals to record any thoughts and ideas I had before the interviews, after the interviews, and during data analysis. I wrote down any idea that I had, whether it pertained to the study or not. This way, I could determine what biases I had before reporting results. By keeping this journal, I was able to see what the information provided by the participants was and what my own personal opinions were and separate the two during data reporting and analysis.

## **Results**

For this study, I had only one research question: What are the opinions and attitudes of administrators who work in schools with successful transition education programs toward transition education programs for high school students with disabilities? To address this question, two interviews were held. Questions asked in both interviews helped me discover the knowledge administrators hold in regard to transition education

and their views on transition education programs. Participants were labeled P1 through P6. As the data is reported, the participants' answers are reported using their label.

### **Interview 1**

Table 1 shows the results for the first interview. The results found in the table are discussed below in the paragraphs to disseminate the data. This interview focused on knowledge of transition and transition education. The answers to each question will be reported separately.

**Question 1.** With the first question, I asked participants what they thought of transition education. The answers varied; however, the overall theme was that transition education was moving from high school to life after high school. P1, P2, P 5, and P6 all mentioned that transition education meant “being able to transition kids from the classroom to a successful life, whatever that may be: college, work, career, home.” P3 and P4 stated that transition education is “teaching kids what they need to be independent after high school.” When participants were asked a follow up question of when should transition education start P1, P2, and P3 said “early,” before graduation. P3 specifically stated, “It should begin in kindergarten.”

Table 1

*Question 1*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Transition to Successful Life: whatever that may be	X	X			X	X
Teaching kids what they need to be successful			X	X		X
Start early: before they graduate	X	X	X			

**Question 2.** With the second question, I asked participants to explain which students they felt need transition education. P5 believed that transition education was only for students with disabilities. P2, P3, P4 and P6 stated that all students, general education and special education students need transition education. P1 indicated that it was only for the students with disabilities that “are able to” (do every day activities) and stated that “some aren’t good candidates; they just don’t have all the facilities about them to do it.” P1 was not in support of all students receiving transition education. This participant stated that they believed that “transition education should only be for those who could do well” with everyday activities and job skills. This opinion was not echoed by anyone else interviewed and is not viewed as the overall opinion or perception of the majority of the participants in the study. Overall, the opinion was that all students need transition education.

Table 2

*Question 2*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Only students with disabilities					X	
All students, both general education and special education		X	X	X		X
Students with disabilities who “can do well”	X					

**Question 3.** In question three, I asked participants to explain why they felt the way they do about those students they said need transition education. P4 stated that “we concentrate on academics and forget that these kids will need to go out in the real world and manage their lives.” P1, P5, and P6 believed that there is a “gap in the perception of what the real world is like and reality”, meaning that students perceive that life will be one day when, in reality, it is completely different. P2 stated that they know students need transition education because of “day to day conversations with students”. In these conversations, the participants said that the students indicate that they do not know what is available for them once they leave high school. P2 stated that the students “do not know how to access assistance, how to hook up utilities, or handle financial business.” P3 and P4 believed that students are unable to handle real world activities when they leave high school as a reason they feel that students need transition education, with one stating,

“They just don’t know how to handle situations”, because they “process things differently” than students without disabilities do.

Table 3

*Question 3*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Students are unable to handle the “real world”			X	X		
Observations of students who are unable to handle transition activities	X				X	X
Day to day conversations with students		X				

**Question 4.** In the fourth question, I asked participants to share their views on how important transition education is for students with disabilities. P 2, P3, P4, and P5 indicated they believed it was very important for students with disabilities to receive transition education. P6 stated, “Honestly, I don’t know that it is any more important for them than it is for the rest of the student body. It’s just who we focus on providing it for”. P1 stated that “everyone deserves a chance.” P1 went on to say that not all students will be successful but everyone should be provided the same opportunity to find success. The overall results were that the participants found it important; however, four out of the six participants said it was very important for students with disabilities.

Table 4

*Question 4*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Very important		X	X	X	X	
Not any more important than for general education students						X
Everyone deserves a chance	X					

**Question 5.** For question five, I asked participants to provide information on what skills are taught in the transition education programs at their schools. P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 indicated that communication, life skills, and soft skills were skills being taught as part of their programs. Specific skills mentioned by one participant were daily living skills, such as cooking, cleaning, and personal hygiene and job skills, such as interview skills, resumes, work attire, and time management. P3 also stated that their program was teaching students how to make choices and how to pass the driver's test. P4 stated that financial skills were being taught in their school's program. P6 stated that they were not sure what was being taught.

Table 5

*Question 5*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Communication, life skills, and soft skills	X	X	X	X	X	
Making choices and driver's test			X			
Financial skills				X		
Not sure						X

**Question 6.** In question six I asked participants to state what skills they believed should be included to have a perfect transition education program. Answers included soft skills, employer site visits, life skills, communication and communication skills, and all areas in adaptive behavior. P3 said these skills need to be taught “so kids can feel independent.”

Table 6

*Question 6*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Soft skills				X		
Employer site visits				X	X	
Life skills		X				X
Communication skills	X					
Areas in adaptive behavior (conceptual, practical, community, home living, self-care, social, functional academics, leisure, health and safety, self-direction, and work)			X			



**Question 7.** For the last question of the first interview, I asked participants to explain what most students do when they graduate from high school or leave the high school setting. P4 answered “They go to sheltered workshops, trade schools, junior college, but for the most part, they go to work.” This answer was repeated in a general way by all the participants. P5 stated some students “sit on their front porches, some go to jail, some do menial jobs.” All participants stated that some students do go on to college and most participants mentioned work or careers as what some students do after high school. P6 mentioned military as an option that some students choose when they leave high school. Overall, the perception was that students go on to college, trade school, work, or stay home.

Table 7

*Question 7*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
College	X	X	X	X	X	X
Careers		X	X	X	X	X
Trade School	X	X	X	X		
Stay home					X	
Sheltered Workshops		X		X		
Military						X

**Review of Interview Data**

The first interview provided valuable insight into what participants perceive transition education as and how they feel about transition education. The themes that emerged from question 1, which asked what the participants felt transition education was,

were that is was continue education after high school, independent living skills, transitioning from the classroom to a successful life. In question 2, the themes that emerged about which students need transition education were all students, start before student graduate/start early, and special needs students. In question 3, participants had to think about the students they said needed transition education and explain why they felt that way. The themes that emerged were students need to be able to manage the real work, there is a gap in the perception of what life is like, they process things differently, they don't know what is available, and there is a greater focus on academics and not real world learning. Participants felt that transition education was important for students and everyone deserves a chance. The themes that emerged from the question about what skills need to be taught were daily living skills, financial skills, job skills, communication, and driving test skills. The major theme of skills needed for a perfect transition program were soft skills, daily living skills and adaptive behavior skills. When asked what most students do after high school, the participants mostly stated that they do some kind of work, trade school, college, sheltered workshop, or sit at home. There was no discrepant data collected during this interview. Table 8 provides a look at what themes emerged from each interview question.

Table 8

*Interview 1 Questions and Emerging Themes*

Questions	Themes
Question 1: When you think of transition education, what do you think of?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing education after high school</li> <li>• Independent living skills</li> <li>• Transitioning from the classroom to a successful life</li> </ul>
Question 2: Explain which students you think need transition education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start before they graduate/start early</li> <li>• All students</li> <li>• Special needs students</li> </ul>
Question 3: Thinking about those students you said need transition education, what is it about those students that make you think they need transition education?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students need to be able to manage the real world</li> <li>• Gap in perception of what life is like</li> <li>• Process things differently</li> <li>• Don't know what is available</li> <li>• Focus on academics and not real world</li> </ul>
Question 4: What is your view on how important transition education is for students with disabilities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extremely important</li> <li>• No more important than for other students</li> <li>• Everyone deserves a chance</li> </ul>
Question 5: Thinking about the transition education program in your school, what kinds of things are students taught in that program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daily living skills</li> <li>• Financial: budgeting, pay bills, checkbooks, etc.</li> <li>• Job skills- resumes, interview, speaking</li> <li>• Don't know</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Driving test</li> <li>• Choice-making</li> </ul>
Question 6: What skills do you believe should be included to have a perfect transition education program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft skills- time management, job skills, people skills, etc.</li> <li>• Visit employer sites</li> <li>• Life Skills 101</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• All areas of adaptive behavior: conceptual, practical, community, home living, self-care, social, functional academics, leisure, health and safety, self-direction, work</li> </ul>
Question 7: Explain what most students do once they graduate from high school or leave the high school setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sheltered workshops</li> <li>• Work</li> <li>• College, community college, or trade school</li> <li>• Jail</li> <li>• Sit on front porch</li> <li>• Military</li> </ul>

## **Interview 2**

The second interview focused on the perception of the success of the transition education program at the participant's school. The questions asked things about how successful they viewed their programs to be, how involved they were with the program, what type of support they provide, and how valued they feel as part of the transition education program. Table 3 shows results for the second interview.

**Question 8.** To begin the interview, I asked how successful each participant felt their transition program at his or her school was. P1, P2, P5, and P6 stated that their programs were successful. P6 stated, "I think the transition process and fair goes over well. Not sure how successful it is in the getting kids transitioned to life". The participant was talking about an activity that is done through their transition education program to help students prepare for life after high school. While the participant stated a specific activity that they believed was successful, they were unsure of how that success aids the overall transition education program. P3 said "I wouldn't give it a top rating right now, but we are getting better". P4 stated that the program is only "as successful as the parents and students will let it be". Overall, participants indicated they had successful programs, however, a few felt that their programs needed work.

Table 9

*Question 8*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Successful	X	X			X	X
As successful as parents and students will let it				X		
Need work			X			

**Question 9.** For the next question, I asked participants to explain why they felt that their programs were successful. P3, P5, and P6 stated that they see students working in the community or going on to college and this lets them know that their transition program is working. P1 said “successful graduation rates” were what showed them their program was successful. P4 stated that parents only let the program be somewhat successful because they “don’t want kids to lose their checks”. When asked why they said that, the P4 said it comes up during meetings with parents. P2 indicated that their program was successful because of the personnel and “their goals and values and how much they want the kids to succeed”.

Table 10

*Question 9*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
See students working			X		X	X
Successful graduation rates	X					
Personnel		X				
Only as successful as parents will let it be				X		

**Question 10.** In question ten, I asked participants to describe what kind of support they provide for their transition education program. P1, P2, P5, and P6 reported providing whatever kind of support was needed. P1, and P6 specifically mentioned providing financial support. P1 stated they provide “anything I can”, from financial to emotional or mental. P3 stated they were “their mouth, the squeaking wheel”. They stated they talk to others to get what the transition education program needs to function and help students succeed. P4 reported that they are part of the weekly team meetings for the transition education program and they serve on several committees within the district and state, along with participating with community organizations to spread information about transition education programs and their needs.

Table 11

*Question 10*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Financial Support	X					X
Whatever is needed	X	X			X	X
Emotional/Mental Support	X					
Be their voice			X	X		

**Question 11.** In question eleven, I asked participants to explain how they are involved in the transition education program and what kind of input they provide. P4 said they are part of meetings and serve on boards and committees. P6 reported that the “LEA keeps me informed”. P2 and P3 said they pass on information that they learn to their lead teachers in the transition education program. P3 stated they help develop the district transition plan and provide financial input and guidance when it comes to deciding what opportunities are offered in the transition education program. P1 reported that the teachers take the lead but that they do their best to provide time for meetings, financial support and any other support needed by the teachers. P1 stated that “As long as I am here we will provide whatever they need.” P5 stated “I don’t really have an answer.”

Table 12

*Question 11*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Part of meetings				X		
Serve on boards				X		
Pass on information		X	X			
Develop transition plans			X			
Provide financial input and guidance			X			
Provide time for planning and meetings	X					
Any support needed	X					
LEA provides information						X
Don't know					X	



**Question 12.** With the twelfth question I asked participants to describe what improvements they felt were needed in their transition education program. P5 mentioned that their program needed better follow up on students. P2 and P4 wanted to see more community involvement. P2 and P3 believed that increased awareness of what opportunities are available was needed. P1 indicated that more support from the whole school district was needed, not just from the teachers and administrators at that particular school. P3 stated that “continual consistency” was needed for the program to improve. P6 believed the best improvement would be to expand transition education to students who do not receive special education services.

Table 13

*Question 12*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Follow up on students					x	
Community involvement		X		X		
More support	X					
Consistency			x			
Expand transition to all students (general education and special education)						X

**Question 13, part 1.** In the thirteenth question I asked the participants what strengths their transition education had. P2 and P4 believed strong teachers or good

teachers as a strong point of their programs. P3 believed their facilities were an asset, as they were set up to provide several opportunities for students. P1 said that the strength of their program was the students they graduate, stating, “They produce”. P2 stated that their program is always working to improve, to get better and that this was a strength for their program. P5 and P6 did not have an answer for strengths of their programs.

Table 14

*Question 13, part 1*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Strong/good teachers		X		X		
Facilities			X			
Students	X					
Always striving to improve		X				
Don't know					X	X

**Question 13, part 2.** In question thirteen, part two I asked participants to identify weaknesses of their transition education programs. P2 and P3 stated that low or a lack of parental involvement was a weakness. P1 and P2 stated a lack of funding or needing more funding was a weakness, as the program does not have all the resources needed to be completely effective. P3 stated a lack of good curriculum materials as a weakness of their transition education program. P4 believed that more a lack of follow through and prior planning were a weakness of their program. P6 stated that a weakness is that the program is limited to only students with disabilities. P6 said “We need to expand to others outside of special education”. P6, also, stated their program needed to collect more

data to be able to show growth. P6 stated “we need more hard data to see what kids are doing”. P5 stated “I don’t know any”.

Table 15

*Question 13, part 2*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Parental involvement		X	X			
Lack of funding	X	X				
Lack of quality curriculum materials			X			
Lack of follow through/prior planning				X		
Program is limited to students with disabilities only						X
Lack of data						X
Don’t know					X	

**Question 14.** With question fourteen, I asked participants what barriers they encounter when dealing with the transition education programs at their schools. P2 stated that getting information out to parents is a major struggle, “We could do better; society forgets about students with disabilities”. P3 stated that funding and time are the biggest barriers, as there is “only so much money and time in the day”. P4 stated that families could be a barrier, as they “don’t want to lose checks”. This same participant believed

that general education teachers can be a barrier if they don't "buy in" to participating in transition education. P5 and P6 indicated that they had not encountered any barriers or could not think of any at the time of the interview. P1 said that each day is a struggle; that the barriers are just trying to keep the program going. This participant described their teachers in this way, "It's like a duck, they look calm and collected on top of the water but up underneath, they're fighting like hell".

Table 16

*Question 14*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Getting information to parents		X				
Funding			X			
Time			X			
Families				X		
General education teachers				X		
Trying to keep the program going	X					
Don't know any					X	X

**Question 15.** In question fifteen I had participants explain what they viewed their role was within the transition education program. P1, P2, P4, P5, and P6 stated that their role was to be a support to the program. P1 stated, "I'm here to help". P3 believed that they were a support but also a committee member and in charge of funding approval. P1,

P3, and P6 stated that while they are more in a supportive role, they do have last say when it comes to funding.

Table 17

*Question 15*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Support	X	X		X	X	X
Committee member			X			
Funding approval	X		X			X

**Question 16.** For the final question I asked participants to explain their value as a member of the transition education program. P5 and P6 indicated they had little value, stating that their teachers were the ones who did the most. “My value, I count it as very small”, P5 said. P6 said, “very minimal but I provide support”. P1 said they were a part of the team, not more important than any other team member was and that all team members brought different skills to the table. P2 and P3 believed that they had high value. P3 said “I feel like I’m valued”. P2 stated, “I feel like an important member of the team”.

Table 18

*Question 16*

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Little value					X	X
High value		X	X			
Part of the team- no more or less important	X			X		

## **Review of Interview Data**

The second interview provided valuable insight into how participants perceive transition education and how successful their transition education programs are at their schools. Overall, participants felt that their transition program was successful or was improving. They believed this based on what they see in the community, successful graduation rates, and with the personnel they have running the program. All participants stated that they provided some kind of support to the transition education program in their school, with the support ranging from attending meetings, to being a voice, to providing emotional and financial support. Participants stated that they are involved by attending meetings, keeping up-to-date with information from the LEA (special education supervisor), serving on boards, providing support and guidance, and providing financial information. When asked what improvements were needed, participants mentioned increased community involvement, follow-up on students, expanding the program to students without disabilities, providing better information parents, and consistency within the program. Participants felt that the strengths of their program was their personnel, always striving for improvement, good graduation rates, and good facilities. Some of the weaknesses participants mentioned were low parental involvement, not enough follow through or prior planning, additional data needs to be collected, program needs to be offered to more students, more financial support is needed, more personnel needed, and better quality curriculum is needed. Two participants did not know of any strengths or weaknesses of their programs. Participants indicated that some barriers faced when dealing with transition education program were lack of time, lack of funding, the daily

struggles in just running a program, and families. Two participants did not feel like they knew any barriers that they faced with their transition education program. When asked about their role as part of the transition education team participants felt that their roles were to provide support, get students in the courses they need, and act as a committee member. Participants' answers varied when asked about their value as part of the team. The answers ranged from one participant saying they provide value input, to another saying they are not more important than another member. One felt that they had little or minimal value while another felt like they had a high value as part of the team. Table 19 provides a look at what theme emerged from each interview question.

Table 19

*Interview 2 Questions and Emerging Themes*

Questions	Themes
Question 8: How successful do you think your transition education program is?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Successful</li> <li>• As successful as parents and students make it</li> <li>• Not sure</li> <li>• Improving</li> </ul>
Question 9: Thinking about your answer to the previous question, what makes you think that?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is seen in the community</li> <li>• Parents don't want students to lose benefits</li> <li>• Successful graduation rates</li> <li>• Good personnel</li> </ul>
Question 10: What kind of support do you provide for the transition education program in your school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Whatever the teachers need</li> <li>• Support: financial, facilities</li> <li>• Attend meetings</li> <li>• Be their voice</li> </ul>
Question 11: Explain how you are involved with the transition education program. What kind of input do you provide?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEA keeps me informed</li> <li>• Attend meetings</li> <li>• Serve on boards</li> <li>• Don't really know</li> <li>• Provide support and guidance</li> <li>• Provide new information</li> <li>• Inform on financial information</li> </ul>
Question 12: What improvements do you think your transition education program needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased community involvement</li> <li>• Increased follow-up on students</li> <li>• Expand to students not in special education</li> <li>• More district involvement</li> <li>• Increased information to parents, students and community</li> <li>• Consistency in program</li> </ul>
Question 13: What are the strengths of your transition education program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers/personnel</li> <li>• Good graduation rates</li> <li>• Always trying to improve</li> <li>• Facilities</li> <li>•</li> </ul>
Question 13, part II: What are some weaknesses?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Low parental involvement</li> <li>• Not enough follow-through or prior planning</li> <li>• Need to be expanded</li> <li>• Additional data needs collected/maintained</li> <li>• More financial support needed</li> <li>• Additional personnel</li> </ul>



- Quality curriculum materials
- Don't know any

*(table continues)*

Questions	Themes
Question 14: What barriers do you encounter when dealing with your transition education program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Families</li> <li>• None</li> <li>• Daily struggles in keeping the program going</li> <li>• Getting information out to parents</li> <li>• Funding</li> <li>• Lack of time</li> </ul>
Question 15: What do you view your role is within the transition education program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support</li> <li>• Make sure students are in classes they need</li> <li>• Committee member</li> </ul>
Question 16: Explain your value as a member of the transition education program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valuable input</li> <li>• Not more important than anyone else</li> <li>• Little or minimal value</li> <li>• Part of the team</li> <li>• High value</li> </ul>

Through both interviews, the data gathered showed the opinions and beliefs of the participants on transition education and how they felt their school's transition education program was doing for students with disabilities. From these interviews, participants indicated that transition education is important for students, while there was discrepancy between participants saying all students need transition education and some saying only those with disabilities need transition education. Participants had mostly a favorable view of transition education and the skills that they felt should be taught varied, but all were skills that help students in dealing with everyday life. The participants believed that students do something after high school, whether it was go to work, get more education, or sit at home. Every participant provided some kind of support to their transition education program at their school. While a few answers of "I don't know" were provided

for a couple of questions, overall the participants were knowledgeable about transition education and what was happening in the transition education program at their schools.

### **Summary**

Based on the results from both sets of interviews, the administrators at the two school sites are supportive of their transition education programs. Most of the administrators believed that all students need transition education and all felt that it was important for students with disabilities. Most administrators mentioned life skills and communication as the skills needed to be taught in transition education programs. Overall, administrators felt that their role with transition education program was to provide support in whatever way was needed. Most administrators attributed success of their program to their teachers and felt that while they have a role in the transition education program, most felt that their role was minimal. There were a few administrators who felt that their role was larger, as they provide the funding for the program. They did say that while their input was not necessarily more important than the other team members, that it was essential. Now that data has been collected and analyzed, interpretations can be made about that data. The next chapter will look at the interpretation of the findings, study limitations, recommendations, and implications of the findings.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand the attitudes of school administrators whose transition programs were deemed as successful by meeting the state set requirement for the transition Indicator 14. Data were collected through two different interviews with each participant. The participants were interviewed in their own offices at a time of their choosing. There were few distractions during the interviews.

The results showed that the administrators who participated in this study believed that most students need transition education. All administrators were able to provide a definition of transition education, indicating that its purpose is to move students from high school to life after high school. Administrators felt that their programs were successful and were able to identify strengths of their programs. The participants were able to identify weaknesses of their programs and barriers when working with their programs. All the administrators felt that their role with the transition education program was to provide support in any way that they could. Most administrators felt that while they were involved, that their input and value to the program was minimal; however, most of them recognized that they provided funding and support for the programs.

### **Interpretation of the Findings**

From this study, I came to several conclusions about administrators' attitudes and opinions of transition education programs. Understanding administrators' attitudes and opinions required a view of their viewpoints and beliefs of transition education and

transition education programs. The following paragraphs include a review of the interpretations of these findings.

All the administrators who participated in the study had knowledge of the transition education programs at their school, what it took to run those programs, and who needed to be included in those programs. In this case it means that administrators who are supportive of transition education programs in their schools are active in the programs and have knowledge of the different aspects of the program. According to Flannery & Hellemn (2015), administrators must understand needs of their students to make accurate decisions regarding a program. In this case, administrators who understand transition education will be better prepared to make decisions for transition education programs in their schools. According to DeMatthews & Mawhinney (2014), administrators' beliefs and opinions impacted the program they were working with because their beliefs and opinions guided their decision-making and level of support for programs. In this study, the administrators' beliefs of what skills should be taught in a transition education reflected the skills that were already being taught in the transition education programs in their schools, which supports what DeMatthews & Mawhinney found in their study. According to Wells et al. (2012) and Flannery & Hellemn (2014), administrators must understand needs of their students in order to provide effect guidance and decision-making for that program. The administrators in the current study indicated they felt valued, which holds with findings in current literature. This understanding may lead to increased favorable decisions for the transition education program and may lead to increased administrator support of the program.

According to Sullivan & Downey (2015) administrators who are effective leaders are ones who are not afraid to voice their opinions, make decisions and are not anxious about making people angry with them. It can be assumed that administrators, who are not afraid to voice their opinions or make others angry with them, may be willing to take risks in finding ways to assist the transition education program. These successful programs had administrators who were willing to express their opinions and ideas to those in the transition education program. It can be hypothesized that successful programs have effective administrators that are supportive of the transition education program. It is possible that the administrators in this study felt that their role as a part of the transition education program was to provide input and make decisions.

When people feel valued as a part of a team, their attitudes toward that team is often more favorable (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2014; Green 2015; Pickens & Dymond, 2015; Wells et al., 2012). The findings from this study support this literature. Administrators were asked about how valued they felt in the transition education programs. Most felt valued in some way and felt that they were needed to help make decisions in the program. This supports the literature that said the feeling of being valued may led to more favorable decisions being made to assist transition education programs.

According to Pickens & Dymond (2015), administrator support is crucial in the success of any program. With the schools working as a system, as described in chapter two, where the administrators are at the top of the system, their support and willingness to be a part of a team affects the rest of the system (Meadows, 2008; Strnadova & Cumming, 2014). The findings from this study support the current literature that support

is important for programs. According to the data, these participants were all supportive of their transition education programs and were willing to provide whatever support is needed. Supportive administrators may be willing to seek out additional opportunities for the students in the programs from community partners.

Involved administrators provide support in any way needed to the programs they are involved in (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013; Green, 2015; Marshall, Powell, Pierce, Nolan, & Fehringer, 2012; Wells & Sheehey, 2012). The administrators in these programs were supportive and active, which was supported by the literature.

According to Manthey et al., (2015) a lack of funding to meet the requirements of all programs in a school is often found to be a major barrier to administrators. Whitby et al., (2013) found that the most common barriers in school programs were a lack of support from administrators to teachers, lack of programs and options available within the school and community, and a lack of communication between administrators and teachers. Administrators interviewed identified the same barriers to having successful programs.

According to system's theory, any group can be considered a complex system (Meadows, 2008). For this study, the group or system was the school, with the administrator being at the top of that system. There are different levels to a system, which are all interrelated (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), the overall beliefs of a system exists in the macrosystem and a change in the macrosystem is needed to make a change to an overall system. In order to make a change, the beliefs of those in the macrosystem must first be understood (Meadows, 2008). The findings of this

study provided a picture of the attitudes and opinions of these administrators about transition education. These administrators, who are part of the macrosystem, believed in their programs and felt that transition education was important.

When looking at the transition education program as a system, based on systems theory that was detailed in chapter two, the support of the administrator is vital to the success of the program. Systems theory relies on the idea that everything works together as a system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Within a system, each part has an impact on another part of the system (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Seligman, 1991). In relation to a school as a system, the administrators are at the top of the system, with the faculty and staff below them, and the students, parents, and community below that. Each part of the system is important to the other parts, as each part wields influence over the other parts (Meadows, 2008) Administrators influence what happens within the system (DeMathews & Mawhinney, 2014). This was demonstrated with this study, as these schools had successful programs who had administrators who supported those programs.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Only two schools were used for this study. There were only three participants for each school. This provides a limited look at the perception of administrators. Larger populations of administrators may provide differing attitudes and opinions. Further research should include a larger population to understand attitudes and perceptions of larger groups of administrators.

The study was done in two schools that had successful transition education programs based on data from the APR; therefore, the findings only represent perceptions

of administrators from schools that have programs that meet the same criteria. The attitudes and opinions of administrators may be the same about transition education at schools who are not deemed as successful, thus this indicates a need for future research to determine what the attitudes and opinions of administrators are schools who are not deemed as having successful transition education programs.

The study was done in Arkansas school districts and may not reflect the attitudes and opinions of administrators in other states. Further research should be done in additional states to determine the attitudes and opinions of administrators on transition education.

### **Recommendations**

One recommendation for further research would be to conduct this study in schools that are not meeting the state requirements for achievement. This would provide valuable data to determine what the opinions and perceptions of transition education and programs are in programs who are not meeting state requirements to see if those attitudes and perceptions are any different from the attitudes and opinions of those administrators in schools who are meeting state requirements. This study only looked at administrator attitudes and opinions of transition education programs in schools that were achieving the state required standard; therefore, looking at programs who are not achieving state required standards would provide valuable data to compare. An additional recommendation would be to determine if a correlation exists between positive administrator attitudes and opinions and the amount of success transition education programs have. This recommendation would allow researchers to determine if there is a



link that exists between those positive attitudes and opinions and how successful the program is, or determine if there are other factors that influence the success of the program. Another recommendation would be to see if the positive attitudes and opinions relate to the amount of interaction the administrators have with the transition education programs. This recommendation would allow a researcher to determine if the attitudes and opinions an administrator has on a program influences the amount of interaction the administrator has with the program. All of the recommendations for future research would provide data that would help those involved in transition education programs find ways to improve their programs, by helping them understand what affects administrator attitudes and opinions and interactions with the program.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study provide a starting point of how administrators perceive transition education program. In this case, these administrators are a part of the team or system for programs that are successful. This study provides a beginning and, if this proves applicable to other areas, provides a way to plan for best transition program development. This study provides a baseline to be used when looking at future research on how administrator attitudes and opinions affect a system within a school or on the successful of transition education programs.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this qualitative interview study was to examine and understand school administrators' attitudes and opinions of transition education programs for students with disabilities who will move from high school to adulthood, whose programs

are deemed as successful by meeting the state set requirement for the transition Indicator 14. Conclusions hypothesized from the data show those administrators at the school sites that had achieving transition education programs have positive attitudes and opinions of transition education and understand the need for transition education for students. These administrators were supportive of the programs in their schools. They provided whatever type of support teachers needed to help the transition education programs be successful. These two school sites had administrators with positive attitudes and opinions of transition education. The programs at these schools were achieving. Based on this study, these schools had administrators who had positive attitudes and opinions of transition education.

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