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Educator Perceptions of Transition Programming for Youth with Disabilities

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
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Walden University
2019

Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2010

BA, Trenton State College, 1987

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

December 2019

Abstract

A local problem exists with transition service providers lacking the skills and knowledge necessary to effectively implement transition planning practices, ensuring youth with disabilities experience positive in-school and post school success. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate transition service provider perceptions of implementation variables that impact the transition service providers' use of evidence-based practices with youth with disabilities. Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler, and Coyle's Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 was used as the conceptual framework for this study. Interview participants included 5 special educators, 4 general educators, 2 district administrators, 2 child study team members, and 2 guidance counselors. Open coding and thematic analysis were used to analyze the results from 15 participants. Themes that emerged from the results of this study were the need for professional development for educators and the need for assistance with parental engagement in the transition planning process. Results from this study may provide positive social change in the form of data to inform future professional development for schools and districts across the United States regarding how to provide meaningful transitional support to youth with disabilities.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my husband. Thank you for all of your patience and love during my doctoral study. When I was frustrated and ready to give up, you helped me re-examine my options and reminded me that there was a light at the end of the tunnel. Through your unconditional love, you supported me every step of the way. This doctorate degree is just as much yours as it is mine.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my colleagues who provided support and encouragement throughout this endeavor. I would also like to thank my Walden University Review Committee for your guidance throughout my dissertation process.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

It has been reported that secondary transition service providers feel they lack knowledge and skills and are ill-equipped for how to successfully plan for and offer transition services to students with special needs (Plotner, Mazzotti, Rose, & Carlson-Britting, 2016). As such, there is a gap in the current practices of educators to ensure achievement and post-secondary school success for students with disabilities (Gothberg, Peterson, Peak, & Sedaghat, 2015; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Many students with disabilities are affected by this gap in practice. Brezenski (2018) reported that only 35% of high school graduates with disabilities have the necessary skills to obtain and keep employment.

Variability in high school transition service provisions across schools, districts, and states exists and presents many difficulties to transition teams (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Transition service providers have expressed frustration due to a lack of expertise regarding the roles, the responsibilities, and the expectations of their role in transition planning. As discussed by Mazzotti and Rowe (2015) and Plotner et al. (2016), special educators and transition professionals require access to resources that offer secondary school professional's skills and knowledge in the field of transition to ensure that youth with disabilities encounter positive in-school and post-secondary education success. Results from this study may provide positive social change to transition service providers by providing the knowledge and skills necessary to offer comprehensive and collaborative transition services to students with special needs.

Chapter 1 introduces the challenges related to transition service providers lacking the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in transition planning practices ensuring students with disabilities experience positive in-school and post school success. Despite increased evidence-based research supporting transition planning and advances in transitions service delivery, long-standing service and systems concerns continue to hinder ideal transition outcomes for youth with disabilities (Newman, Madaus, & Javits, 2016). Chapter 2 includes a review of the current literature pertaining to the problems with the current state of transition processes for youth with disabilities to post-secondary settings. Chapter 3 includes a summary of the methods that were utilized in this study. Chapter 4 includes the results from this study's data analysis. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the results and the contribution made to positive social change.

Background

The articles in the current study's literature review support the notion that a student with a disability's life is significantly enhanced when parents, students, educators, administrators, child study team members, guidance counselors, and community agency personnel collaborate and share their findings to enable students with disabilities to move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities. Bouck and Joshi (2016) advised that transition services support students with special needs with the experiences and skills required for post-secondary life. Cavendish and Connor (2018) explored variables that influence meaningful parental and student involvement in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. Students who are actively involved in the IEP process are linked to higher levels of goal

attainment (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). Cmar, McDonnall, and Markowski (2018) and Luecking and Luecking (2015) revealed that paid work experiences in high school predict post-school employment for students with disabilities. Cmar and colleagues (2018) also found a connection between parents with high expectations and post high school employment and continuous employment for students with disabilities.

Transition plans should emphasize lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities by concentrating on academic and functional achievement as these students move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities (Bartholomew, Papay, McConnell & Cease-Cook, 2015; Gothberg et al., 2015; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Morningstar, Lee, Lattin, & Murray, 2016). However, it has been reported that secondary transition personnel feel they lack knowledge and skills and are ill-equipped for how to successfully plan for and provide transition services to students with special needs (Plotner et al., 2016). There is a gap between the current practices of educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and secondary school administrators and research-based practices required to ensure achievement and post-secondary school success for students with disabilities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Many students with disabilities are affected by this gap in practice. Brezenski (2018) reported that only 35% of high school graduates with disabilities have the necessary skills to obtain and keep employment.

The current study was needed because there was an inconsistency in secondary transition service delivery across schools, districts, and states, which presented many

difficulties to transition teams (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate the transition strategies currently in place in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States and to determine what is successful, what can be enhanced, and how to go about advancing the supported transition program currently in place, thereby enabling access to vocational services, job and career training, and education.

Problem Statement

A local problem exists with transition services providers (i.e., child study teams, high school guidance counselors, teachers, and secondary school administrators) lacking the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully put into operation transition planning practices ensuring students with disabilities experience positive in-school and post-school success (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015). Transition services provide students with special needs with the experiences and skills necessary for post-secondary life (Bouck & Joshi, 2016). Transition plans should emphasize lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities by concentrating on academic and functional achievement as these students move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). However, it was reported that secondary transition personnel feel they lack knowledge and skills and are ill equipped for how to successfully plan for and provide transition services to students with special needs (Plotner et al., 2016).

The challenge in the northeast region of the United States remains consistent with that of the rest of the country: There is a gap between the current practices of educators,

guidance counselors, child study team members, and secondary school administrators and research based practices required to ensure achievement and post-secondary school success for students with disabilities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Many students with disabilities are affected by this gap in practice. Brezenski (2018) reported that only 35% of high school graduates with disabilities have the necessary skills to obtain and keep employment. Plotner and colleagues (2016) revealed that there is a discrepancy between what the research says that educators and transition specialists should provide and what is actually happening in school. Despite increased knowledge of research supporting transition planning and advances in transition service delivery, long standing service and system concerns continue to hinder ideal transition outcomes for youth with disabilities (Newman et al., 2016). When compared to typical peers without disabilities, youth with disabilities can expect poorer post school outcomes to include the following: (a) lower school completion rates (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Powers et al., 2001), (b) lower adult employment participation (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Fraker et al., 2016; Hirano et al., 2018; Plotner et al., 2016; Southward & Kyzar, 2017), (c) lower wages (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Hirano et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; Southward & Kyzar, 2017), and (d) higher incidences of poverty (Fraker et al., 2016). Thus, inconsistency in secondary transition service delivery across schools, districts, and states exists and presents many difficulties to transition teams (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016).

Members of the Board of Education from one school district in northeastern region of the United States met to discuss new programming in March of 2016 for special needs students; specifically students who have met their state directed graduation requirements, however require additional education to meet their transition goals of post-secondary education, entering the workforce in meaningful employment, and ultimately independent living. This program was developed for students between the ages of 18 and 21 and began in September of 2016. Building space was allocated in the district's high school and funding for this program and staff was put into place by the district's Board of Education. What was missing was training and resource material; most specifically evidence-based practices for the secondary school professionals to use as a guide for this new and unchartered program. As discussed by Plotner et al. (2016), special educators and transition professionals require access to resources that provide secondary school professionals with skills and knowledge in the field of transition. Another key component of this program that was lacking was collaboration amongst guidance personnel, child study team members, special and general educators, district administration, and outside agency personnel.

Recently, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJ DOE) revealed to child study team members from New Jersey that students with disabilities require student-focused planning to promote successful education and transition from high school to adult life (Kohler, Gothberg, Fowler, & Coyle, 2016). This student-focused, transition planning should value (a) family engagement and knowledge, (b) foster partnerships with community and state agencies, (c) the unique contribution each person brings to their

community and relationships, and (d) happens in the context of what is important to the student with disabilities and his/her vision for the future (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016). The student-focused planning should include formal planning and every-day support, use accessible and collaborative processes, incorporate facilitated methods of discovery and problem-solving tools, impact organization and system level change, and support effective team building amongst all stakeholders in the student with disabilities' life (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate educator perceptions of the transition strategies currently in place in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States and to determine what is successful, what can be enhanced, and how to go about advancing the supported transition program currently in place, thereby enabling access to vocational services, job and career training, and education. Successful transition plans focus on lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities by focusing on academic and functional achievement as these students move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016; Plotner et al., 2016). Additionally, transition service providers have expressed frustration due to a lack of expertise regarding the roles, the responsibilities, and the expectations of their role in transition planning. This is also evident in other parts of the country as Mazzotti and Plotner (2016) revealed that transition service providers continue to lack the skills and

knowledge to effectively implement evidence-based practices to ensure that students with disabilities are exposed to positive in-school and post-secondary education success. Additionally, school personnel need to have the evidence-based resources as they acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to apply effective transition programs and practices (Plotner et al., 2016). One way to bridge the lack of skills and knowledge that educators are experiencing with effective transition programs and practices is to provide school personnel with information related to implementation of transition services, instruction, and supports (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Based on the findings from this study, patterns and themes emerged, which have identified a clear understanding of what is needed to develop transition service programs for students with disabilities.

In the historical context of transition, a link between research and evidence-based practice was missing. Kohler (1996) developed competencies and practices, which were required for successful transition planning. The stress on the conceptual model is important as it promotes a student-focused approach, strategic planning, and collaboration and provided structure and support to transition planning teams as they evaluated their abilities in offering transition services to high school students with disabilities (Kohler, 1996). Recently, Kohler et al. (2016) enhanced the Kohler (1996) taxonomy by providing evidence-based practices for implementing transition-focused education; programs and services that inter connect and share information on behalf of the high school student with disabilities who is transitioning from high school to adult life.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are perceptions of special education teachers, general education teachers, guidance counselors, child study team members, and administrators regarding the types of student-focused planning strategies being used in secondary-school settings to support students with disabilities in transition planning?

RQ2: What are the barriers that hinder the efforts of special education teachers, general education teachers, guidance counselors, child study team members, and administrators to deliver secondary-school students with disabilities transition planning?

Conceptual Framework

The initial conceptual framework researched for this study was Kohler's (1996) transition taxonomy. This taxonomy was created to offer a guide for successful transition planning for students with disabilities. This conceptual model stressed the importance of a student-focused approach, strategic planning, and collaboration and provided structure and support to transition planning teams as they offered transition services to high school students with disabilities (Kohler, 1996).

Recently, Kohler and colleagues (2016) enhanced the Kohler (1996) taxonomy to offer more structure and support to transition planning teams. The Kohler et al. (2016) Taxonomy for Transition Planning 2.0 offers a guide for transition planning, enabling the stakeholders in the life of a student with a disability to prepare the student to live independently (if appropriate), seek meaningful employment, and explore post-secondary education. Kohler et al. (2016) reported when families, students, community members, organizations, and educators collaborate to implement transition-focused education, post-

school outcomes for students with disabilities improve. Kohler et al. (2016) explained that the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 model has five categories: Student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family engagement, and program structure.

Nature of the Study

Creswell and Poth (2018) discussed that researchers always bring certain beliefs and philosophical assumptions to the research process. I chose to use basic qualitative research as the focus for this study. Qualitative researchers use procedures that are characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the experiences of the researcher as she collects and analyzes her data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using the transformative framework, according to Creswell and Poth, allows the researcher to assist others in improving society. In the case of the current study, results may provide positive social change to the transition service providers in secondary schools, enabling these providers to provide comprehensive transition services to students with disabilities. The transformative framework can change the lives of participants, the district where they work, and the researcher's own life (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Definitions

Below, I have included terms and definitions used throughout this study to assist with a better understanding of the study:

Accommodation: A practice, device, intervention, or procedure provided to a student with a disability that ensures equal access to instruction and assessment. An

accommodation does not change the content being taught nor does it reduce the achievement or learning expectations (Newman & Madaus, 2015).

Competitive employment: Work for pay at or above the minimum wage in an environment with nondisabled colleagues for a period of 20 hours per week, which lasts at least 90 days at any time during the year since leaving high school (Southward & Kyzar, 2017).

College and career readiness: The ability of an individual to be successful in post- secondary education and employment (Monahan et al., 2018).

Every Student Succeeds Act (2015): A general education law that requires all students to be prepared for college and career when they graduate from high school enabling all students to be successful in life after high school (Monahan et al., 2018).

Evidence-based practice: A trustworthy body of research that meets specific high standards and are "supported by multiple, high quality studies that utilize research designs from, which causality can be inferred and that demonstrate meaningful effects on student outcomes" (Test, Kemp-Inman, Diegelmann, Hitt, & Bethune, 2015, p. 59).

Individualized Education Plan (IEP): An individualized education program (IEP) is defined by the US DOE (2017) as a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and reviewed in accordance with section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE): Once determined eligible for vocational rehabilitation services an IPE is developed by a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor (US DOE, 2017).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act: A federal law that governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention as well as special education and related services to youth with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). The law mandates that all students with disabilities receive transition services by age 16 or younger with the purpose of supporting students in achieving post-secondary goals in employment independent living, and post-secondary training (Monahan et al., 2018).

Modification: A practice, device, intervention, or procedure that changes the core content state standard or performance expectation (Newman & Madaus, 2015).

Pre-employment transition services: Designed to offer students with disabilities, who are eligible or potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, the opportunity to identify their career interests through job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling, workplace readiness training, and instruction in self-advocacy (US DOE, 2017).

Student with a disability (SWD): According to the NJ DOE (2017), a student with a disability is an individual with a disability who is enrolled in an education program and is eligible to receive special education and related services. A student with a disability cannot be younger than the earliest age to receive transition services under IDEA unless a State chooses to provide pre-employment transition services at an earlier age. In addition, the student cannot be older than 21, unless state law permits.

Transition assessment: An on-going process of collecting information on a student's strengths, preferences, interests, aptitudes, and needs related to current demands and future educational, career, personal, and social settings (Rowe et al., 2015).

Transition plan. The process of preparing an individual to live, work, and play within the community as fully and independently as possible (US DOE, 2017).

Transition services: An organized set of activities for a student with a disability intended to be in a results-oriented process, focused on improving the functional and academic achievement of the student with a disability to facilitate the student's move from school to post-secondary activities (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015).

Universal Design for Learning (UDL): A collection of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides a matrix for creating instructional goals, methods, materials, and assessments that work for all students by using flexible approaches that can be adjusted for individual needs (Bartholomew & Griffin, 2018).

Youth with a disability (YWD): According to the NJ DOE (2017), a youth with a disability is an individual with a disability between the ages of 14 and 24 years of age. There is no requirement that a youth with a disability be participating in an educational program.

Assumptions

I assumed that secondary school personnel (i.e., child study team members, guidance counselors, administrators, general and special educators) would answer interview questions honestly and communicate how they perceive transition practices in their school district. Additionally, I believed that study participants understood the interview directions. I also presumed that participants included a representative sample of transition service providers (i.e., child study team members, guidance counselors,

administrators, general and special educators) that represented an accurate representation of a school district in the northeastern region of the United States. Lastly, I took for granted that the secondary school personnel understood the importance of transition planning for students with special needs. These assumptions are necessary in developing the context of the study because the process of research flows from these philosophical assumptions, to an interpretive lens, and onto the procedures involved in studying transition service providers and their abilities in ensuring students with disabilities experience positive in-school and post-school success (see Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study included five secondary-school special education teachers, four secondary-school general education teachers, two child study team case managers, two district administrators, and two secondary school guidance counselors as participants for this study. The research plan included participants from one suburban school district in New Jersey. Educators, guidance counselors, administrators, and child study team members from elementary school settings within this school district were not included in this study. Educators, guidance counselors, administrators, and child study team members who attend other suburban, urban, and rural school districts were not included in this study.

Limitations

There were three recognizable limitations to the present study. First, interviews were only conducted at one specific time during the academic year for one school district in New Jersey. This affected the pool of participants available to be interviewed.

Second, the research was limited to five secondary-school special education teachers, four secondary-school general education teachers, two secondary-school child study team case managers, two district administrators, and two secondary-school guidance counselors. Lastly, one of these participants gave responses that were not appropriate and were not included in the results as they were biased and unprofessional.

Significance of the Study

National policy makers have invested in evidence-based school interventions to decrease the skill gap necessary for student with disabilities to achieve post-secondary career and employment possibilities (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015). With the passing of the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) (Public Law 113-128), leaders in the field of education began to examine how to improve services and outcomes for adolescents and young adults who are disabled between the ages of 14 and 24 years old (Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). The intent of the WIOA was to enhance access to vocational services, training, and education, which are needed for employment success by aligning a variety of programs and workforce related agencies funded by the Department of Education and Department of Labor (Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). This basic qualitative study is unique in that it examined a gap in research pertaining to transition programming services for students with disabilities.

Implications for Social Change

The results from this study provide positive social change in the form of data to inform future professional development for schools, districts, and state leaders across the United States regarding how to provide meaningful transitional support to students with

disabilities. This study may enlighten stakeholders to realize that when discussing transition planning, collaboration amongst students, parents, educators, child study team case managers, secondary-school administrators, guidance counselors, and community agency personnel is key to the success of the student with special needs. Bringing together the stakeholders in the student's life has the opportunity to make a powerful difference in the life of a student with a disability, the student's family, and the community where the student lives.

Summary

In the historical context of transition, a link between research and evidence-based practice was missing until Kohler (1996) developed competencies and practices required for successful transition planning. In 2016, Kohler and colleagues enhanced the Kohler (1996) taxonomy by providing evidence-based practices for implementing transition-focused education; programs and services that inter-connect and share information on behalf of the high school student with disabilities who is transitioning from high school to adult life. Kohler et al. (2016) reported when families, students, community members, organizations, and educators collaborate to implement transition-focused education, post-school outcomes for students with disabilities improve. Kohler et al. (2016) discussed that the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 model has five categories: student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family engagement, and program structure.

This study focused on investigating transition service provider variables (i.e., training, access, and preparation) and implementation variables (i.e., knowledge and use

of secondary transition evidence-based practices) that may impact the transition service providers' use of evidence-based practices with students with disabilities (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016). The research method in this study was a basic qualitative design. Convenience sampling was used to select participants for the study, all of whom are employed by a school district in the northeastern region of the United States.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Local Problem

A local problem exists with transition services providers (i.e., child study teams, high school guidance counselors, teachers, and secondary school administrators) lacking the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully put into operation transition planning practices ensuring students with disabilities experience positive in-school and post-school success (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015). Transition services provide students with special needs with the experiences and skills necessary for post-secondary life (Bouck & Joshi, 2016). Transition plans should emphasize lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities by concentrating on academic and functional achievement as these students move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). However, it has been reported that secondary transition personnel feel they lack knowledge and skills and are ill-equipped for how to successfully plan for and provide transition services to students with special needs (Plotner et al., 2016).

The challenge in the northeast region of the United States remains consistent with that of the rest of the country: There is a gap between the current practices of educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and secondary school administrators and research-based practices required to ensure achievement and post-secondary school success for students with disabilities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Many students with disabilities are affected by this gap in practice. Brezenski (2018) reported that only 35% of high school

graduates with disabilities have the necessary skills to obtain and keep employment. Plotner and colleagues (2016) revealed that there is a discrepancy between what the research says that educators and transition specialists should provide and what is happening in school. Despite increased knowledge of research supporting transition planning and advances in transition service delivery, long-standing service and system concerns continue to hinder ideal transition outcomes for youth with disabilities (Newman et al., 2016). When compared to typical peers without disabilities, youth with disabilities can expect poorer post-school outcomes to include the following: (a) lower school completion rates (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Powers et al., 2001), (b) lower adult employment participation (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Fraker et al., 2016; Hirano et al., 2018; Plotner et al., 2016; Southward & Kyzar, 2017), (c) lower wages (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Hirano et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; Southward & Kyzar, 2017), and (d) higher incidences of poverty (Fraker et al., 2016). Thus, inconsistency in secondary transition service delivery across schools, districts, and states exists and presents many difficulties to transition teams (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016).

Members of the Board of Education from one school district in northeastern region of the United States met to discuss new programming for special needs students; specifically students who have met their state directed graduation requirements, but require additional education to meet their transition goals of post-secondary education, entering the workforce in meaningful employment, and ultimately independent living. This program was developed for students between the ages of 18 and 21 and began in

September of 2016. Building space was allocated in the district's high school and funding for this program and staff was put into place by the district's Board of Education. What was missing was training and resource material; most specifically evidence-based practices for the secondary school professionals to use as a guide for this new and unchartered program. As discussed by Plotner et al. (2016), special educators and transition professionals require access to resources that provide secondary school professionals with skills and knowledge in the field of transition. Another key component of this program that was lacking is collaboration amongst guidance personnel, child study team members, special and general educators, district administration, and outside agency personnel.

Recently, the NJ DOE revealed to child study team members from New Jersey that students with disabilities require student-focused planning to promote successful education and transition from high school to adult life (Kohler et al., 2016). This student-focused, transition planning should value (a) family engagement and knowledge, (b) foster partnerships with community and state agencies, (c) the unique contribution each person brings to their community and relationships, and (d) happens in the context of what is important to the student with disabilities and his/her vision for the future (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016). The student-focused planning should include formal planning and every-day support, use accessible and collaborative processes, incorporate facilitated methods of discovery and problem-solving tools, impact organization and system level change, and support

effective team building amongst all stakeholders in the student with disabilities' life (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016).

Purpose

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate educator perceptions of the transition strategies currently in place in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States and to determine what is successful, what can be enhanced, and how to go about advancing the supported transition program currently in place, thereby enabling access to vocational services, job and career training, and education. Successful transition plans focus on lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities by focusing on academic and functional achievement as these students move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016; Plotner et al., 2016). Additionally, transition service providers have expressed frustration due to a lack of expertise regarding the roles, the responsibilities, and the expectations of their role in transition planning. This is also evident in other parts of the country as Mazzotti and Plotner (2016) revealed that transition service providers continue to lack the skills and knowledge to effectively implement evidence-based practices to ensure that students with disabilities are exposed to positive in-school and post-secondary education success. Additionally, school personnel need to have access to the evidence-based resources as they acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to apply effective transition programs and practices (Plotner et al., 2016). One way to bridge the lack of skills and knowledge that educators are experiencing with effective transition programs and practices is to

provide school personnel with information related to implementation of transition services, instruction, and supports (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Based on the findings from this study, patterns and themes have emerged, which have identified a clear understanding of what is needed to develop transition service programs for students with disabilities.

In Chapter 2, student, youth, and parental perceptions, as well as the roles and responsibilities of educational and community stakeholders in the student's life are examined. Next, a discussion ensues regarding the conceptual framework chosen for this study. Lastly, an exhaustive literature review on transition services for students with disabilities is revealed.

Literature Review

The Walden University Library was used for most of literature searches for this study; the following databases were used: *Education Source, ERIC*, *SAGE Journals,* and *Dissertations and Theses at Walden University*. In addition to the data bases listed above, the Council for Exceptional Children's data base was searched yielding articles in the following two journals: *Teaching Exceptional Children* and *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*. Most articles researched for this study have been published within the last 5 years. Keywords used in the aforementioned databases include: *students with disabilities, youth with disabilities, transition, school to work, school to college, school to independent living, parental involvement, person-centered planning, student-focused planning, parent-school relationships, teacher perceptions, climate and education, post-secondary education, parents and guardians, graduation,*

and *barriers*. These key words were all used in each data base selected and yielded the following six journals: *Journal of Learning Disabilities, Exceptional Children, Remedial and Special Education, Teaching Exceptional Children, Learning Disabilities Quarterly, and Career Development* and *Transition for Exceptional Individuals*.

Conceptual Framework

In the historical context of transition, a link between research and evidence-based practice was missing. Kohler (1996) developed competencies and practices, which were required for successful transition planning. This conceptual model stressed the importance of a student-focused approach, strategic planning, and collaboration and provided structure and support to transition planning teams as they evaluated their abilities in offering transition services to high school students with disabilities (Kohler, 1996). Recently, Kohler and colleagues (2016) enhanced the Kohler taxonomy by providing evidence-based practices for implementing transition-focused education; programs and services that inter connect and share information on behalf of the high school student with disabilities who is transitioning from high school to adult life. Kohler et al. (2016) reported when families, students, community members, organizations, and educators collaborate to implement transition-focused education, post-school outcomes for students with disabilities improve. The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 model concentrates on promoting effective transition of youth with disabilities in college and careers by reviewing evidence-based literature (Kohler et al., 2016). Kohler et al. (2016) explained that the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0

model has five categories: Student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family engagement, and program structure.

Student-Focused Planning

Educational laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 1997, 2004) mandated that students with disabilities and their parents be encouraged to participate in all stages of the IEP and transition plan development (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; Rosetti, Sauer, Bui, & Ou, 2017). However, as reported by Cavendish and Connor (2018), a surprisingly low percentage of students with disabilities (68%) and their parents (76%) attend transition planning meetings. Ideally, students with disabilities who contribute to the IEP process have been associated with higher degrees of goal attainment and higher graduation rates (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2015; Powers et al., 2001). In addition, students with disabilities who participate in the IEP and transition planning meetings direct school personnel to a greater emphasis on their strengths; parents also conveyed a greater understanding of the transition process (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016). Transition-focused planning is to begin no later the 14th birthday of the student with special needs (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). The planning team includes the student, family members, and educators; planning decisions are driven by the student and his or her family's wishes for the student's adult life (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Students are encouraged to actively participate in the IEP process as this assists in the development

of self-determination skills (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016).

Like Cavendish and Connor (2018) and Mazzotti et al. (2015), Morningstar et al. (2016) reported that one of the barriers to students with disabilities' participation in IEP meetings include a lack of coaching for students to practice self-advocacy before the IEP or transition meeting. Students with disabilities need to be educated in how to participate in these meetings in order to ensure there is a genuine collaboration amongst all stakeholders present and ensuring the student is the focus of the IEP and transition planning process (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016).

Student Development

Students are an integral part of the IEP and transition planning teams. Through student-focused planning, students are ready to contribute to the IEP process and participate in the evaluation of their previous IEP goals and objectives; student participation in the IEP and transition planning meetings has been connected to higher levels of goal attainment and higher graduation rates (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2015). Self-determination is also facilitated within the planning process as students with disabilities express their preferences, interests, and limitations (Fraker et al., 2016; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016; Shogren, Villarreal, Lang, and Seo, 2017). Student development has three components: (a) assessment, (b) academic skills, and (c) life, social, and emotional skills.

Assessment. Assessment includes formative assessments as well as career interest and aptitude assessments, which are used to drive curricular and instructional decisions (Kohler et al., 2016). Like Mazzotti and Rowe (2015), Stevenson and Fowler (2016) viewed assessments as a key to successful transition planning as they assist students in making informed decisions and lead the transition planning process. Kohler et al. (2016) discussed that accommodations for assessments are to be provided to students with disabilities on an as needed basis and the assessment results should be shared with the students regularly to assist in overcoming identified deficiencies. Kohler et al. (2016) added that remediation and multiple testing opportunities should be offered to students with disabilities for high-stakes testing. Involving students with disabilities in the assessment process is vital to a successful transition to adult life.

Transition assessments should include goals, skills, needs, preferences, and aptitudes a student has along with the skills required to be successful in the next setting; the ultimate goal is to create a broad assessment that will serve as a guide for activities and instruction (Rowe, Mazzotti, Hirano, & Alverson, 2015). Rowe and colleagues (2015) reported that the results from students' original assessments should be viewed as the foundation for transition planning and be the driving force for individualized services. Transition planning identifies areas of student need, which according to Mazzotti and Rowe (2015) and Papay, Unger, Williams-Diehm, and Mitchell (2015), can be addressed as early as primary school. As district administrators adapt to their respective state standards, it is necessary to recognize ways to teach transition related skills within a standards-based framework (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Monahan, Lombardi, & Madaus,

2018). Transition assessments provide a foundation for outlining IEP goals and objectives, as well as transition services, and drive an educator's instruction (Rowe et al., 2015). One way to teach transition related skills within a standards-based framework is through UDL.

Universal Design for Learning. Bartholomew et al. (2015) and Bartholomew and Griffin (2018) provided insight on how to adapt the original UDL checklist to include a focus on secondary transition enabling special and general education teachers the opportunity to connect UDL practices to their current instruction. Teachers who would like to incorporate secondary transition instruction along with academic skills can use the UDL checkpoints to overlap with secondary transition to guide their planning (Bartholomew et al., 2015). These checkpoints will enable teachers to maximize their instructional time with students on secondary transition topics in general and special education settings (Bartholomew & Griffin, 2018; Collier, Griffin, & Wei, 2017; Rowe et al., 2015).

Academic skills. Academic skills include courses and curricula to prepare students with special needs for careers and college (Kohler et al., 2016). In this area of student development, students with special needs focus on academic skills development (i.e., interpretation, comprehension, decoding, and computation), academic strategy development (i.e., learning strategies, test-taking skills, and study skills), and academic behaviors development (i.e., going to class, organization, participation, doing homework, and studying) (Kohler et al., 2016). For educators to address the academic and nonacademic gap in skills, they need to first identify the post-secondary goal. This goal

is then aligned with academic content and industry or higher education standards, which describe the common knowledge, skills, duties, and abilities required to do the job well (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Gothberg et al., 2015). These standards can then be used as benchmarks to compare student achievement and determine the gap between the student's current knowledge and skill level and those needed to be successful in the student's preferred post-secondary environment (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Gothberg et al., 2015). Once the gap analysis reveals inconsistencies between the student's current ability and criteria for attaining academic and nonacademic post-secondary goals, the gap(s) are then linked with the Common Core State Standards so they can be addressed (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Gothberg et al., 2015) and provide students with special needs the academic skills necessary for their success in careers and college (Kohler et al., 2016).

It is then necessary to identify the skill sets required to close the gap between the student's current ability level and the level of performance required to enter post-secondary environments; the number of tasks required to close the gap depends on the needs of the student and the size of the gap (Gothberg et al., 2015). The last step in this process is to develop annual goals associated with the student's post-secondary goals. Once the annual goal is identified, sub-skills are necessary to support the attainment of the goal and to guide instruction (Gothberg et al., 2015). When academic and nonacademic skills are taught in the secondary settings, students with disabilities are more likely to transition successfully into post-secondary settings of their choice (Bartholomew & Griffin, 2018; Bartholomew et al., 2015; Gothberg et al., 2015).

In addition to the Common Core State Standards, instruction for students with disabilities should take place in career and vocational skills, employment, and life skills (Kohler, 2016). Joshi and Bouck (2017) examined post-secondary education related transition services received by students with learning disabilities and revealed students with disabilities who received core content instruction in the general education classrooms were more prepared for post-secondary education than students receiving their instruction in special education classes. In addition, students with learning disabilities who received instruction of their core subjects with their general education peers attended 2-year colleges at a higher percentage than vocational/ technical schools or 4-year colleges (Joshi & Bouck, 2017).

Life, social, and emotional skills. Life, social, and emotional skills includes developing self-determination skills (i.e., goal setting, problem solving, decision making, and self-advocacy), independent living skills, (i.e., financial, first aid, cooking, safety, etc.), interpersonal skills, leisure skills, transportation skills, classroom behavior, social skills, and fostering and supporting autonomy in students with disabilities (Kohler, et al., 2016). Cavendish and Connor (2018) disclosed that students with disabilities who were instructed in how to engage in active IEP participation were able to enter into true collaboration with their IEP team members, ensuring their position at the center of the process. Developing a student with special needs' life, social, and emotional skills will help ensure the student will be the center of the transition planning process.

Interagency Collaboration

Another predictor of continuous employment after graduation from secondary school was receipt of vocational rehabilitation services to include help finding a job, job skills training, career counseling, or vocational education courses (Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Inter-agency collaboration involves an alliance amongst many stakeholders involved in the student with disabilities' life to include students, parents, educators, community agencies, employers, service providers, and post-secondary institutions (Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Information between parties should be shared, to include transition assessment(s) and the discovery process, which yields information on the student with disability's preferences, interests, needs, and strengths to create an individualized plan for achieving attainable and measurable goals, services, and accommodations (Morningstar et al., 2016; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). With this information, stakeholders are then able to engage in planning and facilitating meetings with students and families and coordinate requests for information, organize the collection and use of assessment data, and secure funding and staffing of transition-related services (Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). These interagency stakeholders (special, general, career and technical, and vocation educators) link the student with special needs and their family with appropriate providers to assist with financial planning, health care system navigation, guardianship, adult disability and mental health services, transportation, vocational rehabilitation, center for independent living, and other providers (Kohler et al., 2016). It is critical that

school and vocational rehabilitation personnel are familiar with each other's practices and terminology to prevent a breakdown in services for the students with disabilities that they serve (Fraker et al., 2016; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). Collaboration amongst stakeholders involved in the student with disabilities life may enable the student to transition with adult supports and guidance to adult life.

Family involvement. There is an overwhelming amount of research documenting the importance of parental involvement in promoting positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities (Dodge, 2018; Hirano et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; United States Department of Education [US DOE], 2017). For example, when parents are committed to the belief that their child with special needs can work, their child was very likely to work (Cmar et al., 2018). Surprisingly, research has shown that as students age, there is an overall decrease in parental involvement in IEP and transition meetings (Hirano et al., 2018). As reported by Cavendish and Connor (2018) and Rosetti et al. (2017), parents felt there are barriers to their participation in these meetings, which included a lack of opportunity to provide input, knowledge barriers, work-related time constraints, communication challenges, and a lack of a strengths-based approach by the school in educational planning. Thus, the desired partnership among students, parents and guardians, and schools that is mandated by law is not consistently recognized in practice (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017).

Parents with high expectations for their child with special needs envision post high school employment and continuous employment for their child, which aligns with previous research associated with post-school employment for youths with various

disabilities (Cmar et al., 2018; Pleet-Odel et al., 2016). Cmar et al. (2018) also revealed that students with disabilities who received paid work experiences in high school yielded more post-secondary school employment success. In addition, when students with disabilities receive vocational education services, help finding a job, career counseling, job skills training, and/or vocational education courses, Cmar et al. (2018) found that these students were more likely to have continuous employment suggesting that these services should be infused throughout the student with disabilities' educational program.

Program Structure

Program structure refers to providing program options that are flexible, meet the individual student's needs, and reflect the student's linguistic and cultural diversity (Kohler et al., 2016). Data are used to assess and monitor progress towards graduation to include (a) drop-out risk, (b) attendance, (c) behavior, (d) course completion, (e) social performance, (f) college and technical school enrollment and completion patterns, (g) office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions, (h) truancy, (i) retentions, and (j) support needs; these data are assessed by stakeholders to identify students at-risk of dropping out of school prior to important grade-level transitions (Kohler et al., 2016). Strategic planning is conducted on a regular basis and includes multiple stakeholders from education, community agencies, and community partners (Kohler et al., 2016). The strategic planning is driven by research-based practices for transition education and services and utilizes needs assessments to guide high school level education and postschool community programs and services (Kohler et al., 2016).

Literature Review

This literature review discusses the current state of transition processes for youth with disabilities through the post-secondary years. The literature review supports that a student with disabilities' education is significantly enhanced when parents, students, educators, administrators, child study team members, guidance counselors, and service agency personnel collaborate and share their findings enabling students with disabilities to move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities.

Review of the Literature

Over the past 30 years, research and transition practices revealed that post-secondary school outcomes improve when community organizations, parents, educators, and students work as a cohesive team to implement transition-focused education for youth with disabilities (Kohler et al., 2016). Kohler and colleagues (2016) believed that transition programing should be at the foundation of a student with special needs' education as it guides the development of the student's educational programs. Flannery and Hellemn (2015) reported that focusing on the quality of transition components in the IEP is just as critical as the alignment of these components in the development of the IEP.

Data regarding student outcomes in special education have caused educators, families, and advocates to question both the process and content of special education programming. Thirty years ago, youth with disabilities were not achieving high levels of quality full-time employment, access to secondary education, community engagement, or independent living (Kohler & Field, 2003). As such, there has been an increased focus

on transition education and services for students with disabilities, yielding an expanded perspective of transition education and services as well as an identification of practices.

In 2016, Kohler and colleagues developed the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 to promote a transition-focused education. Kohler et al. (2016) described effective transition practices as having five categories: (a) student focused planning, (b) student development, (c) interagency collaboration, (d) program structures, and (e) family engagement. Transition focused education begins with understanding the student with disabilities' desired adult outcomes and includes academic, extra-curricular, and career instruction and activities taught through many instructional and transition approaches. Kohler and colleagues (2016) believed that transition planning should be the foundation of a student with special needs' education as it guides the development of the student's educational programs.

Student-Focused Planning

Educational laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 1997, 2004) mandated that students with disabilities and their parents be encouraged to participate in all stages of the IEP and transition plan development (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; Rosetti et al., 2017). Like Kohler and colleagues (2016), Mazzotti et al., (2015) and Powers et al., (2001) argued that students should be at the center of the planning process and should be directly involved in all phases of the educational decision-making process as well as be a member of the team that establishes future goals. Students involved in the IEP process have been linked to higher graduation rates and higher levels of goal attainment (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). In addition,

students with disabilities who participate in the IEP and transition planning meetings directed school personnel to a greater emphasis on student strengths (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2015; Powers et al., 2001). Like Cavendish and Connor (2018), Mazzotti et al. (2015) disclosed that students with disabilities who were instructed in how to engage in active IEP participation were able to enter into true collaboration with their IEP team members, ensuring their position at the center of the process. Furthermore, students who actively participate in the IEP and transition planning process develop self-determination skills by setting realistic goals and by participating in making decisions about their own transition plans (Collier et al., 2017; Kohler et al., 2016; Mazzotti et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016).

Student-focused planning should include formal planning and every day support, utilize accessible and collaborative processes, incorporate facilitated methods of discovery and problem-solving tools, impact organization and system level change, and support effective team building amongst all stakeholders in the student with disabilities' life (Morningstar et al., 2016). Focusing on the quality of transition components in the IEP is just as critical as the alignment of these components in the development of the IEP (Collier et al., 2017; Flannery & Hellemn, 2015).

Like Kohler et al. (2016), Morningstar et al. (2016) stated transition-focused planning is to begin no later the 14th birthday of the student; the planning team includes the student, family members, educators, and agency personnel; planning decisions are driven by the student and his or her family's wishes for the student's adult life. There is also an overwhelming amount of research documenting the importance of parental

involvement in promoting positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (Dodge, 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Hirano et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; US DOE, 2017). Surprisingly, research has shown that as students age, there is an overall decrease in parental involvement in IEP and transition meetings (Hirano et al., 2018).

Student Development

Through student-focused planning, students are ready to contribute to the IEP process and participate in the evaluation of their previous IEP goals and objectives; student participation in the IEP and transition planning meetings has been connected to higher levels of goal attainment and higher graduation rates (Cavendish & Conner, 2018). Self-determination is also facilitated within the planning process as students with disabilities express their preferences, interests, and limitations (Collier et al., 2017; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Student development has three components: (a) assessment, (b) academic skills, and (c) life, social, and emotional skills.

Assessment. Transition assessment is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). Assessments are invaluable in the person-centered planning process for the assessment process gathers information on the student with disabilities' strengths, interests, and preferences to create an individualized plan for achieving targeted goals (Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). Assessment focuses on all areas of post-secondary life including employment, independent living skills, and instructional planning and includes formative assessments as well as career interest and aptitude assessments, which are used to drive curricular and instructional decisions (Kohler et al., 2016). Mazzotti and Rowe (2015) viewed

assessments as a key to successful transition planning as they assist students in making informed decisions and lead the transition planning process.

Transition assessments provide a foundation for outlining IEP goals and objectives, as well as transition services and drive an educator's instruction (Rowe et al., 2015). Transition assessments should include the goals, skills, needs, preferences, and aptitudes a student has along with the skills required to be successful in the next setting; the ultimate goal is to create a broad assessment that will serve as a guide for activities and instruction (Rowe et al., 2015; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). The results from students' original assessments should be viewed as the foundation for transition planning and be the driving force for individualized services (Mazzotti et al., 2009). This transition planning identifies areas of student need, which according to Mazzotti and Rowe (2015) and Papay and colleagues (2015), can be addressed as early as primary school. As district administrators adapt to their respective state standards, it is necessary to recognize ways to teach transition related skills within a standards-based framework (Bartholomew et al., 2015; Monahan et al., 2018). One way to teach transition related skills within a standards-based framework is by using UDL.

Universal Design for Learning. Bartholomew et al. (2015) and Bartholomew and Griffin (2018) provided insight on how to adapt the original UDL checklist to include a focus on secondary transition enabling special and general education teachers the opportunity to connect UDL practices to their current instruction. Teachers who would like to incorporate secondary transition instruction along with academic skills can use the UDL checkpoints to overlap with secondary transition to guide their planning

(Bartholomew et al., 2015). These checkpoints enable teachers to maximize their instructional time with students on secondary transition topics in general and special education settings (Bartholomew & Griffin, 2018; Collier et al., 2017).

Self-advocacy. Once the student's completed assessments are reviewed, a summary of performance should be completed and explained to the student, the student's family, school transition service providers, and community agency representatives (Mazzotti et al., 2015; Morgan, Kupferman, Jex, Preece, & Williams, 2017). Active engagement in the summary of performance results is one method of teaching self-advocacy skills. The summary of performance enables students with disabilities to present his or her characteristics and accomplishments for future audiences and provides an avenue for students to learn important transition skills, such as communicating one's strengths and interests and developing self-advocacy skills (Morgan et al., 2017). Through the summary of performance, students gain a greater understanding of their disability and learn to advocate for themselves during Person Centered Planning meetings as well as in post-secondary employment settings (Mazzotti et al., 2015).

Mazzotti et al. (2015) revealed that using Person Centered Planning increases participation from all members present in the student with a disability's meeting and enables high school students with disabilities to generalize the summary of performance results to their employment setting. Youth with disabilities who were instructed in how to engage in active IEP participation are able to enter into collaboration with their IEP team members, ensuring their position at the center of the process; students who are actively involved in the IEP process have been linked to higher levels of goal attainment

(Cavendish & Connor, 2018). When students with disabilities understand the limitations of their disability, they are able to advocate for themselves better in high school and transfer these skills to post-secondary life in careers, education, and independent living.

Another reason it is important for students with disabilities to understand their limitations is upon graduation from high school, their accommodation included in their IEP ends, and they must advocate for themselves and request academic supports during their post-secondary years (Newman & Madaus, 2015). At the kindergarten through 12th grade, accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities are documented in their IEP, as mandated in the IDEA of 2004 (IDEA; 2004). Upon graduation from high school, this coverage under IDEA ends. To ensure students with disabilities have access to both instructional and physical environments, colleges and universities need to provide academic accommodations with regard to course examination and evaluation of academic achievement (Newman & Madaus, 2015). As students with disabilities prepare for post-secondary life, it is important they understand the extent to which the receipt of services, accommodations, modifications, and supports differ between high school and post-secondary school.

Shogren et al. (2017) revealed that autonomy, psychological empowerment, and self-realization play a significant role in facilitating the relationship between school-based factors (student skills, family involvement and expectations, and access to inclusion) and post school outcomes (social relationships, access to services, financial supports, employment, and advocacy). Like Kohler et al. (2016), Shogren et al. (2017) found that the relationship between self-determination instruction, student characteristics,

and secondary skill experiences affect post school outcomes through the enhancement of autonomy, psychological empowerment, and self-realization. In addition, promoting self-determination may further enhance the effects of other school-based factors such as enhancing students' social skills, inclusive opportunities and exposure to the general education curriculum, and promoting family expectations on outcomes (Kohler et al., 2016; Shogren et al., 2017).

Academic skills. Academic skills include courses and curricula that prepare students with special needs for post-secondary education, careers, and independent living. In this area of student development, students with special needs focus on academic skills development (i.e., interpretation, comprehension, decoding, and computation), academic strategy development (i.e., learning strategies, test-taking skills, and study skills), and academic behavior development (i.e., going to class, organization, participation, doing homework, and studying) (Kohler et al., 2016). In order for educators to address the academic and nonacademic gap in skills, they need to first identify the post-secondary goal (Bartholomew et al., 2015). The post-secondary goal is then aligned with academic content and industry or higher education standards, which describe the common knowledge, skills, duties, and abilities required to do the job well (Bartholomew et al., 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2009). These standards can then be used as benchmarks to compare student achievement and determine the gap between the student's current knowledge and skill level and those needed to be successful in the student's preferred post-secondary environment (Gothberg et al., 2015). Once the gap analysis reveals inconsistencies between the student's current ability and criteria for attaining academic

and nonacademic post-secondary goals, the gap(s) are then linked with the Common Core State Standards so they can be addressed (Bartholomew et al., 2015).

It is then necessary to identify the skill sets required to close the gap between the student's current ability level and the level of performance required to enter post-secondary environments; the number of tasks required to close the gap depends on the needs of the student and the size of the gap (Gothberg et al., 2015). The last step in this process is to develop annual goals associated with the student's post-secondary goals. Once the annual goal is identified, sub-skills are necessary to support the attainment of the goal and to guide instruction (Bartholomew et al., 2018). When academic and nonacademic skills are taught in the secondary settings, students with disabilities are more likely to transition successfully into post-secondary settings of their choice (Bartholomew & Griffin, 2018).

In addition to the Common Core State Standards, instruction for students with disabilities must take place in career and vocational skills, employment, and life skills (Kohler et al., 2016). Joshi and Bouck (2017) revealed students with disabilities who received common core instruction in the general education classrooms were more prepared for post-secondary education than students receiving their instruction in special education classes. Luecking and Luecking (2015) agreed with the findings from Joshi and Bouck (2017) and added work experience and paid integrated employment during the high school years is a predictor of successful post-secondary school employment.

Life, social, and emotional skills. Life, social, and emotional skills includes developing self-determination skills (i.e., goal setting, problem solving, decision making,

and self-advocacy), independent living skills, (i.e., financial, first aid, cooking, safety, etc.), interpersonal skills, leisure skills, transportation skills, classroom behavior, social skills, and fostering and supporting autonomy in students with disabilities (Kohler et al., 2016). Cavendish and Connor (2018) and Luecking and Luecking (2015) disclosed that students with disabilities who were instructed in how to engage in active IEP participation were able to enter into true collaboration with their IEP team members, ensuring their position at the center of the process. Parents with high expectations for their child with special needs envision post high school employment and continuous employment for their child, which aligns with previous research associated with post-school employment for youths with various disabilities (Pleet-Odel et al., 2016). Like Luecking and Luecking (2015), Cmar et al. (2018) and Fraker et al. (2016) revealed that students with disabilities who received paid work experiences in high school yielded more post-secondary school employment success. In addition, when students with disabilities receive vocational education services, help finding a job, career counseling, job skills training, and/or vocational education courses, Cmar et al. (2018) and Kohler et al. (2016) found that these students were more likely to have continuous employment suggesting that these services should be infused throughout the student with disability's educational program.

Interagency Collaboration

IDEA (2004) mandated that the transition process begins at the age of 16, however some researchers recommend the process begin at age 14 (Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). In addition to involving the student and family in the process,

it is just as important to collaborate with community agency service providers and post-secondary educational institutions in order to ensure appropriate services are provided to the student (Collier et al., 2017; Mazzotti et al., 2009). Fraker et al. (2016) reported that employment service providers need to intensify their services by working with schools to effectuate work opportunities for students before, during, and after high school graduation.

Collaborative framework. The collaborative framework includes students, parents, educators, service providers, community agencies, post-secondary educational institutions, employers, and other relevant stakeholders in the student with disabilities' life (Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Collaboration amongst schools providing transition services and community service providers assisting youth to secure employment has been identified as a predictor of employment success for young adults with disabilities (Fraker et al., 2016; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). Another predictor of employment success and/or continuous employment after graduation from secondary school was receipt of vocational rehabilitation services to include help finding a job, job skills training, career counseling, and/or vocational education courses (Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016).

Collaborative service delivery. Information between parties should be shared, to include transition assessment(s) and the discovery process, which yields information on the student with disability's preferences, interests, needs, and strengths to create an individualized plan for achieving attainable and measurable goals, services, and accommodations (Morningstar et al., 2016; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). With this

information, stakeholders are then able to engage in planning and facilitating meetings with students and families and coordinate requests for information, organize the collection and use of assessment data, and secure funding and staffing of transition-related services (Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). These inter-agency stakeholders, along with special, general, career and technical, and vocation educators link the student with special needs and his or her family with appropriate providers to assist with financial planning, health care system navigation, guardianship, adult disability and mental health services, transportation, vocational rehabilitation, center for independent living, and other providers (Kohler et al., 2016). It is critical that school and vocational rehabilitation personnel are familiar with each other's practices and terminology to prevent a breakdown in services for the students with disabilities that they serve (Fraker et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016).

Family Engagement

There is an overwhelming amount of research documenting the importance of parental involvement in promoting positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities (Dodge, 2018; Hirano et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; US DOE, 2017). For example, when parents are committed to the belief that their child with special needs can work, their child was very likely to work (Cmar, et al., 2018). Surprisingly, research has shown that as students age, there is an overall decrease in parental involvement in IEP and transition meetings (Hirano et al., 2018).

Family involvement. Family involvement in students' education positively influences all students (see Dodge, 2018). Parental expectations and parental involvement were identified by Pleet-Odle et al. (2016) and Mazzotti et al. (2015) as an evidence-based predictor of improved post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. Kohler and Field (2003) discussed family involvement as being associated with family and parent participation in planning and delivering education and transition. Family involvement has been shown to improve the student with disability's attendance at school and lowers the drop-out rate as well as increases higher education assessment scores and attendance (Kohler & Field, 2003). Thus, expectations and support by the families of youth with disabilities are linked to positive outcomes (Fraker et al., 2016).

As reported by Cavendish and Connor (2018) and Rosetti et al. (2017), parents feel there are barriers to their participation in IEP and transition planning meetings, which include a lack of opportunity to provide input, knowledge barriers, work related time constraints, communication challenges, and a lack of a strengths-based approach by the school in educational planning. Like Povenmire-Kirk, Bethune, Alverson, and Kahn (2015), Rosetti et al. (2017) revealed that many families are frustrated with what they perceive as ineffective and culturally insensitive IEP meetings, leading to a disconnect between schools and families. Thus, the desired partnership among students, parents and guardians, and schools that is mandated by law is not consistently recognized in practice (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017).

CLD. Povenmire-Kirk et al. (2015) revealed the population of special education students have become more diverse across language, socio economic status, culture, race,

sexual orientation, ethnicity, family structure, and religion; of concern is that special educators are not diversifying in the same ways as their student population because culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) youth experience lower graduation rates and employment outcomes than students with disabilities who are not CLD. As such, educators need to integrate their skills and knowledge into practices that are appropriate and respectful and result in improved outcomes for students with special needs who are also CLD. In transition planning, educators should work with students and their families to plan for the student's future; this planning cannot be successful without an awareness and understanding of the student's culture (Hsaio, Higgins, & Diamond, 2018).

Rosetti et al. (2017) discussed developing collaborative partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families during the IEP process. Like Povenmire-Kirk et al. (2015), Rosetti et al. (2017) revealed that many CLD families are frustrated with what they perceive as ineffective and culturally insensitive IEP meetings, leading to a disconnect between schools and CLD families. Family engagement is related to positive student outcomes in special education (Cavendish & Connor, 2018). Rosetti et al. (2017) revealed several CLD barriers to collaboration with their school, including a lack of cultural responsiveness, inappropriate accommodations related to language, insufficient information regarding team meetings, deficit views of family and children, little respect for familial contributions, as well as IEPs that are written in a manner that is difficult for the parent to understand, assessment results are not translated in time for IEP meetings, and interpreters are not provided at meetings despite being federally mandated. Haines, Francis, Shepherd, Ziegler (2018) reported that educators of students with

disabilities who are from CLD backgrounds often have difficulty establishing trusting partnerships with families, which is concerning for transition-aged students as family-professional partnerships significantly enhance post-school outcomes for high school students with disabilities. Cavendish and Connor (2018) agreed that further research is needed examining diverse groups of parents, students with disabilities, and teachers to triangulate perspectives on ways to enhance partnership building.

Family Engagement. Family engagement is linked to positive student outcomes in special education. Kohler et al. (2016) supported the notion that parents of students with disabilities be exposed to adult service providers no later than the child with disabilities 14th birthday. This early exposure educates parents about supports and resources available during and after high school for their child with disabilities and increases parental involvement in the transition planning process so they have a greater understanding of how to access services in the school setting, the adult services venue, and in the community setting (Pleet-Odel et al., 2016). Whenever possible, information should be provided to the parents in their native language in a culturally responsive and respectful manner.

Family preparation. Parents with high expectations for their child with special needs envisioned post-high school employment and continuous employment for their child, which aligns with previous research associated with post-school employment for youths with various disabilities (Cmar et al., 2018). Rosetti et al. (2017) revealed that schools should promote an environment, which supports cultural responsiveness with their student's families, to include accommodations related to language, provide detailed

information regarding upcoming meetings, and accepting input from the student's families during times of decision making. Additionally, documents should be written in a jargon-free manner and assessment results provided prior to meetings so the parents/guardians have time to review the data. Family preparation also includes networking with agencies and wrap-around services and facilitating community experiences for youth with disabilities (Kohler et al., 2016).

Program Structure

Program structure refers to the effective and efficient delivery of transition-focused education and services, which includes resource development, planning, policy, and evaluation (Kohler & Field, 2003). The attributes and structures of a school support the framework for implementing transition-focused education and also focus on systematic community involvement in the development of educational opportunities (Kohler et al., 2016).

Program characteristics. Program characteristics need to be flexible in order to meet individual student needs, be outcome oriented, and reflect high expectations for all students (Kohler & Field, 2003). When students with disabilities receive vocational education services, help finding a job, career counseling, job skills training, and/or vocational education courses, Cmar et al. (2018) found that these students were more likely to have continuous employment suggesting that these services should be infused throughout the student with disabilities' educational program. In addition, graduation requirements need to be clearly defined to all stakeholders in the student with a

disability's life prior to entering the 9th grade and multiple paths towards earning a high school diploma should be explored (Kohler et al., 2016).

Program evaluation. Program philosophy and policy provide the context that makes transition-focused education possible (Kohler & Field, 2003). Evaluating effective transition practices at the program level should be an on-going cycle of program development relying on data to monitor progress and effect change (Kohler et al., 2016). Another way to effect positive transitional programming change is by providing professional development for educators (Holzberg, Clark, & Morningstar, 2018). Like Holzberg et al. (2018), Mazzotti et al. (2016) supported the use of evidence-based practices when providing educators with professional development, feedback, and coaching, thus ensuring the highest return for the resources invested in the development of transition programs, program improvement, and evaluation.

Strategic planning. Strategic planning is conducted on a regular basis and includes multiple stakeholders from education, community agencies, and community partners (Kohler et al., 2016). It is driven by research-based practices for transition education and services and utilizes needs assessments to guide high school level education and post-school community programs and services. According to IDEA (2004), planning and services are to be individualized and specific to a student's interests, needs, strengths, and preferences. Youth with disabilities, however, face unique challenges related to health, service needs, social isolation, potential loss of benefits, and a lack of access of supports, which complicate their post-secondary planning for future education and work (Fraker et al., 2016).

Policies and procedures. Even though post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities have increased over the years, there remains a need for improvement in the areas of education, employment, and independent living (Test et al., 2009). Therefore, it is important to continue looking into programs and practices at the secondary level that lead to improved post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. Policies and procedures warrant the use of evidence-based practices to provide the structure required for on-going program improvement of transition education and services (Kohler et al., 2016).

Resource development and allocation. Morningstar et al. (2016) and Papay et al. (2015) discussed that transition-focused education should begin in the elementary grades so that students have adequate time to transition to adult life. When career awareness, career experiences, and awareness with the exploration process begin in the primary years, opportunities for exploration and work experiences then increase with the student's age. Many research, education, and policy efforts have been implemented to improve student outcomes, including changes to the secondary transition mandate under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (Mazzotti & Plotner, 2016). One way to enhance an educator's professional knowledge on transition-focused education is to provide effective transition-focused professional development, as discussed by Holzberg et al. (2018); Kohler et al. (2016); Mazzotti and Plotner (2016); and Mazzotti et al. (2016). Holzberg et al. (2018) revealed transition-focused professional development should (a) be content focused, (b) incorporate active learning to include follow-up and coaching, (c) be aligned with the current on-the-job issues educators are facing, (d) be of

sufficient length to be effective, and (e) involve collaborative teams in on-going learning. Like Kohler et al. (2016), Mazzotti et al. (2016) supported the use of evidence-based practices when providing educators with professional development, feedback, and coaching, thus ensuring the highest return for the resources invested in the development of transition programs, program improvement, and evaluation.

School climate. The school climate domains of safety and respect, communication, engagement, and academic expectations are all important factors that are associated with student achievement (Davis & Warner, 2018). School climate influences students emotionally, socially, and academically in many ways and has come to be understood as the internal quality and character of school life, which is comprised of many factors, all of which affect student experiences within schools (Thapa, Cohen, Higgins-D'Assandro, & Guffey, 2013). School climate supports a sense of trust and fairness. Like Kohler et al. (2016), Davis and Warner (2018) agreed that a school's climate has a significant relationship with how well students progress academically; the school climate domains of safety and respect, communication, engagement, and academic expectations together within a school can help predict student achievement.

Summary and Conclusions

Major themes, which emerged from the Literature Review, centered around the five categories in Kohler and colleagues (2016) Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0: Student-Focused Planning, Student Development, Interagency Collaboration, Family Engagement, and Program Structure. Educational laws, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA; 1997, 2004) mandated that students with disabilities and their

parents be encouraged to participate in all stages of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and transition plan development (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; Rosetti et al., 2017). In addition, students with disabilities who participate in IEP and transition planning meetings directed school personnel to a greater emphasis on student strengths and parents conveyed a greater understanding of the transition process (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2015). There is an overwhelming amount of research documenting the importance of parental involvement in promoting positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities (Dodge, 2018; Hirano et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; US DOE, 2017). Surprisingly, research has shown that as students age, there is an overall decrease in parental involvement in IEP and transition meetings (Hirano et al., 2018).

As reported by Cavendish and Connor (2018) and Rosetti et al. (2017), parents felt there are barriers to their participation in these meetings, which include a lack of opportunity to provide input, knowledge barriers, work-related time constraints, communication challenges, and a lack of a strengths-based approach by the school in educational planning. Cavendish and Connor (2018) reported that one of the barriers to students with disabilities' participation in IEP meetings include a lack of coaching for students to practice self-advocacy before the IEP or transition meeting. Students with disabilities need to be educated in how to participate in these meetings in order to ensure there is a genuine collaboration amongst all stakeholders present and ensure the student is the focus of the IEP and transition planning process.

Vocational rehabilitation services include help finding a job, job skills training, career counseling, and/or vocational education courses are important to the success of students transitioning to adult life (Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Inter-agency collaboration involves alliance amongst many stakeholders involved in the student with disabilities' life to include students, parents, educators, community agencies, employers, service providers, and post-secondary institutions (Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Information between parties should be shared, to include transition assessment(s) and the discovery process, which yields information on the youth with disability's preferences, interests, needs, and strengths to create an individualized plan for achieving attainable, measurable goals, services, and accommodations (Morningstar et al., 2016; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016).

The present study sought to understand and report on the gap in practice of educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and secondary school administrators in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States for there is a discrepancy between what the research says that educators and transition specialists should provide and what is actually happening. This gap in practice was examined and research-based practices will be provided to ensure achievement and post-secondary school success for students with disabilities. Kohler and colleagues' (2016) Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 was discussed and supports the research questions for the study: Identifying the student-focused planning strategies currently in place and being used by secondary transition specialists as well as identifying the barriers

these secondary transition specialists endure interfering with post-secondary success for students with disabilities. In Chapter 3, the role of the researcher and the methodology on how the study will be conducted will be discussed, as well as further explain the role of Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 in the research process.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Purpose

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate educator perceptions of the transition strategies currently in place in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States and to determine what is successful, what can be enhanced, and how to go about advancing the supported transition program currently in place, thereby enabling access to vocational services, job and career training, and education. Successful transition plans focus on lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities by focusing on academic and functional achievement as these students move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Morningstar et al., 2016; Plotner et al., 2016). Additionally, transition service providers have expressed frustration due to a lack of expertise regarding the roles, the responsibilities, and the expectations of their role in transition planning. This is also evident in other parts of the country as Mazzotti and Plotner (2016) revealed that transition service providers continue to lack the skills and knowledge to effectively implement evidence-based practices to ensure that students with disabilities are exposed to positive in-school and post-secondary education success. Additionally, school personnel need to have the evidence-based resources as they acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to apply effective transition programs and practices (Plotner et al., 2016). One way to bridge the lack of skills and knowledge that educators are experiencing with effective transition programs and practices is to provide school personnel with information related to implementation of transition services, instruction,

and supports (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Based on the findings from this study, patterns and themes have emerged, which have identified a clear understanding of what is needed to develop transition service programs for students with disabilities.

In this chapter, the purpose of the study is discussed. Second, the research questions, research design, and rationale are reviewed. Third, my roles as the researcher are explored as an observer, participant, and observer-participant. Fourth, a description of the research methodology is discussed followed by a data analysis plan. Fifth, concerns regarding trustworthiness are explored and ethical procedures are revealed. Lastly, the chapter ends with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

There are two central questions guiding this study:

RQ1: What are perceptions of special education teachers, general education teachers, guidance counselors, child study team members, and administrators regarding the types of student-focused planning strategies being used in secondary school settings to support students with disabilities in transition planning?

RQ2: What are the barriers that hinder the efforts of special education teachers, general education teachers, guidance counselors, child study team members, and administrators to deliver secondary school students with disabilities transition planning?

I have identified a gap between the current practices of educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and district administrators and the research-based practices required to ensure achievement and post-secondary school success for students

with disabilities (see Gothberg et al., 2015; Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Many students with disabilities are affected by this gap in practice. Brezenski (2018) reported that only 35% of high school graduates with disabilities have the necessary skills to obtain and keep employment. Variability in high school transition service provisions across schools, districts, and states exists and presents many difficulties to transition teams (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Transition service providers have expressed frustration due to a lack of expertise regarding the roles, the responsibilities, and the expectations of their role in transition planning.

Qualitative research was the approach selected to explore the research questions. Creswell and Poth (2018) reported that qualitative research makes the world more visible by locating the observer in the world. Qualitative researchers are interested in comprehending how people interpret their experiences, what meaning is attributed to the experiences, and how they create their world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). "The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24). The research questions are open-ended to encourage narratives to emerge from the participants. Qualitative research can be a catalyst for positive social change in that others may gain further insight into transition practices as a result of in-depth interviews and perceptions.

Within qualitative research, there are several approaches to consider; all approaches begin with a research problem and continue with questions, data, and data analysis and interpretations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The narrative approach seeks to

explore the life of an individual. The phenomenological approach seeks to understand the essence of the phenomenon. When using the grounded theory approach, a theory is developed grounded in data from the field. The ethnography approach describes and interprets a culture-sharing group, and the case study design illustrates a concern, allowing the researcher to accumulate a rich, detailed description of the setting for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have chosen the basic qualitative design because "researchers who conduct these studies …seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and world views of the people involved" (Merriam, 2002, p. 11). Basic qualitative studies are the most common form of qualitative research found in education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Quantitative versus qualitative research. Many quantitative researchers use scales, tests, surveys, and questionnaires with large samples of participants who are randomly selected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The data is then converted numerically, and a deductive mode of analysis ensues. The findings in quantitative research are precise and in a numerical format whereas the qualitative researcher uses descriptive words to report the findings. Strong (2018) reported that "quantitative and qualitative researchers both state the purpose, establish a problem, formulate research questions, define the research population, identify preferred methods, develop a time frame for data collection, collect and analyze data, and present outcomes (p.49)." If I had chosen to use a quantitative design, I would have been seeking to understand the relationship between variables. Instead, I chose to use the basic qualitative design because my goal was to investigate the current transition strategies currently in place in one school district in the

northeastern region of the United States and determine what is successful, what can be enhanced, and how to go about advancing the supported transition program.

Role of the Researcher

The study's participants all work with me; however, I have never had a relationship that involved having power over any of the participants such as in a supervisory or instructor capacity. My role was to plan and conduct an ethical study focusing on three key principals: (a) respect for the participants, (b) concern for their welfare, and (c) equitable treatment. Participants' anonymity was protected by assigning a four-digit number to replace their formal names. The participants understood that they were participating in a study voluntarily. An explanation of the purpose of the study was provided in a clear and concise manner, and I did not engage in deception of any kind. The research questions and interview techniques were designed free of jargon and the participants had a clear understanding of the questions.

Methodology

Participant Selection

In this study, I focused on investigating educator perceptions on transition-related training as well as the educator's perceived access to transition-related materials in the secondary setting. In addition, I explored the knowledge and use of secondary transition evidence-based practices that are currently being used to educate students with special needs. The research method in this study was a basic qualitative design. The basic qualitative design was chosen because it explores the experiences of the participants; specifically, special and general educators, high school child study team members, high

school guidance counselors, and district administrators in a real-life setting (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Convenience sampling was used to select five secondary school special education teachers, four school general education teachers, two secondary school child study team case managers, two district school administrators, and two secondary school guidance counselors as participants for this study. Convenience sampling was chosen because the participants work for the school district discussed in this study.

To secure participants for this study, I contacted the local school district through a letter of cooperation from the superintendent of schools (see Appendix A). I emailed an invitation to educators, child study team members, guidance counselors, and administrators directly, inviting them to participate in the research study. A follow-up invitation was placed in the mailbox of any participants who did not immediately respond.

Secondary-school special education teachers, general education teachers, child study team case managers, administrators, and guidance counselors who work in other school districts in the United States were not included in this study. The results from this study might be transferrable to other secondary schools in districts throughout the United States. The knowledge gained from this study may help educators provide students with disabilities positive in-school and post-school success.

Sample Size

Creswell (2015) advised that the goal of qualitative research is to collect extensive information on each setting, participant, and process to reveal specific information. Specific aspects of the study determine the sample size. In a basic qualitative design, the

sample size should provide enough opportunity to identify themes of the cases as well as show cross-case theme analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I chose to use 15 participants in five categories (guidance counselors, administrators, special education teachers, general education teachers, and child study team members) to provide ample information to identify themes and codes.

Instrumentation

The intent of the data collection process was to provide educator perceptions on the types of transition practices that are currently in place in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States. Data was collected using interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed (see Creswell & Poth, 2018). Using data from multiple sources provides information from different aspects of the phenomenon. Interviewing participants with responsibilities in the high school transition of special needs students to adult life from different departments provided a lens into what is going well and what can be enhanced to ensure students with special needs successfully transition to adult life.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Prior to contacting participants, I submitted my proposal to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for their review and approval of the research along with a copy of my proposed informed consent form. The informed consent form included a written purpose statement explaining the purpose of the study and acknowledged that the rights of the participant would be protected during data collection.

The local school district was contacted using a formal letter (see Appendix A) requesting permission to conduct research through a letter of cooperation from the superintendent of schools. The high school principal was then contacted after securing district approval. Included with the request are the purpose of the study, the amount of time I will be at the high school collecting data, participant time requirements, and how the data and study results will be used (see Creswell, 2015). Providing this information set the tone for realistic expectations on the part of the participants (see Creswell, 2015).

Participants received an email (see Appendix B) with an invitation requesting their participation in the study. Participants were chosen because of the professional position held in the district (i.e., high school guidance counselor, high school child study team member, high school educator, or administrator). The purpose and use of the interview along with its voluntary and confidential nature were further explained to participants. Participants were guaranteed that the research would pose them minimal risk.

Data collection took place at a high school located in the northeastern region of the United States. Data collection took place on two separate occasions and lasted no longer than 45 minutes per session. A hand-held digital recorder was used during each interview in order to record the interview session. Interview recordings were transferred to a flash-drive and the digital recorder cleared to add another layer of confidentiality. All notes and flash-drives will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. A data log containing a list of participants (and their four-digit codes) and contact dates, and consent forms were kept in the locked filing cabinet as well where it will remain for 5

years. All participants received a hand-written letter thanking them for their participation in the study. Lastly, a presentation of the study's results provided an avenue of exiting the participants from the study.

Data Analysis Plan

Creswell and Poth (2018) identified five steps for data analysis. The first step in data analysis was managing and organizing the data by creating data files. I created data files after each participant was interviewed. Additionally, a four-digit numerical code was assigned to each participant's data to protect the participant's identity as well as to assist with the organization of the data.

In the next step, I read through the text, making margin notes, and formed initial codes. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed allowing for initial codes to be documented and notes to be written. The third step involved describing and classifying codes into themes. Themes developed after the data collection process was complete and were documented after analyzing the codes. Each set of data were reviewed multiple times to validate the codes and emerging themes. Additionally, member checking was done with many of the participants to validate the emerging themes and ensure the themes were consistent with the feedback provided during the interview.

In the fourth step, I developed and assessed interpretations establishing themes and patterns. In this step, I made notes pertaining to the codes and emerging themes to identify patterns within the data. In the fifth step, the data were interpreted by developing generalizations of what was learned. These generalizations assisted in the development of the summaries for each group of educators as well as assisted in supporting

recommendations discussed in this study, enabling educators to offer comprehensive and collaborative transition services to students with special needs.

Coding. Coding allows the researcher to arrange data into a systematic order while searching for "patterns in data and ideas that help explain why patterns are there in the first place" (Saldana, 2016, p. 9). Through the many cycles of coding, qualitative data are managed, filtered, and highlighted so that categories, themes, concepts, and theories may be generated (Saldana, 2016). "Coding, codes, and data shape each other; they are interdependent and inseparable" (Saldana, 2016, p. 9). I used manual coding and data analysis in lieu of coding software because I am a novice researcher conducting a small-scale study. Saldana (2016) stated that manual coding gives the researcher more control and ownership of her work when manipulating qualitative data on paper. Creswell (2015) discussed using open coding (also known as initial coding) to identify patterns within the data and ultimately identify findings. Open coding "breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and difference" (Saldana, 2016, p. 115). Open coding allowed me to "remain open to all possible theoretical directions suggested by your interpretation of the data" (Saldana, 2016, p. 115). Through the process of open coding, I was able to manage my data and saw themes emerge as participants felt similarly about the same phenomenon.

Open coding assures the reader that I was open to what the data as revealed as opposed to the predetermined notions of others. I reviewed participants' transcripts multiple times, each time identifying words and patterns and developed codes. Coding was done manually and consisted of multiple rounds. As I coded, important words and

phrases were managed, filtered, and highlighted from interview transcripts. These words and phrases were reviewed for repeating words and significant ideas, enabling me to categorize themes, concepts, and theories. Evaluations of these words and ideas during the manual coding process were based upon the understanding of the participants' experiences. After data were reviewed for repeating words and significant ideas, statements were written based on the participants' experiences. Lastly, a synthesized description of participant's experiences was written documenting the perceptions of the participants to add to information on the perceptions of special education teachers, general education teachers, guidance counselors, child study team members, and administrators regarding the types of student-focused planning strategies being used, and the barriers that exist, in secondary-school settings to support students with disabilities in transition planning.

Discrepant cases. Creswell (2015) discussed discrepant data as data that cannot be categorized into one of the identified themes. Discrepant data "must be rigorously examined, along with supporting data, to determine whether the research findings (i.e., categories, themes) are to be retained or modified" (Rumrill, Cook, & Wiley, 2011, p. 172). Discrepant cases may also assist with identifying future areas of research. Discrepant data that do not fit into a category were carefully evaluated to ensure they do not fit into the identified themes.

In qualitative research, it was essential that I be transparent in eliminating any biases. In this study, Participant 1045 made inappropriate comments about students with disabilities (and their parents). This data was rigorously examined to determine whether

or not the findings should be retained. These responses were not included in the results section of this study as they may bias the work.

Trustworthiness

Qualitative research is interpretive, and engaging in self-reflection is essential to the research process by promoting transparency to eliminate any biases. To ensure the dependability of this study, several steps were taken to eliminate researcher bias. Open coding, reflexivity, audit trails, and member checks were used in this study as one way to reduce researcher bias.

Within the current study, researcher reflexivity involved the continuous process of reflection on the research. This involved the process of examining myself as the researcher and the researcher-participant relationship (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflexivity is an outlook that a qualitative researcher adopts when collecting and analyzing the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflecting on the researcher-participant relationship involved examining my relationship to the participants and how the relationship dynamics affected responses to questions. I also reflected on my own background and my positions as a child study team member and learning disabilities teacher consultant to see how these positions influence the research process. It was critical that I kept a journal throughout this research process to achieve reflexivity. This journal was kept in a locked filing cabinet in my home.

Member checking was also done to validate emerging themes by checking whether or not my interpretations of the data were valid. Participants' transcripts were sent to each participant electronically, asking for their review and comment on what they

reported during their interview. None of the participants noted discrepancies in their respective transcript. Any difference of opinion on what was stated in the interview and subsequently written in the transcript would have been noted on the transcript.

Ethical concerns were also addressed. Initially, I provided a consent form that discussed the purpose of the study and acknowledged that the participant's rights would be protected during the collection of data. The form also provided the Walden University IRB approval number (05-29-2019-00172272), explained that the interviews were voluntary and confidential, and that participants were free to change their mind and exit the study at any time. Participants were then assigned a four-digit, unique identifier to be used in place of their name to protect the confidentiality of each participant. Each participant was asked the same questions and open coding was utilized to reduce bias.

Credibility

Credibility involves whether or not the researcher has accurately portrayed what the participants think, feel, and do. It also involves the processes that influenced the participants' thoughts, feelings, and actions. Evidence of credibility in this study involved the amount of time I spent in the field with my participants developing a nurtured and strong relationship as well as the data collection process. Another aspect of credibility in this study involved checking whether or not my interpretations of the data are valid through member checking. Participants' transcripts were sent to each participant electronically, asking for their review and comment on what they reported. Any difference of opinion between the participant and the researcher on what was stated in the interview would have been hand-written on the transcript.

I also practiced reflexivity throughout this study. Researcher reflexivity involves the continuous process of reflection on the research; the process of examining both myself as the researcher, and the researcher-participant relationship (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflecting on the researcher-participant relationship involved examining my relationship to the participants, and how the relationship dynamics affected responses to questions. I also reflected on my own background and my position as a child study team member and learning disabilities teacher consultant to see how these positions influence the research process. It was critical that I kept a journal throughout this research process so I could work to achieve reflexivity.

Transferability

The maximum variation in perspectives from high school guidance counselors, child study team members, educators, and administrators yielded data from multiple points-of view of the experience of transition practices (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This, in turn, allowed for the creation of a rich and thick description of the data generated by the experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated, "the best way to ensure the possibility of transferability is to create a thick description of the sending context so that someone in a potential receiving context may assess the similarity between them and the study (p. 257)."

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research involves whether or not the processes and procedures can be tracked to collect and interpret the data. In this study, audio tapes were used throughout this study to support dependability. Dependability was enhanced in this

study as the relationships between the researcher and participants was a working relationship where the researcher did not hold any supervisory duties over the participants. Additionally, interviews were confidential, and this confidentiality was enhanced by assigning each participant a four-digit code to be used in place of their name when transcribing the audio recordings and when writing the findings of the study. Lastly, a journal was kept throughout the research process so I could be reflective.

Confirmability

Confirmability involves the level of confidence that the study's findings are based on the participants' narratives and words rather than my potential researcher biases (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, open coding, reflexivity, audit trails, and member checks were used to reduce researcher bias. Open coding allowed the me to arrange my data into a systematic order as I searched for themes and ideas in the data and to help explain why patterns were there in the first place (see Saldana, 2016). Through the many cycles of coding, qualitative data were managed, filtered, and highlighted so that categories, themes, concepts, and theories could be generated. Researcher reflexivity involved the continuous process of reflection on the research. This involved the process of examining both myself as the researcher and the researcher-participant relationship (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Audit trails were used as a validation strategy throughout the course of the study as a means of documenting the thought processes and clarifying understandings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking was also done to validate emerging themes by checking whether or not my interpretations of the data are valid. Participants' transcripts were sent to each participant electronically, asking for their

review and comment on what they said. Any difference of opinion between the participant and the researcher on what was stated in the interview would have been noted on the transcripts; there were no differences in opinion noted.

Ethical Procedures

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) advised that the validity and reliability of a qualitative study depend largely upon the researcher's ethics. Prior to contacting participants, I submitted my proposal to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for their review and approval of the research along with a copy of my proposed consent form. The consent form included a written purpose statement explaining the purpose of the study and acknowledged that the rights of the participant will be protected during data collection.

Next, the local school district was contacted using a formal letter requesting permission to conduct research through a letter of cooperation from the superintendent of schools (see Appendix A). The high school principal was then be contacted after securing district approval. Included with the request was the purpose of the study, the amount of time I planned to be at the high school collecting data, participant time requirements, and how the data and study results will be used (see Creswell, 2015). A consent form was provided to all participants, which described the purpose of the study and acknowledged the participant's rights during the data collection process.

The interview process was confidential and voluntary and the study was contingent upon Walden University's IRB's approval. Participants were assigned a four-digit number to be used in place of their name to ensure another layer of confidentiality.

Data collection took place in an office located in the participating district's high school or in the Board of Education Building's conference room. Data collection took place on two separate occasions and lasted no longer than 42 minutes per session. A hand-held digital recorder was used during each interview in order to record the interview session and transcribed to a password-protected flash-drive. The digital recorder was then cleared to add another layer of confidentiality. All notes and flash-drives are stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home and will remain there for 5 years.

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate educator perceptions currently in place in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States and to determine what is successful, what can be enhanced, and how to go about advancing the supported transition program currently in place, thereby enabling access to vocational services, job and career training, and education. Within qualitative research, there were several approaches to consider; I chose the basic qualitative design as the research method associated with my study because the basic qualitative design illustrates how people make sense of their experiences (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) and works best with participants who come from different disciplines (see Kahlke, 2018).

It is essential that I was transparent in eliminating any biases for qualitative research; to ensure the dependability of this study, several steps were taken to eliminate researcher bias. The same open-ended questions were posed to all participants and open coding was used to create themes, which emerged during the research process. Throughout the interview and data analysis process, researcher reflexivity was practiced

and audit trails and member checking were employed as validation strategies. In Chapter 4, I presented the data analysis and findings of this basic qualitative study.

Chapter 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate the transition strategies currently in place in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States and to determine what is successful, what can be enhanced, and how to go about advancing the supported transition program currently in place, training, and education. Successful transition plans focus on lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities by focusing on academic and functional achievement as these students thereby enabling access to vocational services, job and career move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Plotner et al., 2016).

I explored and described the transition strategies currently in place from the perspective of general and special educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and two district administrators. The central question that guided this qualitative study was: What are the perceptions of general and special educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and district administrators regarding the types of student-focused planning strategies currently in place in a secondary school setting to support students with disabilities in transition planning? Additionally, I sought to understand the barriers that hinder the efforts of general and special educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and district administrators in providing secondary-school students with disabilities effective transition planning. In this chapter, I report on the details about data collection and analysis, discuss evidence of trustworthiness, and present the findings.

Setting

Data collection took place in a school district located in the northeastern region of the United States. There were no known personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at the time of this study that may have affected the interpretation of the study results. The setting for the interviews consisted of a private office or a conference room within the partner school district.

Below is a representation of the participant demographic information for this basic qualitative study.

Demographics

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Identifiers	Role in District	Gender	Number of Years in District	Interview Venue
2162	General Education Teacher	Female	16	Office
2222	General Education Teacher	Female	22	Office
2092	General Education Teacher	Female	09	Office
2232	General Education Teacher	Female	23	Office
2131	Special Education Teacher	Female	13	Office
1121	Special Education Teacher	Male	12	Office
2151	Special Education Teacher	Female	15	Office
2221	Special Education Teacher	Female	23	Office
2121	Special Education Teacher	Female	12	Office
1103	Guidance Counselor	Male	10	Office
2133	Guidance Counselor	Female	13	Office
2024	Child Study Team	Female	02	Office
2174	Child Study Team	Female	17	Office
1025	Administrator	Male	02	Office
1045	Administrator	Male	04	Conference Room

Data Collection

Selection of Participants

To begin the data collection process, it was necessary to receive approval from the Walden University IRB. Once IRB approval was received, (approval number 05-29-2019-0172272), I secured a letter of cooperation from the participating school district's superintendent of schools within 48 hours of IRB approval (see Appendix A). Additionally, I also received a verbal approval from the high school's principal. Next, I used the district's website to email potential teachers, guidance counselors, child study team members, and district administrators using a personalized e-mail message (see Appendix B).

Participant Response

Of the 20 participants emailed, 15 participants agreed to be interviewed, which included five special education teachers, four general education teachers, two district administrators, two child study team members, and two high school guidance counselors. I offered two meeting locations for participants: a conference room located in the Board of Education Building or in the privacy of an office located within the district. Fourteen participants chose to meet in an office located within the district and one participant chose to meet in the Board of Education Building's conference room. Participants were required to review and sign a consent form prior to being interviewed.

Participant Confidentiality

After the interview recordings were saved to a password protected flash drive, the digital recorder was cleared after each interview was transcribed. All participants were

assigned a four-digit numerical code to be used as an identifier to add another layer of confidentiality in data collection and anonymity in data reporting. All notes and flash drives are being stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. Participants were advised that the unique identifier was being used to ensure confidentiality in data collection and in the reporting of data. Interviews were conducted over a 6-week period.

Interviewing

Interviews lasted from 15 to 42 minutes in length and they were audio recorded for transcription purposes. A hand-held digital recorder was used during each interview and interviews were later saved to a password protected flash drive. The digital recorder was then cleared after each interview was transferred to the flash drive and the digital recorder was erased. Fourteen participants chose to meet in an office located within the district and one participant chose to meet in the Board of Education Building's conference room. There were no concerns pertaining to the clarity or understanding of the participants' answers.

The participants were all asked the same open-ended questions (see Appendix C) to allow their perspectives to be heard while providing structure and consistency to the data collection process. The interviews were semi structured, which allowed for flexibility. Fifteen participants consented to be interviewed, which included five special education teachers, four general education teachers, two child study team members, two high school guidance counselors, and two district administrators. Types of interview responses or questions included clarifying questions, probes, and feedback. The

participants participated in face-to-face interviews; all participants appeared to be relaxed during the interview, as evidenced by their posture, conversational tone, and eye contact.

Discrepant cases. Creswell (2015) discussed discrepant data as data that cannot be categorized into one of the identified themes. Discrepant data "must be rigorously examined, along with supporting data, to determine whether the research findings (i.e., categories, themes) are to be retained or modified" (Rumrill et al., 2011, p. 172). Discrepant cases may also assist with identifying future areas of research. Discrepant data that do not fit into a category were carefully evaluated to ensure they do not fit into the identified themes.

In qualitative research, it was essential that I be transparent in eliminating any biases. In this study, Participant 1045 made inappropriate comments about students with disabilities (and their parents). I rigorously examined the data to determine whether the findings should be retained. These responses were not included in the results section of this study as they may bias the work.

Data Analysis

The five steps identified by Creswell and Poth (2018) for data analysis were followed in this research project. The first step was managing and organizing the data by creating data files. The next step was reading through text, making margin notes, and forming initial codes. The third step involved describing and classifying codes into themes. In the fourth step, I developed and assessed interpretations establishing themes and patterns. In the fifth step, the data were interpreted by developing generalizations of

what was learned. Additionally, member checking validated the emerging themes and ensured the themes were consistent with the feedback provided during the interview.

Member checking was also done to validate emerging themes by checking whether my interpretations of the data were valid. I sent each interview transcript to the respective participant electronically, asking for their review and comment. Any difference of opinion between the participant and I on what was stated in the interview and subsequently written in the transcript would have been noted on the transcript; it should be noted that there were no changes made to any of the participants' transcripts.

Coding. Coding allowed the me to arrange my data into a systematic order to increase my connections with data (see Saldana, 2016). During the data collection process, a large amount of data was gathered. Through the many cycles of coding, qualitative data were managed, filtered, and highlighted so that categories, themes, concepts, and theories could be generated (see Saldana, 2016). I manually coded the data in lieu of using coding software because manual coding gave me more control and ownership of my work when manipulating qualitative data on paper (see Saldana, 2016). Open coding "breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examines them, and compares them for similarities and difference" (Saldana, 2016, p. 115). This allowed me to "remain open to all possible theoretical directions suggested by my interpretation of the data" (Saldana, 2016, p. 115). Open coding minimized my personal bias. I was able to focus on what the data revealed instead of concentrating on the preconceived notions of others (Dodge, 2018). My interpretation of the results emerged from an analysis of themes and corresponding codes.

Results

Analysis of Participant Responses: General Education Teachers

General Education Teacher 2162. Participant 2162 was a general education teacher who had been teaching high school students in the district for 16 years. She stated she interacts with students with special needs daily in the classroom, the hallways, and in her after-school club and felt it is her responsibility to ensure that students with special needs have an enriched high school experience.

When discussing barriers to carrying out transition practices, Participant 2162 revealed that she felt she is undereducated and expressed "I wish some of the special education offerings were for me, for general ed. teachers, but they aren't; there aren't any workshops for me to attend." Participant 2162 felt comfortable reaching out to her special education colleagues (teachers and child study team members) and has learned how to modify her lessons and assessments for her students with special needs.

At this time, 2162 does not interact with any outside agency personnel on behalf of students with special needs and was unclear about referrals being made for students with special needs to adult service providers; however, she stated that she has attended IEP meetings for her students and on occasion, she has met some of the parents at Back to School Night. Participant 2162 stated that most of the IEP meetings she has attended at the high school include the student with a disability engaged in the IEP process.

Participant 2162 felt the planning process for students with special needs' transitioning to adult life should begin during the freshman year of high school however, she has not had any involvement in this process and was unaware of parental involvement

in this process. Participant 2162 believed that the parents of special needs students whom she has met are empowered to participate in the transition planning process for their child. "They know they can help their kids. Now there are a few I have run into that are at wits end…I refer them back to somebody at the school who is a professional."

When asked about perceived barriers to including parents in the process of transition, 2162 was unsure of how to answer. "Most of the parents I encounter fight for their children's rights, to get what they can before they transition to adult life." However, Participant 2162 also revealed a common theme found in this study when she stated, "Unfortunately, not all parents are (empowered) and it's frustrating for me to see if the child is having an issue and I call home to get help and the parent has nothing for me, that is frustrating." This situation she felt needs administrative assistance; specifically, how to remedy the situation. She requested additional professional development so she can have a better understanding of what to do when similar situations arise.

Participant 2162 has never used any assessments or data from assessments in her class other than assessments which follow her curriculum. She was unfamiliar with how to incorporate life skills or career and vocational skills into her lessons; most of the students she has in her classes are share-time vocational/technical school students (students who attend the local vocational/technical high school for part of their academic day and attend the high school for the other half of their day).

When asked what she feels the district does well with respect to transitioning our students with special needs to adult life, Participant 2162 stated,

> I love ____ ____'s program. The life skills, thank goodness we have that program. When I first came here to the high school, we did not have that program. And you could see a lot of the kids did not make it. And now, you take some of the more rambunctious ones and he has them trained to do different things and by the end of the year, they are on their own. He has them photo copying, making change, the breakfast service, delivering lunch. They're doing the stuff. They're more independent.

Participant 2162 was also asked what recommendations she had so the district could make the transition planning process for our students with special needs better. She responded that vocations training for students and professional development for teachers were at the top of her list. She also yearned for Homework Club to come back to the high school.

> I think they need to have something; I don't know how to do it. Homework Club is missed because not all of the teachers have office hours, not all of the teachers can stay. Those teachers who stay for Homework Club might not be able to help them with everything, but at least it is something. I really think that if kids are failing, they should be required to attend homework club X amount of times. Forget sports. Forget everything else. They have to go to make up because these kids are failing. Academics before anything else.

General Education Teacher 2222. Participant 2222 had been teaching high school students for 22 years. Like Participant 2162, Participant 2222 has a lot of interaction with the district's high school students with special needs and felt her class is

a "good fit" for them because the class is not intimidating and they are "learning the (life) skills that they need. I feel that it's not intimidating. I think they feel comfortable and welcome." Though Participant 2222 typically has a full class of 22 students, her general education students assist the students with special needs,

> When I have had students with disabilities, I have other students come along side of them and help them with measuring and I have found that the kids are fantastic with that. A lot of times they grow up with the kids with disabilities and they know them; they feel comfortable in helping them.

When asked what she perceived her responsibility was in preparing the students with disabilities for life after high school, Participant 2222 remarked, "To give them as many life skills as possible. Taking care of themselves. Cooking for themselves, money management, job skills." When asked about barriers to carrying out transition practices, Participant 2222 replied, "sometimes it is difficult with a large class and not enough help."

Participant 2222 typically does not collaborate with anyone outside of the high school on behalf of our students with special needs and is not familiar with the process of when or how students receive a referral to adult service providers. She felt that planning for these students for life after high school should begin as early as possible. She was unfamiliar with the level of parental involvement in the planning process for students with special needs, however she does attend IEP meetings on occasion. When asked if she felt parents were empowered to participate in the transition planning process, 2222

remarked, “I think so, I hope so.” Participant 2222 did not feel there were any barriers to including parents of students with special needs in the transition planning process.

Participant 2222 was not aware of any assessments that were used in the transition planning process and does not utilize any data from student assessments in her classes. Additionally, Participant 2222 did not know if students with special needs were involved in developing their IEP. She believed that life skills are inherently included in a student with disability’s educational program, “Like taking care of yourself, cooking for yourself, making sure you are safe in the kitchen, eating healthy” and that career and vocational skills are infused in their educational program as well (resume building, mock interviews).

Participant 2222 was also asked what she thought the district does well with respect to transitioning our students with special needs to adult life. She revealed,

> ____ ____, he is fabulous with the kids. He really talks to the kids with respect, but at their level at the same time so it’s not over their head or too complicated. He treats them with value and shows them how important they are and gives them the confidence they need. ____’s program also has people from the community to work with the kids.

Participant 2222 was also asked what the district could do better as it transitions students with special needs to adult life. She responded there could be more opportunities for the students with disabilities to go into the community. Activities during the school day were also needed – learning how to take public transportation,

infusing more Community Based Instruction (CBI) activities into the students with special needs' schedules, job sampling, and shopping within the community.

General Education Teacher 2092. Participant 2092 was a general education teacher who had been teaching high school students in an in-class support environment for nine years. She felt she interacts with students with special needs on a daily basis in the classroom, the hallways, and on her after-school cheerleading teams. When asked what her perception was regarding her responsibility in preparing our students with special needs for life after high school, 2092 replied, "I see myself as being aware of their IEP and what level they're on. When asked to, I attend IEP meetings. That's where my exposure to transition is." Participant 2092 does not feel she has any barriers to effectively carrying out transition practices. She does not collaborate with anyone outside of the high school to enhance our students with disabilities' transition planning practices and is not sure if our students with special needs are referred to adult service providers. Participant 2092 was unsure when planning should begin for the students with special needs for life after high school and was not aware if parents of students with special needs were involved in the transition planning process.

When asked about parents being empowered to participate in the transition planning process, 2092 replied, "Yes and no." Participant 2092 continued on to say,

> There's definitely some (parents) who are not engaged at all and there are some who are very engaged. I have students who are classified…who are in my advanced class, they're not even in college prep class… and I feel that is a push for the student as the parents are usually much more involved. So, their

> achievement, some of their achievement, is due to the fact that their parents who are involved and I have some students that could be doing better and there are some who come to mind, whose parents aren't involved or are a hinderance to their education.

Participant 2092 felt there are a few barriers to including parents in the transition planning process. She revealed, "the parents are constantly moving, and it is hard they do not push for anything outside of the classroom, more often than not the parents are not there (at IEP/transition planning meetings)."

When answering questions about assessments and data from the assessments to use in class with her students, Participant 2092 was not familiar with ever receiving this information. She was not familiar with students participating in their IEP development and referred me to the child study team. In a conversation regarding life skills, career, and vocational skills being incorporated into the students with disability's educational programming, Participant 2092 was, "not quite sure" with the exception of ____ ____'s Life Skills Program. Participant 2092 felt the district is providing an exceptional Life Skills Program for our lower-level (cognitive ability) students with disabilities. She stated,

> I think that that is an amazing thing that we have here. That we are able to keep students, until they are 21. They are still completely engaged with the student body. They are working on life skills: the bar-b-que classes with cooking and managing money, they are managing breakfasts with managing money and

> delivery. The copying and saying "Hello" and shaking your hand when they deliver it. That is something that is a shining point of our special needs students.

When discussing career and vocational training, 2092 shared,

> I'm a proponent that not every student is going to college and we need trades and I have sat in meetings with guidance counselors in this school that have said "Are you taking the SAT's?" already asking this type of question and they'll just respond; the student just responds "yes". I want them to know that there are other options outside of college. I feel as a district as a whole, there is a major push towards college and they only have college prep or above courses, that the lowest course you can take is a college prep. I just feel like there needs to be attainable goals and there is nothing wrong with not going to college. Doing a trade.

Additionally, Participant 2092 discussed that her district had students with special Needs involved in many extra-curricular activities. When asked what she felt the district could do to enhance the transition planning process, Participant 2092 felt it is important that the goals in the IEP are attainable for each individual student.

General Education Teacher 2232. Participant 2232 had been a general education teacher for 23 years in the district. She typically does not have students with special needs in her classes and admittedly does not interact with special needs students in the high school, as she was unsure of what she can ask or say. Participant 2232 does not participate in the transition planning process for special needs students and therefore was unaware of any barriers that exist with regard to this process. She does not know if parents are involved in the transition planning process and stated she does not know

enough about the process to know if parents feel empowered or not. Participant 2232 also reported that she does not have interaction with outside agency personnel, has never referred a student with special needs to any outside agency personnel, and does not know when the appropriate time is to begin transition planning for students with special needs.

Participant 2232 did express barriers to parent participation in general,

> I think the greatest barrier is the high school, and I've tried several ways to get parents involved and I've taught all levels. It's almost like ok now you're on your own. Or, now you've got to figure this out to a greater extent. Or, what I hear most often calling home is, when you have a problem or an issue or you want support and you're trying to get that from the parent, and I hear "I try everything, and he or she just won't do that for me." And I am like dumb founded on the other end of the phone, I've even made suggestions probably going down what I should say, "Well maybe you should take away this?" "Oh, I can't do that" and I would just stop talking. I realize that there is a very big difference. There's a big difference in what parents are willing to do."

Like Participant 2162, Participant 2232 would like additional professional development in understanding the classification process students undergo prior to being found eligible or ineligible for special education services. She would also like to have greater understanding of the classification categories used by the state as she feels this would make her more comfortable in engaging our students with disabilities outside of her classroom. Participant 2232 reported, "We are not included in the process of knowing who is in our building. We might understand blind or deaf. We are talking

about some major, not only categories, but levels." Participant 2232 continued her discussion and disclosed,

> We don't use the resources that we have in this building. And often, I see ____ and I say to myself, I wonder what students really know? What do they think she's capable of? What is she capable of because there's a million levels of that – like – how would I know? Should I go out and recruit her to do something? Would I have asked her to be on Yearbook? Could I have? How do I know what her level is? And, here's the bigger problem. Can I ask? The privacy issues. Am I allowed to know? Is that why they don't tell me? So, then we back off and then we become pariahs to the situation and then we feel guilty. That's where I am.

Participant 2232 was unsure how life, career, and vocational skills are incorporated into the student with special needs' educational programming. She was not aware of any assessments or assessment data being used in the classroom to enhance the instruction for our students with special needs. Participant 2232 stated she really does not get asked to participate in students' IEP meetings and therefore was not aware of the role a student with a disability plays in the development of their IEP. When discussing what, if any, responsibility Participant 2232 had in preparing students with disabilities for life after high school, she revealed that typically, students with special needs are not enrolled in the classes she teaches. She does not interact with special needs students in the hallway or in after school clubs; one of the reasons she shared is she was concerned about privacy issues, "How do I know what her level is? And, here's the bigger problem.

Can I ask? The privacy issues. Am I allowed to know?" Participant 2232 felt that one way to correct this problem is through meaningful staff development.

Summary of General Education Teachers' Responses.

1. Not all general education teachers interviewed felt comfortable in reaching out to our students with disabilities in the high school. One of the reasons given by Participant 2232 is she is unsure of what she can say and ask due to privacy concerns. All general education teachers interviewed agreed that they typically are not involved in the transition planning process of our students with disabilities in the high school and thus, they are not in agreement as to when the transition planning process should begin for our students with disabilities. They also did not agree on what, if any, responsibility they have in preparing students with disabilities for life after high school.
2. General education teachers are not privy to students' assessment data and are unsure what assessments, if any, the students with special needs receive.
3. General education teachers were also unaware if students with disabilities were connected with outside agencies to assist with the transition process to adult life.
4. General education teachers who participated in this study were divided on whether or not they feel parents are empowered to support their child through the transition planning process. Two participants conveyed during the interview process that parents in general were not involved in their child's education while two participants felt that parents fight for their child's rights.

5. The general education teacher felt there were many barriers to including parents in the transition planning process.
6. Three of the four participants discussed the Life Skills Program in the high school and felt this is a dynamic program for our students with special needs. Through this program, the participants agreed that students are receiving the life skills and vocational training needed to be successful in adult life while one participant admitted not knowing much about this program.
7. The need for more hands-on and relevant professional development was requested by Participants 2232 and 2162. These participants were looking for information pertaining to the levels of special needs students and an understanding of the classification system in general. Participant 2232 stated she would like, "to know who is in the building*"* and would like to know what she can and cannot say to our students with special needs.

Table 2

General Education Teachers' Codes

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
1	Spanish teacher, Family and Consumer Sciences teacher, in-class support Geometry, Teacher,	General education teachers
2	23 years, 9 years, 22 years, 16 years	23 years, 9 years, 22 years, 16 years
3	"On a daily basis, in class, in the hallway, in my after-school club." "I think over all I do. I think my class is a good fit for them because they are learning the skills that they need. I feel that it is not intimidating. I think they feel comfortable and welcome. When I have had students with disabilities, I have other students that come along side of them and help them with measuring and I have found that the kids are fantastic with that. A lot of times they grow up with the kids with disabilities and they know them; they feel comfortable in helping them." "I teach sophomores in an in-class support Geometry class." "None."	Clubs, hallways, in class, no interaction, good fit, feel comfortable and welcome
4	"I don't have special education students in my classes. I wish I knew more. I walk down the hallway and I often think, "Wow, I wonder what the issue is there? I wonder why I don't know anything about that?" and then I plow on." "I see myself as being aware of their IEP and what level they're on. When asked to, I attend IEP meetings." "To give them as many life skills as possible. Taking care of themselves. Cooking for themselves, money management, job skills…" "I wrote a curriculum for a special class; basically, it is an intro to Spanish class. It gives them a base for what they need, it gives them culture, vocab, and has a tiny bit of	No responsibility, attend IEP meetings, life skills

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
	Grammar.	
5	"Honestly, for me I feel I am under educated. I wish some of the special education offerings were for me, for general ed teachers but there aren't, there aren't any workshops for me to attend." "Sometimes it is difficult with a large class and not enough help." "I'm not really exposed (to transition)." "I don't have any special ed kids in my class."	Professional development, not enough help, large class size.
6	"No." "No." "No." "No."	No collaboration
7	"Beginning with the freshman year. I attend IEP meetings, I meet parents at back to school night." "As early as possible." "I'm not really sure about this." "I don't know."	9th grade, a.s.a.p., unsure, don't know
8	"I don't have an answer for this." "I'm not aware of this." "I'm not sure." "I don't know."	No answers
9	"Most of the parents I have met and know are empowered. They know that they can help their kids." "I think so, I hope so." "Yes and no. There's definitely some who are not engaged at all and there are some who are very engaged. I have students who are classified IEP who are in my advanced class, they're not even in college prep class ICS, and I feel that is a push for the student as the parents are usually much more involved. So, their achievement, some of their achievement is due to the fact that their parents who are involved and I have some students that could be doing better and there are some who come to mind, whose parents aren't involved or are a hinderance to their education." "I'm not quite sure."	Empowered, hinderance,

Question	Round 1 Code	Round 2 Code
10	"I think the greatest barrier is the high school, and I've tried several ways to get parents involved and I've taught all levels, I mean every level, the parental involvement is very different by level of student and then coming from 8th grade to high school It's almost like ok now you're on your own. Or, now you've got to figure this out to a greater extent." "the parents are constantly moving, and they are moving from place to place, and it is hard they do not push for anything outside of the classroom." "Not really." "I'm honestly not sure."	Transient, high school, not sure
11	No, "I'm not sure." "I'm not sure about this." "I don't know."	No answer
12	"I don't use them in regular ed classes." "I don't think I have ever received assessment data." "I don't know." "I personally do not see results to these assessments."	Don't know, not used
13	"I don't know." "I don't know." "I'm not sure." "I don't know."	No answer
14	"No, I've never seen that. I have never seen that." "I do not know; I think child study handles this." "I don't know." "I don't know this either."	No answer
15	"Most of my students that I see in my class they are the share-time tech students. They have to come here for their special depart of their education and they get their vocational skills obviously at vo-tech. There are some kids that couldn't get into tech but they would be good at something. I don't know if there is a way that we could test them. Like a vocational assessment so they can see what their	Vocational Technical School, no answer, safety, healthy eating, interviews, resumes.

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
	Strengths are and go from there." "Well a lot of them (life skills) are in there inherently. Like, taking care of yourself, cooking for yourself, making sure you are safe in the kitchen, eating healthy. Vocational and career we do resume building, mock interviews…" "I'm not quite sure other than ____ ____'s program." "I'm not sure."	
16	No answer. ": I love ____ ____'s class. I think that that is an amazing thing that we have here. That we are able to keep students. I don't know if that is a reflection on the district as a whole, I don't know who created that program." ": ____ ____, he is fabulous with the kids. He really talks to the kids with respect but at their level at the same time so it's not over their head or too complicated. He treats them with value and shows them how important they are and gives them the confidence they need. ____'s program has people from the community to work with the kids. That is the only thing that I am aware of."	The Life Skills class
17	"I think that there could be a little bit more opportunities for them to go into the community. Activities during the school day – taking a bus…they need to do more of that. More Community Based Instruction maybe work here for a day, go shopping for yourself or for these items." "Vocations, professional development… homework club." "I think it's making sure, not lacking, but making sure that the goals are appropriate for the student. I'm a proponent that not every student is going to college and we need trades…" "We are not included in the process of know who is in the building."	Community-based activities, knowing students, vocations, professional development

Analysis of Participant Responses: Special Education Teachers

Special Education Teacher 2121. Participant 2121 had been employed as a special education teacher in the ____ ____ School District for 12 years. She teaches a mix of in-class support (history) and resource room support (health and history) students with special needs who are cognitively functioning at multiple levels. When asked what she felt her responsibility was in preparing students with disabilities for life after high school, she responded, "besides academics, the biggest area is preparing them (the special needs student) to be a good citizen, being productive, what skills we can teach them with the time we have during the school day." Participant 2121 does not collaborate with anyone outside of the high school; she did not feel there were any barriers in place hindering her as she prepares her students with special needs for adult life even though she feels only some parents are involved in the planning process for transition. Participant 2121 shared "if parents are educated on the process or steps that need to be taken, then they get more involved…some will get involved." The more parents are educated about the transition process, the more empowered they become to participate in the transition planning for their child.

According to Participant 2121, transition planning for students with special needs for life after high school should begin in the 7th or 8th grade, "I think it is important that they are exposed to some things to start thinking about what they need." She continued adding, "I think they (the students with special needs) are old enough to learn to wash their own clothes, learn to be a little bit organized, study skills, test taking skills" When discussing barriers to including parents in the transition process, like Participant 2232 and

2092, Participant 2121 replied, “Sometimes we need their support and they’re just not there.” Lack of parental support is impacting the education of youth with disabilities.

Participant 2121 has never used assessments or assessment data in her classes to aid in the process of transition planning for her students with special needs and was unaware if students with special needs were ever referred to adult service providers. Students do participate in the IEP meetings that Participant 2121 attends and are included in the development of their IEP; however, life skills and career and vocational skills are not incorporated into any of the classes she teaches. She reported she would like to see this change at the high school level for students with disabilities, “this is not happening in my classes. I would like to make it a class, child care, child development, that would be one whole class. Then you teach them sex ed, abstinence. I just think this would be important.” Participant 2121 reported that she felt the case managers from the child study team communicate well with the faculty regarding special needs students. She shared that it is the child study team case managers who refer students with special needs to adult service providers. Participant 2121 is unaware if any other department in the district is working to assist the special needs students in their transition planning.

Special Education Teacher 2131. Participant 2131 had been employed by the district as a special education teacher and now teacher/supervisor for 13 years. She presently teaches three special education classes per day – two in-class support mathematics classes and one resource room support mathematics class. She felt it was her responsibility as a professional to, “help them (the students with special needs) get ready for life after high school – whatever that may be.” Participant 2131 did feel there

are barriers to this process. "Getting them ready for what it is really like out there. Like we teach them the state standards but it's not really true to them. It's not what we need to prepare them for." Participant 2131 felt teaching functional skills may be more important.

Participant 2131 felt that transition planning should begin during the middle school years (6th through 8th grade). She stated the child study team does a great job at including students with special needs in their IEP and transition planning process and it is the child study team who refers students with special needs to adult service providers. Participant 2131 did not use any transitional assessments or transitional assessment data in the classroom and did not include any outside agencies when preparing her students for life after high school. She did state that the guidance department is using a program called Naviance, but felt we need to do more with the students with special needs throughout their career at the high school. "kids want to go into the military, but they have to take the ASVAB and that's a very difficult test. We need to prepare them…so maybe we can help prepare them." When asked about life skills and career and vocational skills being incorporated into the student with special needs' educational program, she stated, "___ ____'s program does a great job with this (life skills). Just ____ ____'s program. Which would be great if we started earlier in middle school to learn about different careers or even have speakers." Participant 2131 also discussed parental participation in the transition planning process for students with special needs. Though she was not aware of any barriers preventing parental participation, she stated that she feels parents are more empowered now, as opposed to 13 years ago, to participate in the transition planning process for their child.

Special Education Teacher 1121. Participant 1121 had been employed with the school district for 12 years and presently runs the CBI (Community Based Instruction) Program/Life Skills Program located in the district's high school. Participant 1121 had been exposed to many cognitive levels of high school students with special needs and felt the students he teaches now "need more of every day type stuff rather than the Pythagorean Theory or how to solve for X type of thing." He felt he has a great responsibility in preparing his students for adult life,

> Well I think, first and foremost, what we try to do in the classroom is just be as positive as we can with them (the students with special needs). Just build their confidence. Like any teacher, I think the number one responsibility is to build a positive report with the kids and try to gain their trust. I think on many levels, my biggest job is just to be a positive role model and just try to teach or reiterate how important it is in terms of how they handle themselves, how they talk, just using manners, definitely social skills, hygiene, how they present themselves, and really probably the things that the common person just takes for granted because we just kind of do it.

When asked about barriers to carrying out transition practices, Participant 1121 stated that he felt some of the barriers are at home. "I feel like sometimes teachers believe in the kids a little bit more than some of the family. I think teachers are a little bit more willing to push the kids whereas at home, they may be more conservative." Participant 1121 remarked that he felt "in many cases the kids are more capable than people probably think."

Participant 1121 collaborates with the transition's expert from the ARC every two weeks during the academic year. Together, they cover topics such as hygiene, to job readiness skills, and resume building. Participant 1121 carries the lessons taught by the transition's expert over into lessons he plans for his students the following week to reinforce the material. Participant 1121 would like transition planning to begin during the middle school years and carry over into the high school years. He felt most of his student's parents are involved in the transition planning process and that they feel empowered to participate in their child's transition planning process. He went on to say, "I feel that any meetings that I have been involved with, I feel like our guidance and our child study team does a really nice job of explaining. Parents have an understanding of what their child is doing." Participant 1121 did not see any barriers to including parents in the transition planning process.

Like the previous participants, participant 1121 is not aware of any transition assessments used in the classroom and has not received any transition assessment data to use with his students. He attended all of his students' IEP meetings and encouraged his students to attend their meetings so they have an idea of the accommodations in place for them and a clear understanding of what is expected of them. Participant 1121 infuses life skills and career and vocational skills on a daily basis in his Life Skills/CBI Program. "A lot of what we do is general job skills, being able to listen to directions, being able to follow directions, and understand instruction, establish and remember routines and things like that." Referring to the Life Skills/CBI Program that participant 1121 runs, he stated, "This is a great thing we do here for the kids at the ____ ____ High School." Due to

scheduling concerns, Participant 1121 was unable to bring his students into the community as often as he would have liked this past academic year. The community is an integral part of his program as students, "get out into the community and carry the skills that they're learning in school out into the public whether they're at the library, or at a restaurant." Participant 1121 would like to see the district build up its outside partners for the CBI Program and for his schedule to be flexible so he can bring the students with special needs in his classes out into the community more frequently. He said, "I think specifically for CBI, the outside portion of this needs to grow more but again, sometimes I feel like my hands are tied, like transportation, the scheduling." Participant 1121 felt the logistics side of planning was holding his programming back.

Special Education Teacher 2151. Participant 2151 had been a teacher in the district for 15 years and currently teaches freshman special needs students in the resource room support and in-class support environments. When discussing her perception of what her responsibility is in preparing our students with special needs for adult life, she replied, "I teach the 9th graders, so we're not really talking about life after high school yet with the 9th graders." However, at a later point and time during our discussion, she mentioned the following during a question about planning for students for adult life, "by high school though maybe sooner. Kids are not prepared with the basics (writing a complete sentence, cursive writing so they can sign their name) by the time they come to me."

Like participants 1121, 2092, 2121 and 2232, participant 2151 felt that parents are the greatest barrier to carrying out transition practices, "Once kids get to high school, the

parents disappear. We need to do a better job of getting them involved." When asked if parents with special needs are involved in the transition planning process, 2151 replied, "I think when they get to high school (the students with special needs), that door closes." She continued on saying, "So, when I go to call home for whatever reason, it goes right to voice mail. They (the parents) see 1852 the high school's number, and they don't even answer. And they don't even want to discuss anything." Participant 2151 did not see the parents of special needs students as being empowered to participate in the transition planning process.

When discussing transition assessments, 2151 is not familiar with any assessments being administered to her students with special needs and has never received data from assessments to use with her students in class. Participant 2151 does not interact with adult service providers and commented that students with special needs typically attend their child study team meetings and participate in the IEP development at the meeting. Participant 2151 agreed with the other participants that 1121 is doing a great job with the Life Skills/CBI Program in the High School. She felt one thing the district could do better is increase the pay for paraprofessionals..

Special Education Teacher 2221. Participant 2221 had been a special education teacher in the district for 22 years. At the time of her interview, she had three-freshman in-class support classes, one- junior in-class support class, and two-junior resource room support classes. When asked what she perceived as her responsibility in preparing our students with special needs for life after high school, Participant 2221 shared the following,

> I believe it is the school district working together with parents, guidance, CST (child study team), and of course teachers and we also have to have the tools to help them get to where they need to be. I'd like to see more of our students in a situation where they are work ready; not necessarily college ready. I've been in the district a long time and many of our students are not going to college and that's not a bad thing. We need plumbers, electricians, we need that out there and we need to help these kids find their role in life and college is not always the answer for many of the students that we teach with disabilities. We are a work in progress. I think that _____ _____ is always trying to find things – programs to enhance our district and help our students. I definitely see that is something that we are very progressive in doing.

Participant 2221 did not see any barriers to carrying out transition practices for her students with special needs. She does not collaborate with any agencies personnel and was not aware of agencies who collaborate with the district to assist with the transition planning process. Additionally, Participant 2221 was not aware of any transition assessments for her students or data that would be generated from these assessments. She believed the most appropriate time to include a student with special needs in the transition planning process is between eighth and ninth grade for "our kids are still immature."

Participant 2221 encouraged her students to attend their child study team meetings to assist in the development of their IEP and plan for their future. She felt that life skills and career and vocational skills were not included in educational programming

of students with special needs unless they are enrolled in the Life Skills/CBI Program taught by participant 1121. Participant 2221 also believed we need more professional development to understand what other educators in the district are doing,

> I think schools need to talk more. We see each other once a year and that's on the first day of school in September. Number 1 needs to know about Number 2, Number 2 needs to know about Number 4, and Number 4 needs to know about the high school. We need professional development and make it real.

Participant 2221 felt that parents were not involved in the transition planning process because, "I just think in today's society parents are completely inundated and overwhelmed. They're over worked. They have multiple children. Children are taking care of children. I just think that there's a lot of concerns." All of these are barriers to their participation in the transition planning process. Participant 2221 felt that it is not that parents are not empowered, they are just overwhelmed.

Summary of Special Education Teachers' Responses.

1. Like the general education teachers, all but one of the special education teachers interviewed agreed that they typically are not involved in the transition planning process of our students with disabilities in the high school, unless it is to attend child study team meetings.
2. The special education teachers are also are not in agreement as to when the transition planning process should begin for our students with disabilities though they did agree that it needs to begin by freshman year of high school.

3. Additionally, the special education teachers are not privy to students' assessment data and are unsure of what assessments, if any, the students with special needs participate in.
4. Four of the special education teachers were also unaware if students with disabilities were connected with outside agencies to assist with the transition planning process to adult life. Participant 1121 works with representatives from the ARC who come in bimonthly to work with his students in pre-employment readiness skills.
5. The special education teachers interviewed agreed that they wished for more parental involvement at the high school level, though Participant 2131 felt that she has seen more involvement than when she started her career 13 years ago.
6. Additional barriers to carrying out the transition planning process include lack of appropriate courses for students with disabilities as all special education teachers agreed that not all students with special needs are going onto college and their students need more exposure to trades and careers that can accommodate their disability.
7. The Life Skills program taught by Participant 1121 was mentioned by all special education teachers who participated in this study as a program meeting student's needs for life skills and an introduction to pre-vocational skills. However, one thing missing from this program is an SLE (structured learning experience) trained employee, job coaches, and self-advocacy training.

8. All special education teachers interviewed are active participants in their students with special needs' child study team meetings and feel the child study team does a great job at connecting with the students on their case-loads.
9. Like the general education teachers, the special education teachers interviewed are requesting "relevant" professional development and dialog with the other schools in the district. As mentioned by participant 2221, "*the schools need to talk more*" so there is a greater understanding of what each individual special needs student requires as they transition from one school to another.

Table 3

Special Education Teachers' Codes

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
1	Special education teacher, teacher/supervisor, CBI teacher	Special education teacher, supervisor
2	12 years, 12 years 13 years, 15 years, 22 years	12, 12, 13, 15, 22 years
3	"Most of the day consists of a mix of resource and ICS classes." "I teach three classes in the morning…and then I have supervisory duties in the afternoon." "Most of the students I have now are more life skills, kind of, need more every day type stuff rather than Pythagorean Theory or how to solve for X type of thing."	Resource Room, ICS, Life Skills, Supervisory,
4	"So, I think besides the academics, probably the biggest area is preparing them to be a good citizen, productive, being productive, what skills can we teach them with the time we have during the school day. I think I work more on social skills because I don't have the opportunity to work on life skills. I'd like to see more life skills." "To help them get ready for life after high school, whatever that might be." "Well I think, first and foremost, what we try to do in the classroom is just be as positive as we can with them. Just build their confidence. Like any teacher, I think the number one responsibility is to build a positive report with the kids and try to gain their trust. I think on many levels, my biggest job is just to be a positive role model and just try to teach or reiterate how important it is in terms of how they handle themselves, how they talk, just using manners, definitely social skills, hygiene, how they present themselves, and really probably the things that the common	Preparing students: good citizen, being productive, get them ready for life after high school, build confidence, positive report, positive role model, to know the basics

Question	Round 1 Code	Round 2 Code
	person just takes for granted because we just kind of do it." "I teach the 9th graders, so we're not really talking about life after high school yet with the 9th graders. Basically, I want them to be able to write a complete sentence. That's one of the things that you know in our classrooms is that a lot of the kids can't even write a complete sentence. To know like capitalization, punctuation." "I believe it is the school district working the basics together with parents, guidance, CST, and of course teachers and we also have to have the tools to help them get to where they need to be."	
5	No barriers. "Once kids get to the high school, the parents disappear." "Well, sometimes I think some of the barriers are at home. I feel like sometimes teachers believe in the kids a little bit more than some of the family." "…we teach them the state standards, but it's not really true to them. It's not what I need to prepare them for…rooming, hygiene…making change, thinking logic…functional life skills." "Sometimes I think the barriers are at home."	No barriers, parents, CCSS, home
6	"No." "I don't." "The ARC, DVRS." "I do not think I have." "No, no."	No, DVRS, ARC
7	"7th or 8th grade." "Junior high." "Middle School." "By high school, though maybe sooner." "Between 8th and 9th grade."	Between 7th and 9th grade
8	"Some parents are." "I'm not sure about this." "Most of my parents are." "I think when they get to high school, that door closes." "I don't know."	Not sure, most are, some are, not at all.
9	"No." "When I go to call home for whatever reason, it goes right to	No, apathy, yes

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
	voice mail. They see 1852 the high school's number and they don't even answer." "I think they are…I can see where some families may feel a little bit overwhelmed." "In the beginning of my career, parents weren't really involved in the IEP process, but over the years I've seen that parents are more involved." "I think if you are educated on the process or the steps that need to be taken, then they get more involved. Some will get involved. I think some of them are just not educated enough to know what services they could take advantage of."	
10	The parents…sometimes we need their support and they're just not there for us." "No, not really." "I have very involved parents." "My parents typically are not involved." "I just think in today's society parents are completely inundated and overwhelmed. They're over worked. They have multiple children. Children are taking care of children. I just think that there's a lot of concerns."	Parents no involved, parents over worked, parents inundated, many concerns.
11	"I don't know." "I really don't know of anything." "I don't really…not in terms of paper tests and things like that." "The guidance department uses Naviance." "I don't do any of that stuff."	I don't know, Naviance
12	"I don't know." "I don't know." "I don't know." "I don't know." "I don't know."	I don't know
13	"No." "That's handled by CST and Guidance." "Yes, the ARC, DVRS…" "I think they are through child study." "No."	The ARC, DVRS, handled by Guidance and Child Study Team
14	"They attend meetings." "They attend meetings more now than in the past." "…I feel like the kids are 99% of the time at the IEP meetings…" "They usually participate	Students participate in IEP meetings

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
	in the meetings – the meetings I attend anyway."	
15	"____ ____does a great job of this." "They're not really unless you are in ____'s program." "Life skills are infused throughout my instruction with the kids." "____ ____'s program does a great job with this."	Participant 1121's program
16	"I think the case managers from the child study team are very good at getting the information out to the teachers and the meetings. That's my only exposure. I don't know what else the district is doing." "I think we listen to our students and we try to advocate…" "I think maybe the best this that our entire district does is involving everyone." "I do think that our use of in-class support is well done." "Constant communication with them, with the student."	CST, listening, advocating, ICS classes, communicating with students
17	"I think schools need to talk more." "We need more special ed teachers. We need to increase the pay for our aides." "With CBI, we need to build up our outside partners." "To make it more of a committee type, have a group come together and share ideas…"	Talk more, more special ed teachers, increase pay, come together

Analysis of Participant: Guidance Counselors

Guidance Counselor 2133. Participant 2133 had been a high school guidance counselor in the district for 13 years. She has had a lot of interactions with our special needs high school students. When asked what she perceived as her responsibility in preparing students for life after high school, she replied, "we talk about things that they would like to do in the future and we talk about areas where they can go to pursue that, whether it be a community college, a regular college, a trade school." Barriers to carrying out transition practices, according to 2133, have to do with a lack of follow through by the student and/or parents, "I feel when they come in, they want to discuss everything that you want to discuss, and then as they leave, they don't carry that along; not a lot of follow through." Participant 2133 was not aware of the role special needs students play in developing their IEP.

Participant 2133 collaborates with the local community college and arranges information gathering opportunities for all students, including students with special needs. She prides herself on being able to match students to classes. Participant 2133 feels transition planning should begin during the middle school years (grades six through eight) for students with special needs and feels getting on the same page as parents is her biggest barrier to carrying out transition practices,

> We do have good parents who absolutely want to be hands-in. Unfortunately, sometimes when our children are classified, and the parents are working all the time, it is very difficult to get on the same page because they may not be able to

> get here. Even on a telephone call, I give them information, they seem to get it, but it's a lot to handle, it's a lot to absorb.

When discussing parent empowerment and the transition process, Participant 2133 stated, "I feel they want to be, our parents are shut down. It's not necessarily they don't feel empowered, they don't feel it's their responsibility to help their child transition." Participant 2133 felt that the barriers to including parents in the transition process could possibly be because of transportation concerns.

Participant 2133 discussed using the computer program Naviance for all students, including students with special needs as they transition to adult life. She continued on with her discussion highlighting that "Naviance has built in assessments. There's an interest survey – you answer all of these questions and at the end of the survey, it gives you where your interests lie." Participant 2133 admitted that these assessment results do not carry over into the classroom however in the future, this may become a possibility. Participant 2133 also discussed outsourcing students to adult service providers in the community whenever needed.

When discussing life skills and career and vocational skills being incorporated into the student with disabilities' educational program, 2133 replied,

> So, what normally does happen, we do have a Home Economics course that we put most of our students through because everybody needs life skills training. However, just recently we brought to our school a program where our lower-level students are able to come here to school, stay until (through) their 21st birthday, and they get so many life skills, hands-on, daily practices that they can take long-

> term. Not only is it in the school, the teacher actually brings them out for job skills and actual recreation stuff. We're starting to bring a lot of vocational things into the school. Manufacturing is one. Now obviously it's just wood cutting and things of that nature but as you get a couple of years in, you start to do property maintenance. So, you learn about plumbing, and a little bit about electricity, you're gonna build a shed. It's just coming up this year. So, it's something to look forward to so that they have a little bit of something to do at home.

Like the general education and special education participants, Participant 2133 feels the Life Skills/CBI Program in the high school is exceptional for our "lower level students" and her recommendation is that she would like to see it expanded.

Guidance Counselor 1103. Participant 1103 was a high school guidance counselor and was been employed by the district for 10 years. When discussing his interactions with students with special needs, 1103 shared the following,

> Well, scheduling, which is just groups, freshman (and) sophomore. It's nothing personal. But then individual one on one is junior year scheduling where we sit down and talk about everything we've done so far in high school. Any gaps we have to fill for senior year. And then senior year we sit down with them again, with all of our students, one on one in the beginning of senior year so again we re-go over everything we did at the end of junior year and see where they are and what steps we need to do moving forward.

Participant 1103 felt his responsibility in preparing our special needs students for adult life was to help them "identify what they are going to get into and to put you in

contact with that next person." Barriers to the transition process include not having enough time to incorporate a follow-up piece with Naviance.

> Naviance is super cool…the career part of it I think is amazing. And I think we could do a better job with Naviance. I think that we don't necessarily have the time to do a better job with Naviance. We pretty much say here kids, do these ten things, but there's no controls on them. There's not checks and balances. Did you do this? Don't forget to do this. With this, if you do it - you do it, if you don't - you don't. So, if you use it the right way, which we do, if you go in and see we have kids that are on Naviance 120 times, we have kids that are on it once. Again, I feel that there is not a follow-up piece. It's hey, contact this person. I want to be in the military. Here's our military contact. And then I hope they follow through with it. Most of them don't.

Participant 1103 collaborated with many people on behalf of student with disabilities in the high school. This list includes, but is not limited to law guardians, case managers from the Division of Child Protection and Permanency, the Armed Forces, DVRS, probation officers, and CMO workers. Like Participant 2133, he felt planning for adult life should begin in middle school and felt the parents he worked with are empowered to assist their child in the transition process though there are geographical and economic concerns. Participant 1103 relies on the computer program Naviance to assist students with special needs in the transition assessment process, "You can go on there and select what you think your strengths are. They also do different kinds of

assessments to match your personality, (and) interests to different careers that are out there."

Though students with special needs have access to use the Naviance software, there typically is no one there to support them if questions or concerns arise. Additionally, data from the assessments are not shared with anyone else in the high school (teachers, child study team, coaches) at this time. According to Participant 1103, he is aware of certain teachers who log onto Naviance and "take it and run with it," however none of the teacher participants interviewed for this study were able to confirm this. Participant 1103 is not familiar with special needs students' involvement in the IEP process and he felt that the Life Skills/CBI Program taught by Participant 1121 would be where the special needs students receive their career and vocational exposure in addition to the life skills component. Participant 1121's recommendations for making the transition planning process better is to have more time to follow up with his students.

Summary of Guidance Counselors' Responses

1. Both of the guidance counselors interviewed for this study use the computer program Naviance as one way to assess student with special needs, though they admittedly do not share the results with anyone else in the district. According to Participant 1103, Naviance had a vocation and career component along with interest inventories and links to colleges. The drawback to using the computer program was there is no follow-up with the students. The guidance counselors stated the program is self-directed but there is no one

available to assist students with special needs should they need assistance with reading, understanding, or navigating the site.

2. The guidance counselors agreed that planning for adult life should begin during the middle school years. It should include the parents and guardians and anyone relevant in the student with special needs' life.
3. When discussing parental involvement, the guidance counselors were divided on this topic. Participant 1103 felt he had a good report established with all of his parents while Participant 2133 feels many of her student's "parents are shut down; they don't feel it is their responsibility to help their child transition." This sentiment was also shared by one of the administrators and some of the teachers.
4. Parental barriers mentioned by Participant 1103 included economic and geographical concerns as many parents are working two jobs and are unable to get off of work to come in and discuss their child.
5. Both guidance counselors worked with outside agency personnel to assist our special needs students with the transition planning process. They have established a working relationship with the local community college as well as the Armed Forces, probation, law guardians, and CMO workers. Additionally, both counselors agreed that there was a need for more courses and events that expose our students with disabilities to careers and vocations that do not involve college. One program mentioned by Participant 2133 involved students who are interested in the Manufacturing Program in the

high school. This program was due to expand to include additional courses where students build a shed, learn about wiring a house, and how to do basic plumbing services. Property maintenance was also discussed as an addition to this program.

6. Counselors were unaware if students with disabilities were participating in their IEP meetings, which imply that the guidance counselors are not typically involved in the meetings held by the child study team. Additionally, the lack of involvement in this aspect of the transition planning process leads to an absence of information regarding the development of self-determination skills for students with special needs.

Table 4

Guidance Counselors' Codes

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
1	School counselor, guidance counselor	School counselor, guidance counselor
2	Thirteen years, ten years	Thirteen years, ten years
3	"Well, scheduling, which is just groups, freshman sophomore. It's nothing personal. But then individual one on one is junior year scheduling where we sit down and talk about everything we've done so far in high school. Any gaps we have to fill for senior year. And then senior year we sit down with them again, with all of our students, one on one in the beginning of senior year so again we re-go over everything we did at the end of junior year and see where they are and what steps we need to do moving forward." "We talk about things that they would like to do in the future and we talk about areas where they can go to pursue that."	Scheduling, meetings in junior and senior year
4	"To help you identify what you are going to get into and put you in contact with that next person."	
5	"Not a lot of follow through." "I think we don't necessarily have the time to do a better job with Naviance." There's no checks and balances with things students are asked to do on their own.	Not enough time, no follow-through, no checks and balances
6	The Armed Forces. DVRS, agencies (CMO, probation, law guardians), local community college.	Armed Forces, DVRS, CMO, ACCC, probation, law guardians
7	"Middle School." 7th and 8th grade.	6th -8th grade
8	"We do have good parents who absolutely	Some parents are involved

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
	want to be hands-in. Unfortunately, sometimes when our children are classified, and the parents are working all the time, it is very difficult to get on the same page because they may not be able to get here. Even on a telephone call, I give them information, they seem to get it, but it's a lot to handle, it's a lot to absorb." "Some are."	Some parents are not involved.
9	"I feel like they want to. Some people have better relationships on the outside. Other times it's just like any other student – our parents are shut down they feel like it's your job to do this. So, it's not necessarily they don't feel empowered, they don't feel it's their responsibility to help their child transition." "I feel that maybe those parents (parents of students with special needs) reach out a little bit less."	Some parents are empowered. Others are shut down, not their responsibility
10	"There are geographic and economic concerns." "We do have a lot of transportation issues. So, I will set up a time to come in. They have the bus schedule, they're coming in, they're all about their child, and it's snowing or raining, whatever. The next time they can meet, again they took off of work, whatever it is it is very difficult to get here."	Geographic, economic, transportation, work schedules
11	"So, we do have Naviance which has built in assessments. There's an interest survey – you answer all of these questions and at the end of the survey, it gives you where your interests lie." "They also do different kinds of assessments to match your personality, interests to different careers that are out there."	Naviance software, guidance department,
12	"Not at this time." "There are different	No, Financial Literacy class

Question	Round 1 Code	Round 2 Code
	classes use it, Financial Literacy uses some stuff, ____'s class uses the resume on there so there are different teachers who take it and run with it."	
13	"Sure, DVRS, Armed Services, local community college." "We do resource out for any student that would need it and that includes special education students."	DVRS, Armed Services, local community college, itinerant services
14	"This is a child study team question." "I'm not sure about this."	No answer.
15	"That (life skills) would be through ____ ____'s program and _____'s class. Again, not all teachers use Naviance and those who do, don't use it fully." "So, what normally does happen, we do have a Home Ec course that we put most of our students through because everybody needs life skills training. However, just recently we brought to our school as program where our lower-level students are able to come here to school, stay until their 21st birthday, and they get so many life skills, hands-on, daily practices that they can take long-term. Not only is it in the school, the teacher actually brings them out for job skills and actual recreation stuff. We're starting to bring a lot of vocational things into the school. Manufacturing is one. Now obviously it's just wood cutting and things of that nature but as you get a couple of years in, you start to do property maintenance. So, you learn about plumbing and a little bit about electricity."	Life Skills Program, Home Economics, Manufacturing
16	"So, I really think that the program for the lower-level students is exceptional. I think that that is so perfect. If we could have something along the lines of that, although we do use his Everyday Life for other students, if we could do that and use more	Everyday Life Program, collaborating with Middle School guidance team.

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
	kids to get more of those life skills, that would go forth."	
17	"I use the time constraint as a crutch, but it's real. So, I guess being able to follow-up with kids...kind of express the importance of getting it (things) done… I guess it would be maybe cool to have at the end of senior year kind of have a sit down, where are you at, a follow-up! Where are we, what do we have, what don't we have, where's our working resume, like a portfolio." "Expanding the Everyday Life Program and not just for lower level students."	Time, creating portfolios, expand Everyday Life Program

Analysis of Participant Responses: Child Study Team (CST) Case Managers

CST Case Manager 2024. Participant 2024 was a school psychologist who had been employed with the district for two years. She was responsible for case managing approximately 80 students with special needs in the high school and conducting cognitive assessments when ordered by the IEP team. When asked what she perceived her responsibility to be in preparing special needs students for adult life, she shared the following,

> I think that it is my job to introduce them to whatever agencies can help them for life after high school, provide them with records, talk to them about their strengths and interests, and I try to create a plan to align those to what comes next.

Like many participants in this study, Participant 2024 stated she wished parents were more involved in the process of transition, "The parent involvement…sometimes I don't think the students are ready to absorb the information. It would be more helpful if the parents were more involved." Other barriers to the transition process include economic and geographic barriers along with the parent's level of education. Participant 2024 was unclear if the aforementioned barriers affect whether or not parents felt empowered to participate in the transition planning process for their child with special needs.

When discussing collaborating with agency personnel outside of the high school, participant 2024 described the following,

> We collaborate with DVR. We collaborate with the local community college, the P.R.E.P. Program, which is also the Department of Labor, preparing for career

> readiness. They come in and work with a small handful of students because it's just one woman. She assesses their interests using a computer program, she works with them on interview skills, preparing a resume, getting a job or an internship in a field they're interested in. The program actually pays their salary – they just find business who are willing to participate, they (the students with special needs) receive $50.00 for graduation, and then they will help similarly to DVR. My one student, she got a job sweeping up hair in a hair salon and they helped her get into Tech after graduation. (Referrals happen) only in senior year.

Participant 2024 begins planning for life after high school at the first meeting during the freshman year. She brings up DVR because she feels, "it is so important for that to be second nature – to enter it. So, I start talking about it freshman year. Every single meeting, I say, "And then, soon, you'll be referred to DVR." Participant 2024 discussed assessments and stated that her contact with the Division of Labor who came into work with her students with special needs during their senior year sometimes did computer interest inventories with the students. This data, however, was not given to the students' teachers or anyone in the school to use in planning for adult life. The students with special needs whom Participant 2024 case managed all attend their own child study team meetings. She shared, "There are some that understand their disability and voice exactly what they need … I have others who don't quite understand the process. I have come across some students who didn't even know they have an IEP." When asked about career and vocational skills as well as life skills educational programming for the students with special needs, Participant 2024 stated that they are building upon the Life Skills/CBI

Program every year. She felt the Life Skills Program elective is very helpful to a lot of students with special needs.

CST Case Manager 2174. Participant 2174 had been a school psychologist in the district for 17 years. She had 80 special needs students whom she case managed and conducted cognitive assessments when requested by the IEP teams. When asked what she perceived as her responsibility in preparing students with special needs for life after high school she shared the following,

> I think it's my responsibility to help them develop a plan of some sort, articulate goals, and from there figure out do they need to go and get some type of training, vocation, (or) college? How are they going to reach that? In what way will they reach that and what help do they need to get to their goal? What do they need to reach the goal and take the steps to get to the goal? Do they need DVRS? Or are they a kid that doesn't need that but needs the office of special services at a college they want to go to? Whatever it may be because different students have different needs and there are different levels of disability. It depends on each individual student.

Like Participant 2024, Participant 2174 felt the barriers that interfere with her transition planning are geographic in nature, "In ____ County, there aren't a lot of services for us so there's less resources and services to refer to, to tap into for our kids." Participant 2174 collaborates with DVRS, the Department of Labor, the ARC, CMO workers, probation, counselors and behaviorists, and the local community college. She began planning for special needs students' life after high school during the student's

freshman year and tried to include parents as much as possible in the transition planning process.

Participant 2174 felt that parents can be a barrier to the transition planning process and tries to empower them as much as possible. She shared,

> I mean I think I do my best to have them (parents) involved. In order to get DVR services, they have to sign consents and we also have another program, _____ _____, she comes in and she does the P.R.E.P. Program. They have to sign consents so parents have to be involved in allowing their students to do it.

According to Participant 2174, barriers to including parents in the transition planning process include, "Geographical, economic- they work two jobs or they just don't understand how important it is to be involved in the process. They might be a single parent or a grandparent." Other than using cognitive assessments for the students she assessed, Participant 2174 typically did not use transition assessments of any kind. She reported "We've sent kids out for life skills assessments, we also have the Adaptive Skills Inventories (ABAS), I use it for lower-functioning kids." These inventories typically are not shared with the student's teachers.

Participant 2174 always invited her students to be a part if the IEP and transition planning process. She shared the following,

> They're always met with before to discuss what their goals are for the year. They're given a voice, what's working, what's not, what their goals are for the future? What are (do) they want to do? I always include them and tell them they're the most important person at the meeting because it's about them.

According to Participant 2174, life skills and career and vocational skills were infused through Participant 1121's Life Skills/CBI Program for a select group of students. The students with special needs also received life skills through the Home Economics class and through the 21st Century Math class. Participant 2174 stated she felt these programs were a good fit for some of the special needs students in the school and is looking forward to new programs for her students in the future.

Summary of Child Study Team Members' Responses

1. The child study team case managers agreed with the guidance counselors that there are economic and geographical concerns which affect parental involvement in the transition planning process for their child with special needs. Participant 2024 stated, "sometimes I don't think the students are ready to absorb the information. It would be more helpful if the parents were more involved."
2. Case managing approximately 80 students with special needs (each), the two child study team members collaborated with a myriad of outside agency personnel. DVRS, the Division of Labor, the ARC, area counselors and behaviorists, the local community college, CMO workers, and probation are just a few of their contacts. It appears that the transition planning process flows through the child study team case managers and they were responsible for ensuring students are connected with the appropriate resources at the right time. As Participant 2174 shared, it is her responsibility to "develop a plan of some sort, articulate goals. Figure out do they need to go and get some type

of training, vocation, (or) college? How are they going to reach that? In what way will they reach that and what help do they need to get to their goal? What do they need to reach the goal and take the steps to get to the goal?"

3. Regarding program structure, the district had recently incorporated a Life Skills/CBI Program into their high school for students with special needs, however they did not have an SLE trained employee running the program nor do they have job coaches or self-advocacy training in place.
4. Like Participant 1121, the child study team case managers incorporated developing self-determination skills for their students with special needs and prepared each student for what to expect prior to the IEP meetings.
5. Additionally, child study team case managers typically were not privy to the assessment data generated by Naviance or from the results community participants receive. This assessment data would be helpful as the case managers meet and conduct student-focused planning with their students.

Table 5

Child Study Team Members' Codes

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
1	School psychologist and child study team case manager	School psychologist, CST case manager
2	2 years, 17 years	2 years, 17years
3	School psychologists, case management, cognitive assessments	Case management, cognitive assessments
4	"I think it's my responsibility to help them develop a plan of some sort, articulate goals, and from there figure out do they need to go and get some type of training, vocation, college?…In what way will they reach that and what help do they need to get to their goal? What do they need to reach the goal and take the steps to get to the goal? Do they need DVRS? Or are they a kid that doesn't need that but needs the office of special services at a college they want to go to? Whatever it may be because different students have different needs and there are different levels of disability. It depends on each individual student." Introduce students and parents to agency representatives. Discuss student's strengths and interests.	Develop plan, post-high school goals, college, vocation, individualized, parents and students, agency representatives
5	"It would be more helpful if parents were more involved." "There's also economic barriers, geographic barriers, level of education…" …there aren't a lot of services for us…less resources for people to tap into." Pre-ETS through DVR.	Parental involvement, economic and geographic barriers, limited agency resources
6	"We collaborate with DVR, local community college, the P.R.E.P. Program, Dept. of Labor." "…all different kinds of agencies… counselors, probation officers, CMO workers, parents, families"	DVRS, local community college, Dept. of Labor,

Question	Round 1Codes	Round 2 Codes
7	"Freshman year at their very first meeting…I bring up DVR because I think it is so important for that to be second nature-to enter it." Pre-ETS Program beginning at age 14.	Freshman, DVR, work readiness, Pre-ETS.
8	"I try to include parents as much as possible…depends on their degree of availability and understanding." If they don't come to meetings, parents are called. "Would be helpful if parents were more involved…"	Availability and understanding, phone calls, parents can be barriers
9	"Our parents are empowered to participate or just overwhelmed themselves and don't really get the opportunity to get information." "In order to get DVR services, parents have to sign consent."	Empowered, overwhelmed, need consent for DVR
10	"Geographical, economic – they work two jobs or they don't understand how important it is to be involved in the process." "Socio-economic barriers – time, working, education levels themselves."	Geographical, economic, time, education levels
11	"The woman through the Department of Labor does interest inventories with them." "I don't typically use assessments with them unless it's the IQ and the learning." Sent kids out for life skills assessments. Adaptive Skills Inventory (ABAS).	Dept. of Labor - interest inventories, IQ, learning, ABAS
12	"No, they are not used." Assessment data not carried over to the classroom.	Data not used
13	DVRS, Department of Labor, ARC,	DVRS, Dept of Labor, ARC
14	"They're always invited. They're always met with before to discuss what their goals are for the year…they're given a voice, what's working, what's not?"	Student invited, pre-meeting discussion, given a voice, most important person.

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
15	"I think just in our Everyday Life Program…our 21st Century Math…prepare them if they're working in the school store, if they're making copies…" "Building on this year by year."	Everyday Life Program, 21st Century Math
16	"I think the Life Skills elective is very helpful for a lot of students…we have a very good relationship with our DVR representative." "I think the Everyday Life program is nice because they get different job sampling in a few different areas. They're actually working and doing things and if they've never had a job outside of school it's a good place to start to give them some exposure to things, and like counting money and being able to work like customer service."	Life Skills/Every Day Life, DVRS, job sampling
17	"More services, more interaction with agencies. Sometimes we refer them to DVRS and they get involved but sometimes they drop the ball. The parents don't complete; you've taken the steps to set them up – you've gotten the paperwork done, you've gotten all of the updated assessments they need, then they don't take the steps to follow through so they've graduated and then you're like, "Oh, they're not doing anything." And you can't do anything at that point." "I think getting parents to understand how they can be helped by following through with outside agencies would be helpful."	More services, follow through, parental involvement.

Analysis of Participant Responses: Administrators

High School Principal. Participant 1025 had been employed by the district for almost two years as the high school principal. He had approximately 775 students enrolled in the high school, roughly 20% of the student body were students with special needs. He had daily interaction with our students with special needs and reflected on his perception of his responsibility in preparing students with special needs for life after high school. He shared the following dialog,

> I think the key word there is that transitional piece and that they could be productive citizens after they receive a diploma from high school, that they can show-up on-time for work, that they can work diligently for 8, 10, 12 hours, that they can follow the rules and regulations that they're in at whatever job or organization that they're working at, and that they can follow the directives of their superiors.

The biggest barrier to transition planning that 1025 encountered is "the (lack of) support at home from the parents." He continued on to say, "I think another barrier at times is the language barrier and trying to communicate with parents and students, so they can be successful after high school."

When discussing collaboration with people outside of the high school, Participant 1025 shared that it is his responsibility to "get a pulse from the community… students … teachers … and parents to see if there is a commonality in what they're saying." In doing this, he stated he is able to make the necessary corrections and adjustments to "help our students be more successful in whatever area of need." Participant 1025 believes that

planning for life after high school for student with special needs should begin as soon as the students enter the building in the ninth grade. "I think it's enough time to meet with those students and ask, "What are your goals?" "What is your end game?" "What would you like to achieve?" Some may not have an answer for us and that's OK." Participant 1025 reported that this endeavor is a collective effort amongst guidance counselors and child study team case managers who regularly check-in with students with special needs "on their progress, we keep tabs on them on how they are developing toward any type of goals, that they are trying to achieve, to make sure that they are moving in the right direction to meet those goals.

Participant 1025 has had difficulty in getting parents to participate in the transition process for their child with special needs and stated, "we need to find a way to get them in our building, to make them feel comfortable (so they can give) their point of view (and their) goals for their child." He feels it is the collective responsibility of everyone working together to make sure they are meeting the needs of all students with special needs. Participant 1025 shared that he feels the school faculty is, "do a good job inviting and trying to communicate with them…it's almost like it's our job to take care of their child." He felt the school needed to work on having community events in the school and also take a look at the hiring process so they have the "ability to communicate with different types of groups." Participant 1025 discussed that this may be one way to help parents become empowered to participate in the transition planning process for their child.

At the present time, 1025 stated the school is not using any type of assessments to assist students with special needs in the transition planning process. He did mention Naviance, a computer program also referred to by Participants 2133 and 1103; however, Naviance was not being used to its capacity. When discussing adult service providers, 1025 was not aware of anyone outside of the school that our students with special needs are being referred to. He did mention that students are participating in the IEP process with the child study team case managers. Participant 1025 shared, "I think the biggest thing is it all comes down to communicating with the student on a regular basis and are we meeting with them and just checking on their progress?"

Career and vocational and life skills are incorporated into the student with disability's educational programming through the Life Skills/CBI Program taught by Participant 1121 however, 1025 stated, "…within this building, we need to do a better job…we're not there yet" which is why the district has a good working relationship with the local vocational-technical high school. According to Participant 1025, the students with special needs have the opportunity to attend this school and feels this is a good opportunity. Participant 1025 envisioned his high school to have the necessary programs within their building so they do not have to send the students out. He shared, "selfishly, I want our students to stay here…. but I respect the fact that there are some courses that we don't offer that Tech does." Participant 1025 also shared that the high school will be starting a behavioral disabilities program in the fall of 2019 known as the PRIDE Program. This program will allow students who were once sent to an out-of-district school to remain with their non-disabled peers in a self-contained setting in the high

school. "We're giving them another chance to be successful in a setting where we think they can flourish."

Additional comments made by Participant 1025 regarding areas that he would like to enhance include the following:

> I think we need to meet with them (students) more. I think we need to work on getting a full-time student assistance counselor. We need to celebrate student successes more, make parents feel welcome. Are we addressing the needs of every classified student? Let's foster the relationship with those students on a regular basis.

Summary of Administrator's Responses

Though two district administrators were interviewed for this study, only one set of the responses were considered unbiased. The results from Participant 1045 have been excluded from this study.

1. Participant 1025 had been a principal in the district's high school for almost two years and felt he has a good pulse on the community. He felt it is his responsibility to ensure that students graduating from his high school can be productive citizens after they receive their diploma. He stated the biggest barrier to transition planning for students with special needs is the lack of support from home. Most participants in this study agree with this. He continued on to say, "we need to find a way to get them in our building, make them feel comfortable."
2. Another barrier according to Participant 1025 is the language barrier.

3. At the present time, Participant 1025 was not aware of any transition planning assessments being used for students with special needs other than what Naviance has to offer.
4. Participant 1025 discussed new programming in the high school beginning in September 2019: The Pride (behavioral disabilities) and Fusion (alternative) Programs. These two programs will allow students who were once placed in an out-of-district program to come back to their district in a less restrictive environment.
5. Participant 1025 felt the right time to begin transition planning is when the student enters the 9th grade.
6. The only career and vocational programming that participant 1025 was aware of was what is currently offered in the Life Skills/CBI Program taught by Participant 1121. The district, does however, have a good relationship with the local vocational and technical where many of the district's students attend on either a full-time or share-time basis.

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Table 6

Administrator's Codes

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
1	"Principal at ____ ____ High School." "Roughly 775 students…overseeing staff, students, the community, parents, Board of Education."	Principal, 775 students
2	Two years	Two years
3	Daily interaction with students with special needs. Approximately 160 students with special needs in high school.	Daily, 160 students.
4	"To be a more productive citizen after they receive a diploma…show up on-time, work diligently, follow rules and regulations, follow directives from superiors."	Productive citizen
5	Support from home from parents, community involvement, language barrier. "Trying to create a plan for them so they can be successful after high school."	Parents, community, language
6	"…responsibility as principal to get a pulse from the community."	Community
7	"As soon as they enter 9th grade."	9th grade
8	"Sometimes it's just they're not available so as much as I can get them involved, I do." "We have to find a way to make them feel comfortable. We have to find a way to get them in our building…to make them feel comfortable."	Yes and No
10	Communicating with parents.	Communication

Question	Round 1 Codes	Round 2 Codes
11	"I think on a whole, no."	No
12	"No, not really."	No
13	"We don't."	No
14	No	No
15	"We're not there yet." "We have a working relationship with tech, our special needs students have the ability to use both buildings."	____ ____Tech
16	Life Skills Program taught by Participant 1121. "They're learning to cook food, and they're learning to count numbers, and they're learning to deliver the goods to where ever they need to go to, and they're learning that social-emotion piece so when they walk in, they're greeting people hello, so I think we do a really good job with that. I think moving forward with the Fusion and Pride Programs, with our self-contained students, we are giving them another layer to be incorporated here at the high school. We're giving them another chance to be successful in a setting where we think they can flourish. When I think about the Fusion Program for the dis-affected student, we put them in a smaller environment where their grades, attendance, credits and their social-emotional well-being can get better.	Life Skills, Fusion, Pride Programs.
17	"I think we need to meet with them more... I think we need to work on getting a full-time student assistance counselor. We need to celebrate student successes more. Make parents feel welcome. Are we addressing the needs of every classified student? Let's foster the relationship with those students on a regular basis."	Meet with students, SAC, celebrate successes, welcome parents, foster relationships.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In conducting qualitative research, it was essential that I be transparent in eliminating any biases. Qualitative research is interpretive and engaging in self-reflection is essential to the research process. To ensure the dependability of this study, several steps were taken to eliminate researcher bias. Open coding, reflexivity, audit trails, and member checks were used in this study as one way to reduce researcher bias.

Within the current study, researcher reflexivity involved the continuous process of reflection on the research. This involved the process of examining both oneself as the researcher and the researcher-participant relationship (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflexivity is an outlook that a qualitative researcher adopts when collecting and analyzing the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflecting on the researcher-participant relationship involved examining my relationship to the participants and how the relationship dynamics affected responses to questions. I also reflected on my own background and my positions as a child study team member and learning disabilities teacher consultant to see how these positions influence the research process. It was critical that I kept a journal throughout this research process to achieve reflexivity. Member checking was also done to validate emerging themes.

Ethical concerns were also addressed. Initially, I provided a Consent form that discussed the purpose of the study and acknowledged that the participant's rights would be protected during the collection of data. The form also provided the Walden University IRB approval number (05-29-2019-00172272), explained that the interviews were voluntary and confidential, and that participants were free to change their mind and exit

the study at any time. Participants were then assigned a four-digit, unique identifier to be used in place of their name to protect the confidentiality of each participant. Each participant was asked the same questions and open coding was utilized to reduce bias.

Credibility

Researcher reflexivity involved the continuous process of reflection on the research. This involved the process of examining both myself as the researcher and the researcher-participant relationship (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflexivity is an outlook that a qualitative researcher adopts when collecting and analyzing the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reflecting on the researcher-participant relationship involved examining my relationship to the participants and how the relationship dynamics affected responses to questions. I also reflected on my own background and my position as a child study team member and learning disabilities teacher consultant to see how these positions influence the research process. After interviews were transcribed, participants were invited to review their transcript for accuracy; notes were made on the participant's transcript if a discrepancy was found.

Transferability

The maximum variation in perspectives from high school guidance counselors, child study team members, educators, and administrators yielded data from multiple points-of view of the experience of the phenomenon. This in turn allowed for the creation of a rich and thick description of the phenomenon's data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As Lincoln and Guba (1985, p. 257) state, "the best way to ensure the possibility

of transferability is to create a thick description of the sending context so that someone in a potential receiving context may assess the similarity between them and the study."

Participants in this study were asked the same open-ended questions which allowed for a variety of opinions on the status of transitioning our students with special needs to adult life. The different levels of professionals interviewed (five special education teachers, four general education teachers, two district administrators, two child study team members, and two high school guidance counselors) allowed for a variation in perspectives from multiple categories of educators yielding a rich description of the phenomena's data.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research involves whether or not the processes and procedures can be tracked to collect and interpret the data. In this study, audio recordings were used throughout this study to support dependability. Dependability also was enhanced in this study as the relationship between the participants and I is a working relationship; I do not hold any supervisory duties over the participants. Additionally, interviews were confidential, and this confidentiality was enhanced by assigning each participant a four-digit code to be used in place of their name when transcribing the audio recordings and when writing the findings of the study. Lastly, a journal was kept throughout the research process so I could be reflective and stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home for 5 years.

Confirmability

Confirmability involves the level of confidence that the study's findings are based on the participants' narratives and words rather than my potential researcher biases (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, open coding, reflexivity, audit trails, and member checks were used to reduce researcher bias. Open coding allowed the me to arrange my data into a systematic order as I searched for themes and ideas in the data and to help explain why patterns were there in the first place (see Saldana, 2016). Through the many cycles of coding, qualitative data were managed, filtered, and highlighted so that categories, themes, concepts, and theories could be generated (see Saldana, 2016). Researcher reflexivity involved the continuous process of reflection on the research. This involved the process of examining both myself as the researcher and the researcher-participant relationship (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Audit trails were used as a validation strategy throughout the course of the study as a means of documenting the thought processes and clarifying understandings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checking was also done to validate emerging themes by checking whether or not my interpretations of the data are valid. Transcripts were sent to each participant electronically, asking for their review and comment on what they said. Any difference of opinion between the participant and the researcher on what was stated in the interview and subsequently written in the transcript would have been noted on the transcripts; there were no differences in opinion noted.

Summary

In Chapter 4, information was shared as I explored and described the transition strategies currently in place from the perspective of general and special educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and district administrators. The central questions that guided this basic qualitative study were the following: What are the perceptions of general and special educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and district administrators regarding the types of student-focused planning strategies currently in place in a secondary school setting to support students with disabilities in transition planning? Additionally, I sought to understand the barriers that hinder the efforts of general and special educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and district administrators in providing secondary-school students with disabilities effective transition planning.

In this chapter, I reported the details about data collection and analysis, discussed how open coding was used to break down the data into discrete parts, and discussed how issues related to trustworthiness were addressed. Lastly, the discussion on participants' responses provided a rich, thick description of educator responses to the semi-structured interview questions. In Chapter 5, the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 model (Kohler et al., 2016) was applied to the data analysis, leading to a discussion, conclusions, and recommendations.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate the transition strategies currently in place in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States and to determine what is successful, what can be enhanced, and how to go about advancing the supported transition program currently in place, thereby enabling access to vocational services, job and career training, and education. Successful transition plans focus on lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities by focusing on academic and functional achievement as these students move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Plotner et al., 2016).

I explored and described transition strategies from the perspective of general and special educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and a secondary school administrator. The central question that guided this qualitative study was the following: What are the perceptions of general and special educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and district administrators regarding the types of student-focused planning strategies currently in place in a secondary school setting to support students with disabilities in transition planning? Additionally, this study sought to understand the barriers that hinder the efforts of general and special educators, guidance counselors, child study team members, and district administrators in providing secondary-school students with disabilities effective transition planning.

In Chapter 4, I presented the results of the interviews with the 15 consenting participants. In Chapter 5, I will provide an interpretation of the findings, address

limitations to this research, recommendations for future research, and discuss the potential impact for positive social change.

Interpretation of the Findings

In the historical context of transition, a link between research and evidence-based practice was missing. Kohler (1996) developed competencies and practices, which were required for successful transition planning. This conceptual model stressed the importance of a student-focused approach, strategic planning, and collaboration and provided structure and support to transition planning teams as they evaluated their abilities in offering transition services to high school students with disabilities (Kohler, 1996). Recently, Kohler et al. (2016) enhanced the 1996 Kohler taxonomy by providing evidence-based practices for implementing transition-focused education; programs and services that inter-connect and share information on behalf of the high school student with disabilities who is transitioning from high school to adult life. Kohler et al. (2016) reported when families, students, community members, organizations, and educators collaborate to implement transition-focused education, post-school outcomes for students with disabilities improve. The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 model concentrated on promoting an effective transition of youth with disabilities in post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities by reviewing evidence-based literature (Kohler et al., 2016).

Student-Focused Planning

In this study, it was revealed that parents were a hindrance to the transition planning process. Educational laws, such as the IDEA; (1997, 2004) mandate that

students with disabilities and their parents be encouraged to participate in all stages of the IEP and transition plan development (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; Rosetti et al., 2017). However, as reported by Cavendish and Connor (2018), a surprisingly low percentage of students with disabilities (68%) and their parents (76%) attend transition planning meetings. One of the participants shared the following response, "Well sometimes, I think the barriers are at home" while another reported, "Once the kids get to high school, the parents disappear." Still another participant responded with, "It would be helpful if the parents were more involved." It may benefit the district to have a parent liaison to reach out to the parents when the need arises.

Student Development

Students with disabilities who contribute to the IEP process have been associated with to higher degrees of goal attainment and higher graduation rates (Cavendish & Connor, 2018; Mazzotti et al., 2015). In addition, students with disabilities who participate in the IEP and transition planning meetings direct school personnel to a greater emphasis on student strengths and parents convey a greater understanding of the transition process (Mazzotti et al., 2015). The results from my study reported an educational community which includes high-school students with disabilities in the IEP and transition planning process. Child study team members and classroom teachers support and encourage their students with disabilities to attend their respective meetings. It was reported that parental involvement is limited in these student-focused meetings.

There was no consensus amongst educators for when transition planning should begin. According to Cavendish and Connor (2018), Kohler et al. (2016), and

Morningstar et al. (2016) transition-focused planning is to begin no later the 14th birthday of the student with special needs. The planning team includes the student, family members, and educators; planning decisions are driven by the student's and their family's wishes for the student's adult life (Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Students are encouraged to actively participate in the IEP process as it assists in the development of self-determination skills (Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Participants overwhelmingly agreed that students do attend these meetings and are active participants as they are the focus of the meeting.

Assessment. Assessment includes formative assessments as well as career interest and aptitude assessments, which are used to drive curricular and instructional decisions (Kohler et al., 2016). Like Mazzotti and Rowe (2015), Stevenson and Fowler (2016) viewed assessments as a key to successful transition planning as they assist students in making informed decisions and lead the transition planning process. All participants in this study shared that assessments, to their knowledge, are not being used to drive curriculum and instruction. As reported by one participant, she collaborated with an employee from the Department of Labor who worked with a handful of seniors each year. This employee from the Department of Labor conducted assessments with her select students; however, the results from these assessments were not shared with anyone from the district.

It was reported by Participants 2133 and 1103 that the guidance department of this high school uses a computer program with their students called Naviance. However, Participant 1103 reported, "Naviance has a lot of components that we don't use fully."

while Participant 2133 reported, “There’s an interest survey – you answer all these questions and at the end of the survey, it gives you where your interests lie.” One of the counselors did share that they did not feel they have the time to better use the software program.

Life, social, and emotional skills. Life, social, and emotional skills includes developing self-determination skills (i.e., goal setting, problem solving, decision making, and self-advocacy), independent living skills, (i.e., financial, first aid, cooking, safety, etc.), interpersonal skills, leisure skills, transportation skills, classroom behavior, social skills, and fostering and supporting autonomy in students with disabilities (Kohler, et al., 2016). The consensus of most of the participants is that the Life Skills/CBI Program taught by Participant 1121 is where these skills are developed for students with disabilities. One of the barriers to effectively carrying out this aspect of student development is that this program is only offered to students with special needs who have lower cognitive functioning.

Interagency Collaboration

One predictor of continuous employment after graduation from secondary school was receipt of vocational rehabilitation services to include help finding a job, job skills training, career counseling, and/or vocational education courses (Bouck & Joshi, 2016; Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Inter-agency collaboration involves an alliance amongst many stakeholders involved in the student with disabilities’ life to include students, parents, educators, community agencies, employers, service providers, and post-secondary institutions (Cmar et al., 2018; Fraker

et al., 2016; Kohler et al., 2016; Morningstar et al., 2016). Information between parties should be shared, to include transition assessment(s) and the discovery process, which yields information on the student with disability's preferences, interests, needs, and strengths to create an individualized plan for achieving attainable, measurable goals, services, and accommodations (Morningstar et al., 2016; Stevenson & Fowler, 2016).

Cmar et al. (2018) revealed that students with disabilities who received paid work experiences in high school yielded more post-secondary school employment success than students who did not received paid work experiences while in high school. In addition, when students with disabilities receive vocational education services, help finding a job, career counseling, job skills training, and/or vocational education courses, Cmar et al. (2018) found that these students were more likely to have continuous employment suggesting that these services should be infused throughout the student with disabilities' educational program. Students are afforded few opportunities in this area. There is a direct connection with the local community college for students with disabilities and their general education peers. There is also a relationship with the local vocational and technical school for students who desire the exposure to career and vocations. Of concern is the relationships with federal and state agencies who are mandated to work with the students with disabilities. The resources available in this area of the country are limited; DVRS previously informed the participants that they were only available to students during their graduation year. This has recently changed as DVRS has developed a Pre-Employment Training Services Program (Pre-E.T.S.) which recently began offering students with disabilities vocational services as young as 14 years old.

Additionally, the Department of Labor comes into the high school every two weeks to work with a small number of students with disabilities in their senior year. The students receive individualized services as they develop employment readiness skills. Lastly, the school has a relationship with the local ARC. The ARC's transitions expert comes into the Life Skills/CBI class and works with the teacher delivering instruction in pre-work readiness skills and everyday life skills.

Participants agreed that they have limited resources in their area of the country. This affects their ability to collaborate with agencies and employers. Parental consent is also required for all of these services and without the consent, the students are unable to take advantage of these services. Participants agreed that the lack of parental participation directly affects the transition planning process of their students with special needs.

Program Structure

Program structure refers to providing program options that are flexible, meet the individual student's needs, and reflect the student's linguistic and cultural diversity (Kohler et al., 2016). Strategic planning should be conducted on a regular basis and include multiple stakeholders from education, community agencies, and community partners (Kohler et al., 2016). Strategic planning is driven by research-based practices for transition education and services and uses needs assessments to guide high school level education and post-secondary community programs and services (Kohler et al., 2016).

Program structure for students with disabilities in this high school is limited. While the current special education programming does meet the needs of some of the current students with special needs, it does not meet the needs of all students with special needs. In addition, there are limited life skills and career and vocational classes offered at this school.

Limitations of the Study

There were three recognizable limitations to the present study. First, interviews were only conducted at one specific time during the academic year for one school district in the northeastern region of the United States. This affected the pool of participants available to be interviewed and thus limited the sample size. Secondly, the study was limited to five secondary-school special education teachers, four secondary-school special education teachers, two secondary-school child study team case managers, two district administrators, and two secondary-school guidance counselors. If the study was conducted at a different time of the academic year, more participants may be available, adding to the study's results. Whether the difference in sample size would have been significant in terms of qualitative purposes is unknown. Lastly, one of my participants gave responses that were not appropriate and were not included in the results as they were biased and unprofessional. Despite these limitations, the current study provided data to compare to the findings in recent literature.

Recommendations

Recommendations come from the findings from the study and the limitations of the study's design. The findings from this study were developed using the taxonomy

developed by Kohler and colleagues (2016), Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 as the theoretical lens through which data were viewed. I determined that future research should focus on parental engagement as well as educators' roles, responsibilities and the expectations of their role in transition planning and programming. Additionally, student-focused planning should be researched to provide educators with the knowledge and tools needed to provide lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities. Future researchers should be cognizant of the sample size of the study. A larger sample size may provide more detailed information and therefore reveal more themes. Additionally, multiple strategies of validation should be employed to ensure the data are insightful (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

Common themes which emerged from this study include the need for professional development for all educators discussing special education law, transition planning and programming, and parental engagement. Participant 2232 revealed a desire to make direct contact with students with special needs, however, she is uncomfortable reaching out because she is uncertain that she is allowed to do so. Plotner et al. (2016) revealed that transition service providers continue to lack the skills and knowledge to effectively implement evidence-based practices to ensure that students with disabilities are exposed to positive in-school and post-secondary education success. Additionally, school personnel need to have the evidence-based resources as they acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to apply effective transition programs and practices (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015). One way to bridge the lack of skills and knowledge that educators are experiencing with effective transition programs and practices is to provide school

personnel with information related to implementation of transition services, instruction, and supports (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015).

Another common theme found within this study is the "shining moment" in programming, the Life Skills/CBI Program taught by participant 1121. This program, however, is only available to limited number of students with disabilities. This program also has limited opportunities to bring the students into the community on a consistent basis to gain employment experience. By expanding upon this program and making it available to all students with special needs in the high school, the district will be able to bring back students who are placed out-of-district who are receiving career, vocational, and life skills programming elsewhere, saving the district money and educating students with special needs in the least restrictive environment.

Students with disabilities also need the opportunity to engage in a variety of assessments as mandated by the IDEA (2004). Assessments are invaluable in the person-centered planning process for the assessment process gathers information on the student with disabilities' strengths, interests, and preferences to create an individualized plan for achieving targeted goals (Stevenson & Fowler, 2016). Assessment focuses on all areas of post-secondary life including employment, independent living skills, and instructional planning and includes formative assessments as well as career interest and aptitude assessments, which are used to drive curricular and instructional decisions (Kohler et al., 2016). Mazzotti and Rowe (2015) viewed assessments as a key to successful transition planning as they assist students in making informed decisions and lead the transition planning process.

There is admittedly a lack of follow-through and assistance for student with special needs who use the Naviance computer program in the high school. Many students with special needs have specific learning disabilities and/or low cognitive functioning. They require educators who provide assistance and encouragement as well as educators who follow-through with the students, all the while explaining the assessment results and encouraging the students to begin the next phase of the program.

Lastly, it is recommended that a Parent Assistance Committee be developed in the high school. There is an overwhelming amount of research documenting the importance of parental involvement in promoting positive post school outcomes for students with disabilities (see Dodge, 2018; Hirano et al., 2018; Morningstar et al., 2016; US DOE, 2017). Surprisingly, research has shown that as students age, there is an overall decrease in parental involvement in IEP and transition meetings (Hirano et al., 2018). As reported by Cavendish and Connor (2018) and Rosetti et al. (2017), parents feel there are barriers to their participation in these meetings, which include a lack of opportunity to provide input, knowledge barriers, work-related time constraints, communication challenges, and a lack of a strengths-based approach by the school in educational planning. Thus, the desired partnership among students, parents and guardians, and schools that is mandated by law (Zirkel & Hetrick, 2017) is not recognized by the high school in this district.

Implications

Variability in high school transition service provisions across schools, districts, and states exists and presents many difficulties to transition teams (Luecking & Luecking, 2015; Plotner et al., 2016). Transition service providers have expressed

frustration due to a lack of expertise regarding the roles, the responsibilities, and the expectations of their role in transition planning. As discussed by Mazzotti and Rowe (2015) and Plotner et al. (2016), special educators and transition professionals require access to resources that offer secondary school professional's skills and knowledge in the field of transition to ensure that youth with disabilities encounter positive in-school and post-secondary education success.

Results from this study may provide positive social change in the form of data to inform future professional development for schools, districts, and state leaders across the United States regarding how to provide meaningful transitional support to students with disabilities. This may also enlighten stakeholders to realize that when discussing transition planning, collaboration amongst students, parents, educators, child study team case managers, secondary-school administrators, guidance counselors, and community agency personnel is key to the success of the student with special needs. Bringing together all of these stakeholders in a student's life has the opportunity to make a powerful difference in the life of a student with a disability, the student's family, and the community in which the student lives.

To facilitate change, the following are recommended:

1. Implement professional development for general education and special education teachers, guidance personnel, child study team members, and administration discussing educators' roles, responsibilities, and the expectations of their role in transition planning and programming using evidence-based practices.

2. Student-focused planning should be utilized and shared with educators to provide staff with the knowledge and tools needed to provide lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities.
3. Expand the Life Skills/CBI Program in the high school, making it available to all students with special needs in the high school. In doing so, the district will be able to bring back students who are placed out-of-district who are receiving career, vocational, and life skills programming elsewhere, saving the district money and educating students with special needs in the least restrictive environment.
4. Encourage the current CBI/Life Skills Program educator to secure his SLE certification. It is also recommended that the students venture out into the community more often through this program. To do so, job coaches need to be available to enhance the students' experiences and to assist with the generalization of skills learned in the classroom to the job site.
5. Implement professional development for all staff members regarding special education law so all educators understand what can be discussed with students with special needs.
6. As mandated by the IDEA (2004), students with disabilities also need the opportunity to engage in a variety of assessments. The results of these assessments should be shared with the students' educators who can utilize this information in the classroom.

7. Gather information on the student with disability's strengths, interests, and preferences to create an individualized plan for achieving targeted goals.
8. Focus on all areas of post-secondary life including employment, independent living skills, and instructional planning and include formative assessments as well as career, interest, and aptitude assessments, and
9. Develop a Parent Assistance Committee. There is an overwhelming amount of research documenting the importance of parental involvement in promoting positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities (see Dodge, 2018; Hirano et al., 2018; US DOE, 2017). As reported by Cavendish and Connor (2018) and Rosetti et al. (2017), parents feel there are barriers to their participation in these meetings, which include a lack of opportunity to provide input, knowledge barriers, work-related time constraints, communication challenges, and a lack of a strengths-based approach by the school in educational planning.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to investigate educator perceptions of the transition strategies currently in place in one school district in the northeastern region of the United States and to determine what is successful, what can be enhanced, and how to go about advancing the supported transition program currently in place, thereby enabling access to vocational services, job and career training, and education. A student with a disability's life is significantly enhanced when parents, students, educators, administrators, child study team members, guidance counselors, and community agency

personnel collaborate share their findings to enable students with disabilities to move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities. Transition plans should emphasize lasting outcomes for youth with disabilities by concentrating on academic and functional achievement as these students move onto post-secondary education, upward mobility in selected careers, and suitable adult living opportunities (Gothberg et al., 2015; Plotner et al., 2016).

My findings suggest that professional development in special education law, student-focused planning, and the roles, responsibilities, and expectations of educators' in transition planning is needed for educators and administration to close the gaps in transition practice. Additionally, the high school needs assistance with fostering parental involvement. Recommendations for future research focused on students with disabilities and transition planning processes emerged from the limitations of the research design and findings; future research using different parameters is recommended. Results from this study may provide positive social change in the form of data to inform future professional development for schools, districts, and state leaders across the United States regarding how to provide meaningful transitional support to students with disabilities. This may enlighten stakeholders to realize that when discussing transition planning, collaboration amongst students, parents, educators, child study team case managers, secondary-school administrators, guidance counselors, and community agency personnel is key to the success of the student with special needs. Bringing together all of these stakeholders in the student's life has the opportunity to make a powerful difference in the life of a student with a disability, the student's family, and the community where the student lives.

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Appendix A: Letter of Cooperation

May 31, 2019

Mrs. Jessie Reeves
____ School District
216 South Main Street
____ ____, NJ ____

RE: Letter of Cooperation
Jessie Reeves/Walden University

Dear Mrs. Reeves:

Based on my review of your research proposal, I am giving you permission to conduct the study entitled *Educator Perceptions of Transition Programming for Youth with Disabilities* within the ____ School District. As part of this study, I authorize you to invite ____ School District personnel to participate in your study, collect data, and engage in member checking. Individuals participating in this study will do so voluntarily and at their own discretion.

The ____ School District will provide interview locations within the district's high school. Interviews will take place during our employees' non instructional time. In addition, I understand that the ____ School District will not be named in the doctoral dissertation published in ProQuest.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting and that this plan complies with the ____ School District's policies. I understand that the data collected will remain confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of your supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University Institutional Review Board.

Sincerely,

____ ____, Superintendent
____ ____ School District
216 South Main Street
____ ____, NJ ____

Appendix B: Email Message

Dear _____,

I am conducting a study entitled *Educator Perceptions of Transition Programming for Youth with Disabilities* and I am writing to request your participation. The purpose of this study is to investigate the transition strategies currently in place in the _____ School District. Participants will be asked to answer open-ended questions pertaining to their experiences with the transition of youth with disabilities to post-secondary education, employment, and independent living. Interviews will take place during non-contractual hours and will take place either in my office located in the _____ High School or in the Conference Room in the Board of Education Building.

There will be one audio recorded interviews lasting no more than 45 minutes. This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one at the _____ School District will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. Additionally, if you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you may choose not to answer any specific questions. The researcher will follow up with volunteers to let them know whether or not they were selected for the study.

Please take a moment to consider my request. If you have any questions or require additional information regarding this study, please send a reply to this email or call me on (___) ___-____.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jessie Reeves
Walden University Doctoral Student

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

1. What is your role in the district?
2. How long have you been with the district?
3. Do you have much interaction with our students with disabilities?
4. What do you perceive as your responsibility in preparing students with disabilities for life after high school?
5. Do you find that you have barriers to carrying out transition practices?
6. Do you collaborate with anyone outside of the building on behalf of students with disabilities?
7. When do you begin planning for the students with special needs for life after high school?
8. Are the parents of students with special needs involved in the planning process for transition?
9. Do you think parents are empowered to participate in the process?
10. Do you see any barriers to including parents in the process of transition?
11. Are assessments ever used in the transition planning process?
12. How is the knowledge gained from assessments used in the classroom?
13. Are students with disabilities ever referred to adult service providers?
14. What role does a student with a disability play in developing their IEP?
15. How are life skills and career and vocational skills incorporated into the student with a disability's educational program?
16. What do you feel is done really well by the district in preparing students with disabilities for adult life?
17. Do you have any recommendations for making this process better?