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LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE
DISABILITIES: AN ASSESSMENT OF POSTSECONDARY PREPAREDNESS

By
Audrey A. Moore

A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

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2021

Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Audrey A. Moore under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Abstract

LIFE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL FOR STUDENTS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES: AN ASSESSMENT OF POSTSECONDARY PREPAREDNESS.

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The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate the effectiveness of transitional preparatory programs from the perspective of parents and teachers in North Carolina. The following three research questions guided this research inquiry: Based on parent and teacher perspectives, how did the high school transitional program facilitate success after high school for students with moderate to severe disabilities? To what extent do the parents and teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities perceive that a transitional program is a necessity for post-high school success? The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004 (IDEA, 2004c) section on transition served as the conceptual framework for this study. This study used data from interviews of six parents and three teachers in different counties in eastern North Carolina. The interview questions included an evaluation of 16 independent readiness skills provided by Datson et al. (2012) believed to be instrumental in the success of student life after high school. Findings from this study indicate consistency among the perspectives of parents and teachers regarding the effectiveness and necessity of transitional programs. Parents and teachers agree that students enhanced and gained many skills; ability to retain a job is a direct correlation to participation in transitional programs; and the 16 independent readiness skills provided by Datson et al. (2012) are fundamental in post-high school success. Ultimately, the consensus is that participation in transitional programs is necessary for and beneficial to students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Keywords: transitional programs/postsecondary transitional programs/students
with disabilities/students with moderate to severe disabilities/postsecondary
readiness/post-high school life/adult life after high school

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Nature of the Problem

The North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force (2009) reported that in 2006, there were approximately five million children and adults with intellectual disabilities or developmental delays in the United States. This number represents nearly 2% of the total population of American citizens. While precise state-level data are not available, the estimation is that there are more than 100,000 people with intellectual disabilities or developmental delays in North Carolina (North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2009). In 2007, the North Carolina Department of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services estimated that approximately 50,000 adults and 54,000 children needed community intellectual disabilities or developmental delay services. Mild disabilities are usually the most common, followed by moderate disabilities (North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2016). Only a small percentage of individuals with intellectual disabilities or developmental delays have more profound disabilities (North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2016). It is often challenging to choose the optimal life path for students with disabilities upon graduating; however, careful preparation, resources, and support are key. Unfortunately, for students with moderate to severe disabilities, most of these decisions are made for them by their parents, guardians, and professionals.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004b) mandates Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for public school students receiving special education services. IEPs are legal documents written by educators and resource providers outlining the specific services disabled students must acquire to ensure a free and

appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. Transitional planning is a significant component of all IEPs from the time a student with disabilities turns 14 years of age until they exit high school (IDEA, 2004b). When a student leaves high school, the IEP is no longer in effect. Upon leaving high school, a solid transitional plan should help provide directions for the student's future. Wright and Wright (2004) defined a transitional plan as a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability. The plan is designed to deliver results by focusing on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to expedite the child's progression from school to postsecondary activities (Wright & Wright, 2004). The plan should address how the individual will participate in integrated employment, postsecondary education, continuing and adult education, vocational education, independent living, adult services, and community engagement (Wright & Wright, 2004). Wright and Wright went on to share that the transitional plan is based on the child's individual needs and should take into consideration the child's preferences, strengths, and interests. The plan should detail who will help the student acquire the skills necessary for successful performance in each of the required components of the transitional plan (Wright & Wright, 2004).

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Labor presented data that showed the employment rate for persons with disabilities was more than three times lower than for those without a disability: 19 and 66 respectively. If schools adhered to the above requirements for transitional procedures as advocated by Wright and Wright (2004), would there be such a large number of moderately to severely disabled students unemployed or not engaged in postsecondary education?

A 2012 report published by the United States Government Accountability Office

(GAO) documented that post-high school special education services are not adequately coordinated or monitored (GAO, 2012). There are many programs and resources available for students with disabilities when preparing for life after high school. The most common resources include Career and Technical Education (CTE), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), Occupational Course of Study, Virtual Academies, Advancement via Individual Determination, Early College, and Health Sciences Academy (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2017).

CTE is a program aimed at training tomorrow's workforce by requiring every high school student to take at least one CTE course. Upon completion of CTE courses, students will have a portfolio of credentials and skills needed to successfully compete in today's economic environment (NCDPI, 2017). The SAT is a standardized test that assesses student readiness for college (NCDPI, 2017). Students must achieve the minimal SAT score specified by the college or university of interest as one of the prerequisites for admission (NCDPI, 2017). Occupational Course of Study is a program designed to provide students with mild disabilities a sound foundation in preparation for adult living through participation in a standards-based curriculum with a vocational focus (NCDPI, 2017). With this curriculum, students learn skills necessary to enter the world of work, retain employment, and seek other employment throughout their adult lives (NCDPI, 2017). Virtual Academies are digital learning options offering flexibility for students with mild disabilities or no disabilities to conveniently earn educational credits online (NCDPI, 2017). Advancement via Individual Determination trains educators who, in turn, train students with mild disabilities or no disabilities to prepare for a chain of success through high school, college, and their career. Through participation in the program,

students learn public speaking, goal setting, organization, time management, note-taking, and social skills (NCDPI, 2017). The Early College provides capable students with the opportunity to simultaneously earn their high school diplomas and an associate degree of 2 years' worth of college credits that are transferable (NCDPI, 2017). Health Science Academies prepare students who have an interest in pursuing a healthcare-related career after graduating by allowing them to take part in job shadowing, mentoring, internships, medical research, career exploration, and volunteer work (NCDPI, 2017). The students who take advantage of the aforementioned resources possess an advantage over students who do not. Hence, many students with moderate to severe disabilities are left underserved.

Problem Statement

One of the goals of the Public Schools of North Carolina is to make sure that every student exits high school globally competitive for work and postsecondary education and are prepared for life in the 21st century (North Carolina State Board of Education, 2007). Nevertheless, in 2018, only 69% of the disabled students graduated from high school with a diploma or certificate (NCDPI, 2018); thus, approximately 30% of the students with disabilities left school without acquiring a diploma or certificate. This does not, however, prove that they were aptly prepared for competitive work or postsecondary education. Learning Disabilities Association of America (2013) asserted that even graduates or those with certificates might have trouble transitioning from high school to postsecondary education or community settings. Unfortunately, North Carolina does not have a separate law that mandates transitional services for students with moderate to severe disabilities. However, according to NCDPI (2014), the state does

mandate that all North Carolina school districts follow the IDEA (2004b) law on transitional services for disabled students without deviations or modifications to the federal law.

According to an interview with a representative from NCDPI (N. Johnson, personal communication, March 22, 2019), 20 of the 184 school districts in North Carolina have a formal postsecondary transitional program. Are these programs essential to the future of disabled students? Do they make a difference in helping students with moderate to severe disabilities find work or educational placement after high school? If these programs are so successful, why doesn't every school district find it necessary to offer structured transitional programs? Parents and advocates of students with moderate to severe disabilities should strongly ponder these questions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to explore from the perspective of parents and teachers how important transitional programs are to student success after high school. This qualitative study explored parent and teacher stories relative to the impact of transitional programs. It was essential to understand from the perspective of the parents and teachers whether or not transitional programs positively impacted the successful transition from life in high school to life after high school. To accomplish this task, this research followed a qualitative research approach. The participants in this study included parents and teachers of students who participated in transitional programs. Using telephone interviews and interview protocol based on IDEA (2004c) Section on Transition, I obtained data to answer the research questions.

Research Questions

In qualitative research, according to Creswell (2014), inquiry is issued via research questions; as opposed to objectives and hypotheses, which are used in quantitative research. Creswell (2014) further divulged that qualitative researchers should establish no more than three research questions. I hoped to satisfy this inquiry by answering the following research questions.

1. Based on parent and teacher perspectives, how did the high school transitional program facilitate success after high school for students with moderate to severe disabilities?
2. To what extent do the parents and teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities perceive that a transitional program is a necessity for post-high school success?

Conceptual Framework

IDEA (2004a) defined transition as,
 a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (p. 2)

Also, IDEA mandated the inclusion of transitional goals in the IEP of every student aged 16 and older and the inclusion of a statement of transitional plans for each student aged 14 and older. The transitional goals must focus on each of the areas listed in the definition or provide a statement explaining why they are not needed (IDEA, 2004b). Details of the mandates and transitional activities follow.

IDEA Mandates

Beginning at age 14, a statement of transitional services, alternatively thought of as a description of the student's course of study, needs to be included in the IEP (McPartland, 2005). Beginning at age 16, the IEP must include transitional activities that address community experiences; instruction; development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; related services; and, when suitable, daily living skills and functional vocational evaluations (McPartland, 2005). If objectives are not necessary, a statement must be included as to why they are not required (McPartland, 2005). All rights granted to parents are transferred to the student when a student reaches the age of consent at 18 (McPartland, 2005). At least 1 year in advance, the student and parents must be advised of this transfer, and documentation of this notification must be included in the IEP (McPartland, 2005).

Transitional Activity Areas

McPartland (2005) did extensive research on the seven transitional areas and offered detailed descriptions of each.

1. **Instruction:** When a student is occupied with scholastic or related exercises, whether in regular or special education in any transitional domain, instruction is occurring. The goal is to prepare the student for life after high school (McPartland, 2005).
2. **Related Service:** Refers to services available while a student is still in school. Connections should be made, so the student and guardians have the links they need when the student leaves the public school setting (McPartland, 2005).
3. **Community Experiences:** Subjects canvassed in this area must be both at school and home and may also include instruction and practice contributed by

outside agencies. Instruction should occur in the natural setting of the community when possible and should consist of transportation, access to community services, and leisure (McPartland, 2005).

4. Employment: A student being employed during their time in high school dramatically increases their chances of being hired later. Instruction should include how to look for a job, fulfill the complete prerequisites for a job, interview for and secure a job, keep a job, and when to leave a job and how to do so appropriately (McPartland, 2005).
5. Adult Living: Skills should include the ability of a student to make sound career decisions, create and evaluate goals, and advocate for one's self (McPartland, 2005).
6. Daily Living Skills: This component is mainly for students with significant disabilities. Skills can be provided through education courses, home instruction, or specially designed instruction (McPartland, 2005).
7. Functional Vocational Evaluation: A signed Consent for Release of Information form must be included in the IEP before including the vocational rehabilitation worker in the transitional plan. Documentation should consist of the statement, "at the time, release of information has been made" (McPartland, 2005).

In addition, IDEA (2004b), Section 614, dictated that each student exiting special education upon graduation or exceeding the state's age eligibility requirements should receive an individualized Summary of Performance. The Summary of Performance is a document used to summarize a student's current academic and functional performance

and provide sanctions to further assist the student in achieving their postsecondary goals (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2013).

Methodology

As stated by Creswell (2013), qualitative research is the approach preferred by researchers whose research problem requires them to learn about individuals' views, analyze a system over time, create theories based on participant perspectives, or collect detailed information about a few individuals or research sites. Participation in this study was voluntary. I used convenience sampling (the selection of subjects based on their convenient accessibility and proximity to me) for the selection of the participants. Subjects were considered for participation in the study based on having a child with moderate to severe disabilities who completed a transitional program. The first six parents and three teachers who accepted the invitation for the survey were the subjects of the study. It was important to understand that students referenced in teacher interviews are not the same students referenced by parents who were interviewed. Students have already graduated, and it is impossible to match students. The goal was to understand the successful components and necessity for transitional programs.

For this study, in the spring of 2020, I conducted telephone interviews with six parents and three teachers. To support trustworthiness, each interview session was audio-taped and commercially transcribed via Temi, an online speech recognition program, and then categorized by themes using a coded-theme analysis (Temi, 2017). Upon transcription of the interviews, I read each transcript and identified themes. Following the identification of themes, I analyzed the transcripts to code each response to correspond to the identified themes.

Definition of Terms

Following are the definitions of terms, according to the NCDPI (2014) handbook, that are used throughout this research and may be complex or unfamiliar to anyone lacking experience in the research topic.

IEP

A written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised per IDEA (2004b) and includes the required components, such as present level of performance, annual goals and objectives, and updated student progress (NCDPI, 2014).

Free and Appropriate Public Education

Special education and related services that (a) are rendered at public expense, under public guidance and direction, and without charge; (b) meet the standards of the state education agency, including the specifications of this part; (c) include a relevant preschool, elementary school, or secondary school education in the state; and (d) are administered in compliance with an IEP that meets the demands of IDEA (2004b; NCDPI, 2014).

IEP Team

A committee of parents, teachers, administrators, and school personnel who administer services to a student. The committee, which may also include medical professionals and other pertinent parties, reviews evaluation results and regulates goals, objectives, and program placement for the child in need of services (NCDPI, 2014).

Child With a Disability

A child assessed as having an intellectual disability, hearing impairment, speech or language impairment, visual impairment, serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairment, specific learning

disability, deafness and blindness, or multiple disabilities and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (NCDPI, 2014).

Intellectual Disability

Indicated as below-average cognitive functioning in two or more adaptive behaviors with onset before age 13 (NCDPI, 2014).

Mild Intellectual Disability

A student who has an IQ between 50 and 70, is slower than typical in all developmental areas, has no unusual physical characteristics, is able to learn pragmatic life skills, gains reading and math skills up to Grade Levels 3 to 6, is able to integrate socially, and functions in daily life. About 85% of people with intellectual disabilities fall into the category of mild disability and many achieve academic success (NCDPI, 2014).

Moderate Intellectual Disability

A student who has an IQ between 35 and 49, observable developmental delays, and probable physical signs of impairment; can communicate in primary, traditional ways; can learn primitive health and safety skills; and can execute self-care activities and transit alone to nearby, familiar places. People with moderate intellectual disabilities have good communication skills but generally cannot communicate at a sophisticated level. They may have hardship in social situations and complications with social cues and judgment. These people can care for themselves but might need more guidance and support than the typical person. The majority can live independently, but some need the assistance of a group home. Approximately 10% of those with intellectual disabilities fall into the category of moderate disability (NCDPI, 2014).

Severe Intellectual Disability

A student who has an IQ between 20 and 34 and significant delays in development; understands speech but has little capability to communicate; is capable of learning daily routines; may learn very simple self-care; and needs direct supervision in social situations. Approximately 3-4% of individuals diagnosed with intellectual disability fall into the category of severe disability. These people can communicate at the most primitive level. They are not able to perform all self-care activities independently and need daily supervision and support. The majority of people in this category are not able to successfully live an independent life and will need to live in a group home setting (NCDPI, 2014).

Profound Intellectual Disability

A student who has an IQ of less than 20, profound developmental delays in all areas, and evident physical and congenital abnormalities; requires close supervision and an attendant to help with self-care activities; may respond to physical and social events; and is unable of independent living. People with significant intellectual disabilities require round-the-clock support and care. They rely on others for all aspects of daily life and have remarkably limited communication ability. Often, people in this category have other physical restrictions as well. Approximately 1-2% of people with intellectual disabilities fall into this category (NCDPI, 2014).

Vocational Rehabilitation Agency

A service provider that provides counseling, training, education, transportation, job placement, assistive technology, and other support services to people with disabilities (NCDPI, 2014).

Assumptions

I assumed that all parents, guardians, and teachers are concerned with the welfare of their children/students as a priority. Therefore, it was assumed that parents and teachers would answer any questions asked of them truthfully and with fidelity. This assumption was necessary for the context of this study because, assuming the assumption was correct, I was able to proceed assured of the validity of the interview results.

Scope and Delimitations

Six parents or guardians and three teachers were used in the sample for the interview. The primary purpose of this research was to determine whether transitional programs can be deemed beneficial to the students of the parents or guardians and teachers being interviewed. Each research participant was asked the same interview questions, specific to their title of parent or guardian and teacher. Interview questions included parent or guardian educational background, gender, and age. Interview questions for teachers included the same as well as years of teaching experience, years of experience with transitional programs, number of different transitional programs experienced, and highest position held as an educator. I considered this information to be of high importance because it could have affected participant responses and perceptions.

Limitations

Limitations, as defined by Creswell (2013), are potential weaknesses or problems with the study as identified by the researcher. I have had experience with postsecondary transitional practices in multiple counties and consider some practices much more favorable than others. Only six parents or guardians and three teachers were interviewed for this research; therefore, their perceptions are not representative of all parents or

guardians and teachers who have had a child/student to participate in a transitional program; parents or guardians may have given the answers they thought I wanted to hear. Having nine participants meant I could not generalize to the general public, but I was able to provide information for the specific counties from which the participants came. Finally, some parents or guardians did not have the educational background necessary to answer the interview questions truthfully or efficiently, or their background may have impacted their perceptions.

Significance of the Study

This study may contribute to the reform of postsecondary transitional preparatory programs not only in the county in which the research was conducted but also in the world of special education in general. I hope educators will use the information gained from the research participants regarding their perceptions of what works and what is still needed as a catalyst for modifying programs already in place or implementing new postsecondary transitional programs. Other outcomes that may emerge from this study follow: the improvement of transitional preparatory programs in general, the maintenance of transitional programs, the increase of parent interest and student participation in transitional programs, increased awareness of transitional program needs, knowledge of what works and what is still needed in transitional programs, and increased levels of parent participation in transitional preparatory programs.

Summary

Chapter 1 served as an introduction to the nature of the problem, the background and significance of the problem, the research questions, the limitations of the research, the theoretical construct for this research, and the definition of terms used in said

research. Chapter 2 provides a review of the available literature as it pertains to postsecondary practices, including laws, stakeholder perceptions, and effective models. Chapter 3 describes the proposed methodology for this research, including a more in-depth look at the chosen research design model, the researcher's role, the proposed procedures for the collection and analysis of data, the necessary instruments, and any foreseen limitations and delimitations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Common speculation may suggest that students with moderate to severe disabilities do not seek employment or further education once they finish high school. Reasons range from a lack of transitional planning and action to inefficient resources and programs that match student ability levels and skill sets. As shown in Chapter 1, not only are the number of transitional programs few, but they often do not accommodate the unique needs of students with moderate to severe disabilities. This results in an enormous gap in the preparedness of students with no disabilities to mild disabilities compared to those students with moderate to severe disabilities.

While there is an abundance of research on the transition from high school to postsecondary activities for students without disabilities and even those with mild disabilities, there is a definite gap in available research on the employability and well-being of students with moderate to severe disabilities once they graduate from high school. This study may validate the gap in preparedness between these two groups, especially in the geographical region in which the research was conducted. It may also add to the research on the need for impactful postsecondary transitioning programs and may indicate whether or not students with moderate to severe disabilities in the counties in which the participants are from are prepared for the postsecondary transition. This review of literature includes the following topics: disability classification, the need for quality transitional programs, legislation/federal law/policy regarding transitional planning, transitional planning processes for students with disabilities with an IEP, transitional team perceptions and experiences, model transitional programs/planning,

potential barriers in transitional planning, and Project SEARCH and Bridges model programs. Assumptions and major findings of the research are summarized. This chapter is not intended to represent an exhaustive review of the literature. It is intended to familiarize the reader with the background, legislation, processes, perceptions, effective models, and recommendations for effective transitional planning and to sustain the relevancy and desirable contribution of this proposed research to the transitional planning process.

Disability Classification

NCDPI (2014) revealed that per IDEA (2004b), there are 12 specific and primary terms under the definition of “child with a disability”: a serious emotional disturbance, mental retardation, an orthopedic impairment, a hearing impairment, autism, a speech or language impairment, a specific learning disability, a visual impairment, traumatic brain injury, deafness and blindness, another health impairment, and multiple disabilities. Every child diagnosed with a disability is classified by one of four categories of cognitive impairment: mild (IQ 50 to 70—slower than typical in all developmental areas), moderate (IQ 35 to 49—noticeable developmental delays), severe (IQ 20 to 34—considerable delays in development), and profound (IQ less than 20—significant developmental delays; NCDPI, 2014). Based on the data presented in Appendix A, in 2009, there were approximately 61,000 students with disabilities in Grades 9-12 in North Carolina. Over half of them were in the regular education setting for 80% or more of their school day (North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2009). Twenty-two percent were in a resource setting and spent 40-80% of the day with other students without disabilities (North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2009). Another 22% of disabled

students were in a separate setting and spent 40% or less of their day with their peers without disabilities (North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2009). The prevailing 4% of the students were in more restrictive settings like public, separate, residential, or private schools, and homebound or hospitalized (North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2009). Therefore, there is a population who would benefit from postsecondary transitional preparedness.

The Need for Quality Transitional Programs

Findings by the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force (2009), displayed in Appendix B, revealed that schools are failing to enable individuals with disabilities to acquire the skills and expertise they need to engage in postsecondary school or competitive work. Based on data presented in Appendix B, individuals with mental disabilities are the least likely to be employed or engaged in postsecondary education in the year after exiting high school, with 50% not in school or employed at all (North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2009). What these individuals do once they leave high school is unknown (North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2009).

The lack of quality transitional programs for students with disabilities is a huge problem for parents/guardians, caregivers, and disabled individuals. Lack of proper transitional training and preparation creates a vast void of the ability of the student with disabilities to be a productive and competitive member of society; thus, parents/guardians feel prompted to find another placement for their student, whether it be residential, day treatment, respite, or placement with other family members. Likewise, educators are also directly impacted, as this deficiency demonstrates either a lack of awareness of

unpreparedness or a reluctance to adequately prepare students with disabilities for the postsecondary transition.

Currently, there are 11 postsecondary transitional programs offered in North Carolina to students with disabilities (Trillium Health Resources, 2015). While these programs aim to ensure that students with disabilities make a smooth and successful transition from high school to postsecondary education and adult life, nine of them are college-level programs. There is very little research available about transitional programs offered at the high school level in North Carolina; however, two prominent program models are currently implemented in one or more school districts in North Carolina: Project SEARCH and Bridges (Trillium Health Resources, 2015). Per a representative from NCDPI (N. Johnson, personal communication, March 22, 2019), these implementations are currently in place in 20 North Carolina school districts. Certainly, there must be more high school transitional program models, and surely there are more districts that have transitional program models implemented. However, data to support such assumptions are not available; and though this may be alarming, it is not an infraction against North Carolina or federal law, for neither mandates that high schools adopt and implement a transitional program model.

Legislation/Federal Law/Policy Regarding Transitional Planning

IDEA (2004b) is a United States law mandating equity, accountability, and excellence in education for children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Signed into law by President George W. Bush on December 3, 2004, it became effective on July 1, 2005 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Before it was IDEA, the act began as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (U.S. Department

of Education, 2018). Since 1975, the bill has undergone several revisions: 1997; 2004; 2006; and, most recently, 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Since 1975, there has been a progression from excluding nearly two million children with disabilities from public schools to delivering special education and related services constructed to meet their distinctive needs to more than seven million children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The mission of IDEA was to ensure that all students with disabilities have afforded to them a free appropriate public education that prioritizes special education and related services engineered to meet their exclusive needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living and guarantee that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are safeguarded (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). It was also the mission of IDEA to aid states, districts, educational service agencies, and federal agencies to furnish the education of all children with disabilities and to support states in the application of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Further, it was the mission of IDEA to guarantee that educators and parents have the required tools to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities by supporting system improvement activities; coordinated research, personnel preparation, technical assistance, dissemination, and support; technology development and media services; and assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Under IDEA, the only regard given to the development and implementation of transitional programming is to permit states to use their federal funding to support any transitional initiatives (U.S. Department of

Education, 2018). In Section 1400 of IDEA, great emphasis is placed on effective transitional services (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). It is in this section that Congress made significant changes to the legal definition of transitional services, thus providing the specific meaning and description of these services (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

As for North Carolina, it is not a demand that districts establish a program for transitioning; however, legislation did mandate the appointment and convening of a state-level advisory group that is required to meet a minimum of once quarterly and report annually. The advisory group is also responsible for implementing an approach to assess gaps, system needs, and necessary skill development to support transitions of students with disabilities into postsecondary education programs and employment (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). The legislation also mandated the development of recommendations for programmatic and fiscal policies to expand and sustain postsecondary education for students with disabilities and employment opportunities for students in and graduating from secondary and postsecondary education programs and the development of recommendations to increase public awareness about postsecondary education for students with disabilities and employment opportunities (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

Further, the legislation mandated the development of recommendations with regard to joint policies and data indicators for tracking critical outcomes for people with disabilities who are participating/have participated in postsecondary education programs and employment opportunities and the development of recommendations with regard to linked, agency databases regarding outcomes associated with postsecondary education

and employment for students with disabilities (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Additionally, NCDPI (2007) has developed and published a transitional planning guide to bring awareness to the impact of sufficient transitional planning, identify stakeholders and IEP team members in the transitional process, and establish goals for the transitional process regardless of the district and available resources. The guide also asserted that transitions are deemed most effective when all personnel and agencies are responsive to the student and to the stakeholders most affected by the changes (NCDPI, 2007).

Transitional Planning Process for Students With Disabilities With an IEP

The purpose of transitional planning is to facilitate the student's move from secondary school to postsecondary school life and activities (Stanberry, 2016). This planning is completed by the student's IEP team, comprised of the parent, child, special education teacher, representative of the local educational agency, a regular education teacher, an individual who can interpret implications of evaluation results (if applicable), and anyone the parent or child deems necessary to invite at their discretion (Lee, 2016). The transitional planning team may also include other school professionals and outside agency representatives whose primary role is to provide schools with guidance and technical assistance in preparing for the transition from school to post-school activities for students with disabilities. If the needed professionals or agency representatives do not attend the meeting, the school is required to take other steps to include the missing entities in the planning of the student's transitional services (Cobean, 2000).

When the student is 14 years old, the IEP team develops a report on the transitional service needs to help the student make an effective transition from high

school to postsecondary activities. This usually includes courses that are pertinent to the future goals of the student and encourage the student to finish high school (Lee, 2016).

The IEP team develops a statement on the necessary transitional services when the student is 16 and a statement on the responsibilities of the interagency or any pertinent links for transitional services (Lee, 2016). When looking into and planning for a student's post-school future, the specific process the IEP team may go through will vary from student to student (Lee, 2016).

Since the transitional process is based on the individual needs of the student, taking into account the desires and preferences of the student, transitional services can be offered in a wide range of locations. Services are generally provided in the school setting for students who are not yet 16, as transition is focused at this age on the course of study (Lee, 2016). After the student turns 16, the focus of transition is on post-school activities, and services are more likely to be provided outside of school. If the IEP team decides an individual does not need services in one or more areas, the IEP must contain a notice to that effect, along with the grounds upon which the decision is made (Lee, 2016).

Transitional planning, services, and activities should be approached as a multiyear process, as transitional goals cannot be achieved in a single year (Cobean, 2000). It is required by law to include students in their transitional planning in order to facilitate the development of their self-determination and self-advocacy skills, which are essential for students to develop the ability to manage their own lives (Cobean, 2000).

As previously stated, all students with an IEP and approaching their exit from high school must receive a Summary of Performance, a document that must be provided by the school before students graduate from high school or turn 22 years of age (Learning

Disabilities Association of America, 2013). The Summary of Performance summarizes academic and functional performance levels and transitional needs at the time of school completion, and it must make recommendations about how to aid the student to meet their postsecondary goals (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2013).

If the school fails to provide transitional planning or services to eligible students, the school has breached the law, also known as noncompliance (GAO, 2012). Follow-up studies of students with disabilities have shown that a significant number of these students do not go on for further training, do not receive vital support and services as adults, and are not as productive as the general population (Cobean, 2000). Such findings have led to the conclusion that the educational program needs to be aligned with the community living, working, and social environments of the student to improve the post-school outcomes of these students (Cobean, 2000). The transitional requirements of IDEA (2004b) challenge educators to improve the post-school outcomes of students with disabilities by doing a better job of planning and preparing students and families for the challenges and complexities of the adult world (Cobean, 2000).

Transitional Team: Perceptions and Experiences

Oliver et al. (2003) defined perception as the course through which the information from experience is selected, received, organized, and interpreted to make it meaningful to the individual, ultimately resulting in decisions and actions. Perception is essential for leaders who want to evade making mistakes when working with people and events (Oliver et al., 2003). This section looks at the literature on the perceptions and experiences of transitional team members that will offer information that is not obvious on the surface of the transitional process.

Parents

Insight and opinion gained via parent perspectives are imperative when evaluating needs and efficacy. Snyder (2014) conducted a qualitative study that examined the perspectives of 10 parents of students with significant disabilities about the secondary transitional process. The consensus was split evenly and showed that parents are either satisfied with the transitional process in general and view themselves as very involved or feel their child's school needs to provide more information about the transitional process, communicate better, and collaborate more with outside agencies (Snyder, 2014).

Similarly, Bahn-Kraatz (2017) conducted a qualitative study on parental perceptions of the postsecondary transitional planning process. Through a purposeful sample of six participants who completed a transitional rating scale and a semi-structured interview, Bahn-Kraatz found that data revealed gaps in parental knowledge regarding the postsecondary transitional planning process, and parent perceptions suggested a lack of faith in the postsecondary transitional planning process to provide successful outcomes for their children (Bahn-Kraatz, 2017).

School Staff

As the implementer of transitional services, school staff can provide invaluable insight into the transitional planning practice. Numerous researchers have found that teachers support transitional planning but find it challenging to incorporate it into their regular Common Core curriculum, as evidenced by a study conducted by Wallen (2014). In this qualitative study, 12 teachers completed a questionnaire regarding their attitudes and perceptions on the transitional planning process and how these attitudes influence instruction (Wallen, 2014). Results indicated that teachers felt that transitional planning is

essential but found it challenging to incorporate instruction with the Common Core curriculum (Wallen, 2014). Likewise, Parrish (2006) found similar views in her qualitative study in which she explored the perceptions of administrators regarding the effectiveness of transitional services. Data analysis from the 77 administrators surveyed showed administrators agreed with teachers and felt there is a need for additional staff employed for the specific purpose of coordinating and delivering transitional services (Parrish, 2006). In the same study, administrators also expressed the need for expanded community resources to establish ties with agencies and other related services, additional staff development focused on transitional programming and clarification of the new IDEA (2004b) transitional requirements, and federal funding for mandated positions to provide more equity and commitment to students with disabilities (Parrish, 2006).

Students

The student with special needs is the most important individual on the transitional team, as the entire process is dedicated to meeting their transitional needs. To better understand the desires of the student with disabilities undergoing the transitional process, Lindstrom et al. (2007) conducted a qualitative study of 33 young adults with disabilities in hopes of identifying their perceived needs in the transitional process. Participants conveyed the desire to increase self-knowledge and awareness, engagement in career exploration and multiple work experiences during high school, opportunities for community-based experiences, self-direction and independent decision-making, school staff's dedication to student interests and dreams, motivation and persistence from school staff, transitional services, and post-school support from community agencies (Lindstrom et al., 2007).

In an action study conducted by Carufel (2013), transitional plans reflecting many of the student desires in the previous study were implemented for four students. The conclusions of the study revealed positive gains for two students, whereas one student's remained the same, and one student's indicated a negative loss (Carufel, 2013). Therefore, the input of the transitional team is essential to ensuring that the right goals are put into place.

Model Transitional Planning/Programs

Drago-Severson (2009) believed evidence-based practices are of utmost importance regarding the decision-making process when making credible and informed decisions, as evidence-based practices are supported bodies of research, indicating they are generally sufficient. This section looks at the literature on transitional planning and programs of best practice.

A national longitudinal study by Cameto et al. (2004) examined attempts to prepare youth with disabilities for the transition from secondary school to adulthood. Findings demonstrated that the majority of students and their parents participate in transitional planning; and among the 90% of parents participating in the transitional planning process, two-thirds reported being satisfied with their level of participation (Cameto et al., 2004). School staff reported that approximately 70% of students with transitional plans participate actively in the planning by providing input (58%) or taking a leadership role (12%; Cameto et al., 2004). Findings also demonstrated that the essential requirement for transitional planning is being met for many students with disabilities, with almost 90% of secondary school students receiving special education services having transitional planning underway for their benefit as required by IDEA 1997

(Cameto et al., 2004). Furthermore, school staff report that roughly three fourths of students, regardless of age, have a distinguished course of study that is intended to help them achieve their transitional goals (Cameto et al., 2004). The report identified four main themes found to be the national consensus for successful transitional planning: The degree to which parent and student expectations for the transitional planning process are being met varies; transitional planning evolves as students move through their high school years; transitional planning reflects the diversity of student needs and abilities; and the transitional planning process differs based on various household incomes and the racial and ethnic backgrounds of students (Cameto et al., 2004).

Kellems and Morningstar (2010) found that students with disabilities as compared to students without disabilities are less likely to enroll in postsecondary programs (40% vs. 50%). The study also found that students with disabilities are less likely to be employed after leaving high school as compared to students without disabilities (60% vs. 70%; Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). One way for practitioners to begin to close these gaps, as conveyed by Kellems and Morningstar, is to design and implement a practical transitional plan for their students that is ongoing and dynamic. In doing so, Kellems and Morningstar suggested implementing a transitional process that organizes a district transitional group that meets once a month. The transitional group may benefit from using a transitional interview with students, the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment for independent living skills, a variety of strategies to gather information, video modeling to teach social and work-related skills, and a checklist (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). It is also recommended that the transitional group have students develop a portfolio and create a person-centered plan, establish a discovery profile for each student, develop transitional

brochures and tips sheets, hold a transitional fair, create a notebook of relevant paperwork for postsecondary settings, implement community-based instruction, and develop job shadowing work programs (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010).

Hamblet (2014) emphasized nine strategies high school IEP teams and special education faculty and staff members can do to give students the preparation they need to be successful in the postsecondary environment: educate IEP team members and special education faculty, reach out to families, encourage the future independence of students, teach students to use assistive technology, give students the documentation they need, educate students about their disabilities and strengths, explicitly teach learning and organizational strategies, make certain that students are prepared to apply for accommodations in college, and create a district-wide transitional program. Hamblet further recommended a district-wide transitional program that includes all nine suggested strategies throughout the students' middle and high school years in order to guarantee that students enter college with the skills, documentation, and strategies they need to achieve success.

Because of the research on transitional practices demonstrating positive post-school outcomes improve for students with disabilities when educators, students, families, community members, and organizations work collaboratively to implement a broad perspective of transitional planning, commonly referred to as transition-focused education, Kohler (1996) advocated the Taxonomy for Transition Programming. In general, this concept reflects the viewpoint that transitional planning is the fundamental guide for the creation of students' educational programs, including strategies that keep them in school. Transition-focused education has a positive impact when service systems

and programs are connected (Kohler, 1996).

In 2016, Kohler et al. revised the Taxonomy for Transition Programming, titling it the Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0. This version builds upon the earlier version and provides concrete practices for implementing transition-focused education by including the most recent indicators for post-school achievement, methodologies to expand graduation and decrease dropout, positive school climate, professional administrations, and effective transition of young adults with disabilities in college and careers (Kohler et al., 2016). The 2.0 model proposes five essential practice classifications: student-centered planning, student development and supports, interagency collaboration, family engagement, and program structure (Kohler et al., 2016). Within family engagement, attention to cultural relevancy, empowerment, and family preparation is emphasized (Kohler et al., 2016). Collaboration with service agencies, especially vocational rehabilitation, accentuates the significance of such associations before and during school and post-school transitions (Kohler et al., 2016).

Research by Mazzotti and Rowe (2015) reflected the evolving work of the Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Career Development and Transition. One of its many contributions is bridging the research-to-practice gap related to implementing transitional instruction, services, and supports across the continuum. The demands of the 21st century require educational organizations to prepare students with disabilities for college and career by providing instruction and services to assist in achieving positive post-school outcomes (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015). Finally, the Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Career Development and Transition identified the following overarching standards: assessment; curricular content knowledge, programs, services, and

outcomes; research and inquiry; leadership and policy; professional and ethical practice; and collaboration (Mazzotti & Rowe, 2015).

Neubert et al. (2002) presented research that reviews the literature on postsecondary programs and supports for individuals with disabilities to identify a philosophical basis for providing such opportunities, identify practices, and summarize research on the efficacy of these efforts. The literature supported providing postsecondary services and personal aid for mentally disabled students and those with other significant disabilities between the ages of 18 and 22 who were still enrolled in public schools (Neubert et al., 2002). The results indicated that the record of student outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction with age-appropriate alternatives, and the cost-benefit analysis of postsecondary programs or individual supports must be addressed (Neubert et al., 2002). The authors also suggested it is essential to assess the efficiency of postsecondary efforts in terms of other quality of life indicators; and it is imperative to research advancing postsecondary practices and alternative, age-appropriate programs and individual supports for students with disabilities during the transition to adulthood (Neubert et al., 2002). Therefore, it seems postsecondary transitional programs implementing a practice that enforces parent and student involvement, collaboration with postsecondary entities, the creation of student-centered transitional plans, and service provider fidelity are imperative to maximizing student postsecondary success.

Potential Barriers in Transitional Planning

The transition to adulthood for students with disabilities meets a complex barrier commonly referred to as the “transitional cliff,” created when eligibility shifts as students with disabilities move from children services to adult services (North Carolina

Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Many difficulties arise in accessing programs, services, and support after secondary school, complicating the transition to adulthood for students with disabilities and thus worsening the gaps that create the barrier presented by the transitional cliff (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Some barriers reported explicitly by parents of students with disabilities include an absence of general information or guidance or alternatives, school and other staff expectations and dispositions about postsecondary options, budgetary limitations, staff from various places offering diverse advice, insufficient transitional planning, various services neglecting to collaborate with one another, long waitlists for services, and written and online materials that are hard to decipher (Kelley, 2014). Further insufficiencies noted as barriers to transitions include lack of training (Gray, 2013), lack of federal coordination, lack of programs and resources, lack of funding, lack of constructive attitudes, and lack of parent knowledge (GAO, 2012). Shapland (2006) found that parent apprehension is a common barrier to successful transitioning but suggested that this apprehension often is due to a lack of knowledge, thus affecting parental involvement.

Additionally, teachers and employers have a different view on the barriers that hinder successful postsecondary transitioning. Griffin et al. (2010) found that teachers identified the following as barriers: insufficient or ineffective transitional planning and implementation, gaps in student preparedness, inadequate support and missed opportunities to participate, systematic low expectancies placed on students with disabilities, insufficient awareness of available postsecondary education options from transitional coordinators, and limited social consciousness and practices. The Canadian

Centre on Disability Studies (2004) examined the encounters of students with disabilities in Canada while transitioning from high school to the workplace, based on the perspectives of students and employers. The report indicated that barriers to employment include a lack of flexibility in the workplace, lack of secure social networks, lack of supportive and accessible environments, the attitudinal barriers of employers, lack of transportation, lack of education and work experience of students with a disability, deficiency of access to interpreters and attendants, and a biased outlook of uncertain futures (Canadian Centre on Disability Studies, 2004).

Based on the research of potential barriers to transitional planning, we know the greatest barrier occurs when students with disabilities exit high school and enter adult life. The access of services and supports is viewed as lacking in availability and knowledge thereof. Access to such services and supports is more affluent when the student with disabilities is in school and still covered by an IEP. What we do not know is what currently implemented postsecondary transitional preparedness programs are doing to close gaps in order to decrease the barriers to postsecondary transition. As well, we do not know how beneficial these programs are to students with disabilities.

Project SEARCH and Bridges Model Transitional Programs

Project SEARCH, a program serving students with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities, is a distinctive, business-led, 1-year school and work program that takes place entirely at a host site (NCDPI, 2017). The site gives access to an on-location classroom that can sustain as many as 12 students and is equipped with a special education teacher and up to three job coaches to meet the academic and training needs of the students (NCDPI, 2017). The program offers an employment skills curriculum with

focuses on team building, navigating the workplace, workplace safety, technology, social skills, communication, presentation skills, interviewing skills, financial management, health and wellness, job search skills, job retention, and participation in internships and worksite rotations (NCDPI, 2017). Currently, this program model is implemented in 14 school districts in North Carolina (Project SEARCH, 2018a).

To be eligible for Project SEARCH, students have to be identified as having a significant intellectual and/or developmental disability addressed in an IEP and must be in their last year of high school eligibility; they are referred to the program through their schools/teachers (Project SEARCH, 2018b). Prospective participants must complete an application and must also meet the following set of entrance criteria:

- be the minimum age of 18
- have attained all high school credits for graduation
- meet eligibility requirements for Vocational Rehabilitation and for the Developmental Disabilities organization and other service providers
- have independent personal hygiene, grooming, and daily living skills
- maintain appropriate behavior and social skills in the workplace
- take direction from supervisors
- be able to communicate effectively
- participate in travel training to ensure success in using the bus or public transportation independently
- be able to pass a drug screening and a background check
- have immunizations up to date including two TB tests and a flu shot
- have the desire to work competitively at the conclusion of the Project

SEARCH program

- participate in graduation from their home school before attending the Project SEARCH program (Project SEARCH, 2018b).

The first few weeks of the program are focused on new employee orientation, hands-on skill assessment, and business environment familiarization (Project SEARCH, 2018b). Students develop a career plan that guides the process of internship selection and individual job searches; and throughout the school year, the students generally work for 1 hour of their day on employability and functional skills (Project SEARCH, 2018b). Classroom activities are designed around team building, workplace security, technology, social skills, communication, presentation skills, interviewing skills, money management, health and wellness, job search skills, and job preservation (Project SEARCH, 2018b). Students gain valuable, marketable, and transferable skills through a series of three targeted unpaid internships to allow them to apply for a similar position and learn communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills that are essential for their overall development (Project SEARCH, 2018b). Potential worksites for students are identified through an ongoing collaborative process involving teachers, job coaches, and business liaisons (Project SEARCH, 2018b). To schedule a job interview to secure each rotation, students are required to communicate with their supervisors through telephone and written communications (Project SEARCH, 2018b). A department mentor is established at each site as a reliable source of support and feedback and is also tasked with the responsibility of communicating with the instructor and job coaches (Project SEARCH, 2018b). Students spend roughly 5 hours each day at the internships, including a 30-minute lunch. The focus during the program's last few months is on improving skills,

achieving the career goal, and completing individual job placement (Project SEARCH, 2018b). Once the course has been completed (95% or better attendance, right attitude, successful skill acquisition at each job site), students receive a career portfolio that includes a resume, letters of recommendation, a profile of competencies, work hours acquired, and special recognition earned during the process (Project SEARCH, 2018b). Job development and placement is based on the student's experiences, strengths, and skills. In the community, services are pinpointed that provide aid with modifications necessary to accomplish a specific job. Job coaching and long-term follow-alongs are usually arranged through the local developmental disability organization (Project SEARCH, 2018b).

Bridges is a postsecondary program designed for students with developmental disabilities who have complex learning and social challenges and are between the ages of 18 and 21 (Phillips Academy, 2018). During the student's 12th-grade year, the IEP team will generate a referral. An intake meeting will be held to identify and develop an appropriate process to transition to the Bridges program. The program is designed for students who desire to continue their education in the areas of career preparation and independent living within the community (Anoka-Hennepin Schools, 2018). Bridges is student centered with small group instruction and individualized goal plans and offers functional and vocational curriculum with the instructional focus on the acquisition of skills necessary for increased independence within the community. Program components include community-based learning experiences, classroom instruction, recreation and leisure activities, home living experiences, and jobs and job training (Anoka-Hennepin Schools, 2018).

The curriculum for Bridges is divided into four categories: academic skills, independent living, vocational, and electives. Across this continuum, students cover counting coins, making change, using the calendar, budgeting, tipping, using a calculator, reading comprehension, solving real life word problems, telling time, using the computer, reading a newspaper, everyday household cleaning tasks, basic planning and preparing of food items, basic hygiene routines, accessing the community, personal safety, technology/phone skills, money skills, volunteer opportunities, getting along with others, communication skills, employability and self-advocacy, workplace etiquette, social thinking and networking, and a variety of other skills and concepts (Anoka-Hennepin Schools, 2018). When students have the necessary ability and work ethic to meet the requirements of employment, the Bridges staff look for paid, community employment opportunities. It is the goal of this program to facilitate cooperation between students, families, and other service providers (Sauk Rapids-Rice Public Schools, 2018).

Barriers to transition, experienced and researched, are what made this study an area of interest for research. Those barriers are lack of formal transitional programs for students with severe disabilities or deficits, lack of parent knowledge, lack of resources, lack of supports, attitudes, lack of training, failure to prioritize, parent apprehension, and teacher effort. It was not intended in any way for this study to be a program evaluation. The intent was to gain the perspective of parents of students who have been participants in transitional programs in regard to their effectiveness.

Summary

We know there are at least 20 counties in North Carolina with a model transitional program. We do not know how these programs impact the post-school success of

students. We need to know if parents perceive overall that transitional programs have merit such that the programs meet the needs of their children and prepare them for the world beyond high school. IDEA (2004b) mandated the process and components of transitional planning for students with disabilities, served under an IEP, began by age 16 but can start as early as age 14 if deemed necessary and appropriate. North Carolina offers very few mandates for the transitional process, opting instead to require its schools to follow the IDEA (2004b) mandate without any deviations from the law. There are many barriers to transitioning planning, as barriers are to be expected in the implementation of initiatives. However, research suggests identifying those barriers and finding ways to counteract those barriers. Overall, the idea of the transitional planning process is common knowledge among parents, teachers, and other stakeholders; but methods differ from county to county and state to state. The main recommendations of the research are to properly and adequately train those responsible for transitional services, increase parent knowledge and awareness, adjust attitudes so they are more positive about the process, involve multiple agencies beyond the school building/district, make transitional planning a priority, make an honest and diligent effort for delivering transitional services, and differentiate transitional programs and activities.

Chapter 3 describes the proposed methodology for this research, including a more in-depth look at the chosen research design model, the researcher's role, proposed procedures for the collection and analyzing of data, needed instruments, and any foreseen limitations and delimitations.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

The central research question for this study was, “Are structured transitional programs deemed beneficial by parents and teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities?” Given the findings by the North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force (2009) that only 50% of students with disabilities are in postsecondary institutions or employed following high school graduation, this study is relevant and warranted. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of transitional preparatory programs. It was essential to understand from the perspective of the parents and teachers whether transitional programs positively impacted the successful transition from life in high school to life after high school.

Creswell (2013) suggested a qualitative research design for studies that inquire about the views of individuals and/or a process over time. Because this research depended significantly on the views of the parents and teachers, a qualitative approach was followed (Creswell, 2013). The following research questions navigated this study:

1. Based on parent and teacher perspectives, how did the high school transitional program facilitate success after high school for students with moderate to severe disabilities?
2. To what extent do the parents and teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities perceive that a transitional program is a necessity for post-high school success?

Data Collection

Qualitative research is grounded in words and stories (Butin, 2010). Collected interview response data identified patterns in the experiences of participants in relation to their involvement with a transitional program. I analyzed the interview responses and constructed narrative statements about the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2014). The narrative statements were used to answer the research questions.

According to Creswell (2014), the central initiative behind qualitative research is to learn about the problem or issue from participants and to employ the research to procure that information. Creswell (2014) also noted that a small and purposefully selected group of participants is imperative in conducting a qualitative study. To collect the data for this inquiry, I used convenience sampling for the selection of parents and teachers as participants—selection based on convenient accessibility and proximity to me (Creswell, 2014). Parents are their child's first teacher and are the ones who establish the overall vision for their child's future and facilitate the formulation of goals needed to attain that future. Teachers spend 6-8 hours a day with their students and have the vital role of fostering an environment conducive for cultivating the academic and life goals of their students. For these reasons, I chose parents and teachers as participants, as they were best suited to gauge the effectiveness of a program geared toward preparing their child/student for their future as an adult.

The informed consent begins with the purpose of the study and can be found in Appendix C. For parents or guardians, the first four interview questions provide background information about the subject. The next three interview questions provide background information about the subject's child. For teachers, the first eight interview

questions provide background information about the subject. The final 10 interview questions for all participants sought insight of the subject's experience of a transitional program as a parent, guardian, or teacher of a participant in the program. Responses from the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed via Temi—an online speech recognition program—and responses were categorized by themes using a coded theme analysis (Temi, 2017).

The Research Site

I recruited participants, both parents/guardians and teachers, in three nearby eastern North Carolina counties. I contacted service providers to gain permission to place participant recruitment flyers in their establishment. Upon approval, I posted recruitment flyers in vocational rehabilitation centers, Autism Society home/community service providers, Pinnacle home/community service providers, behavior support service providers, and on social media. Recruitment flyers were placed on bulletin boards and/or other designated announcement posting locations within each of the businesses. On social media, the recruitment flyer was posted in North Carolina educator groups of which I am a member. Parents and teachers self-selected participation. Selection was based on a first-come-first-serve basis.

The Role of the Researcher

I am currently in my eighth year of employment in my district. My current teaching assignment is in a self-contained classroom for students with autism. I have regular involvement throughout the school year with a transitional program and have had several students apply for the program, one of whom was admitted and completed the program. I also complete transitional plans for each of my students yearly as part of their

IEP. I have been teaching for 18 years, 10 of which were in a previous county. For this research, I was responsible for soliciting participants, conducting interviews, transcribing the responses, analyzing the data, and presenting implications. I have completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative certification, a process for familiarizing oneself with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol.

The Subjects

Participation in this study was voluntary. Subjects were contacted by me for participation in this study. Once the invitation was accepted, the subjects received a copy of the IRB Informed Consent Form (Appendix C), either through mail, email, or in person, which they were asked to sign and return. I picked up the consent form at the subject's convenience. Interviews were conducted and recorded via phone. Subjects were considered for participation in the study based on having a child/student with disabilities who have completed a transitional program. The first six parents and three teachers to accept the invitation for the study were the subjects of the study. Subjects were interviewed at their convenience.

The Instrument

The interview questions (17 total for parents or guardians and 21 total for teachers) were created by me. The interview instrument (Appendix D) was piloted by validation through three exceptional children's staff by using Simon and White's (2011) Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel (Appendix E). Changes to the instrument were made based on the feedback received.

Interviewing subjects in their natural setting is a crucial benefactor of qualitative research, as it allows the subject to listen to what is being said and done in the comfort of

their natural environment (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, all subjects were allowed to choose the time that was most convenient for them to be interviewed within a specified date range. Interviews were digitally recorded via mobile phone and transcribed via Temi for coding purposes.

The Interview Questions

An interview protocol indicates the context (researcher/interviewer, subject/interviewee, date, and time) of the interview and instructions that I followed and is included in the Appendix F. Interviews of subjects occurred individually. Based on recommendations from Creswell (2014), the questions include warm-up questions (designed to put the subject at ease), probes (used for follow-up for specific questions), space for recoding interview responses, and a statement of appreciation for the subject's time and consideration. As part of the interview questions, parents and teachers were asked to evaluate their students based on a list of 16 skills provided by Datson et al. (2012), which Datson et al. believed are needed by anyone who aims to be successful and competitive as an independent adult. These skills are employability, functional, team building, getting around the workplace, workplace safety, technology, social, communication, presentation, interviewing, money management, health and wellness, job search skills, keeping a job, teamwork, and problem-solving skills (Datson et al., 2012). I used the responses to gain insight into parent and teacher perspectives of the benefits of transitional programs. The interview questions for the study are in Appendix D.

Procedures for Data Collection

Table 1 displays the steps I took to collect the data needed for this research.

Table 1

Data Collection Process

Step	Action to be taken
1.	Piloted the interview questions by validation through three exceptional children's staff by using Simon and White's (2011) Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel.
2.	Contacted service providers to gain permission to place participant recruitment flyers in their establishment.
3.	Posted recruitment flyers in service provider establishments and on social media.
4.	Formally extended the invitation and purpose of the study to parents/guardians and teachers who respond to the recruitment flyers.
5.	Emailed, mailed, or delivered the IRB Consent Form.
6.	Picked up IRB Consent Form and exchanged for the interview protocol.
7.	Conducted interviews at the convenience of the subject. Interviews were digitally recorded.
8.	Transcribed interview responses via Temi.
9.	Coded the data for themes.

Data Analysis

Following the interviews, I transcribed the digitally recorded interview responses and any handwritten notes to create a document of each subject's responses. I used a confidential format to label each file. In this way, subjects are referred to as P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, T1, T2, and T3. Upon transcription of the interviews, I read each transcript and began to identify themes. Following the identification of themes, I analyzed the

transcripts and coded each response to correspond to the identified themes.

Limitations and Delimitations

The projected limitations of this study were as follows: I had favorable and unfavorable experiences with the postsecondary transitional practices and programs in two different counties; only six parents/guardians and three teachers were interviewed for this research, and therefore perceptions are not representative of transitional programs overall; parents/guardians may have given the answers they think I wanted; some parents/guardians did not have the educational background to answer the interview questions; and some parent/guardian backgrounds may have impacted their perceptions. The study was conducted in three counties in eastern North Carolina; thus, this leaves the findings confined to just these three counties as well as just eastern North Carolina, instead of across the region, state, etc. Also, students referenced in teacher interviews are not the same students referenced by parents who were interviewed. Students have already graduated, and it was impossible to match students. These are delimitations of the study.

Summary

This qualitative research study sought to determine if structured transitional programs are deemed beneficial by parents and teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities. The study used a convenience sample of parents and teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities who have completed a transitional program. Subjects were individually interviewed using a series of 17 (for parents) or 21 (for teachers) questions. Using Temi, I transcribed the digitally recorded interview responses and then identified themes and coded each interview response to its corresponding theme. Chapter 4 presents the results of all data gained through the collection of data.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore from the perspective of parents and teachers in eastern North Carolina communities and high schools how important transitional programs are to moderately to severely disabled students' success post-high school. This study explored parent and teacher stories relative to the impact of transitional programs. Additionally, this study sought to determine from the perspective of the parents and teachers whether transitional programs are beneficial to moderately to severely disabled students' successful transitions from life in high school to life after high school. The following research questions guided this study:

1. Based on parent and teacher perspectives, how did the high school transitional program facilitate success after high school for students with moderate to severe disabilities?
2. To what extent do the parents and teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities perceive that a transitional program is a necessity for post-high school success?

Six parents and three teachers were interviewed for this study. (IDEA, 2004c, Section on Transition) served as the foundation for composing the interview protocol (Appendix F). Upon completion of the interviews, the raw data were commercially transcribed. Following the reading of the transcripts, I coded each set of data and analyzed for themes. Establishing themes helped me recount the interviewees' information and add depth and insight to the individual experiences (Creswell, 2014).

The following sections present the demographics of study participants and results

of this study. Results from parent and teacher data are organized relative to the research questions. In some instances, quotes have been edited for conciseness and grammatical clarity. Names have been redacted to protect participant identity.

Parent Demographics

Participant relationship to the child was either father, mother, or grandmother: two being fathers, three being mothers, and one being a grandmother. The age range of the participants was from 40-70: 33% being in the 40-50 age group, 50% being in the 60-70 age group, and 17% being in the 70-80 age group. All participants were African American, of which four were female and two were male. The highest level of educational degree ranged from high school diploma to master's degree. When asked how the parents learned of the transitional programs, 100% said their child's teacher told them about the program. Finally, when asked whether participation in the program was voluntary or required, 83% of the participants said participation was voluntary, while 17% of the participants said participation was required.

Table 2 displays parent demographics and other information about research participants. Table 2 also shows how parents learned of the transitional programs and whether participation was required or voluntary.

Table 2*Parent Demographics*

Relation to the child	Age range	Parent's race/gender	Child's race/gender	Parent's highest level of education	How did you learn about the transitional program?	Was participation in the program voluntary or required?
[P1] Father	40-50	AfrAm Male	AfrAm Male	HS Diploma	"Son's high school."	Voluntary
[P2] Mother	60-70	AfrAm. Female	AfrAm Male	Associate's Degree	"His teacher told me about it."	Voluntary
[P3] Mother	60-70	AfrAm. Female	AfrAm Male	HS Diploma	"His teacher told me about it when he got in 9th grade."	Voluntary
[P4] Grand-mother	70-80	AfrAm. Female	AfrAm Male	Master's Degree	"My grandson's teacher told me about the program at one of his IEP meetings."	Voluntary
[P5] Mother	60-70	AfrAm. Female	AfrAm Male	Bachelor's Degree	"Through the school. They actually starting working with him before he graduated. Taking him places to learn to work and stuff."	Required
[P6] Father	40-50	AfrAm Male	AfrAm Male	Bachelor's Degree	"My son's teacher told me about it."	Voluntary

Parent Results by Research Question

Research Question 1. Based on Parent and Teacher Perspectives, How Did the High School Transitional Program Facilitate Success After High School for Students With Moderate to Severe Disabilities?

Overall, the majority of parents interviewed expressed a positive experience with their child's transitional program. Eighty-five percent of parents felt the structured transitional program was beneficial to their child. Nearly 85% of parents revealed that their child is currently employed. Approximately 17% of parents shared that their child is enrolled in educational activities or living outside of the home, to which over half of the parents articulated a direct correlation to participation in the transitional program. Parents expressed that many skills were enhanced or gained as a result of participation in the transitional program. Among the skills gained or enhanced were learning to build things, being productive, maturity, responsibility, completing a job, customer service, thoroughness, and being able to manage time. P4 noted, "He [P4's child] learned how to search and apply for a job, and he really learned how to respond appropriately in an interview." P6 shared, "He [P6's child] was able to find a job and so far he's been able to keep the job. He keeps up his appearance for work. He's increased his speed in getting things done. He's more responsible."

The data revealed a connection between the transitional program and community resources and how this connection played an intricate role in bridging the gap between high school and adult life. Eighty-five percent of parents stated they were put in touch with other community resources upon or before completion of the transitional program. These community resources were helpful. Vocational rehabilitation and community

services were the most often named. P1 recounted, “They [vocational rehabilitation] helped him to get a job. They took him to the interview and everything. They sat there with him. They spent two weeks with him to train him on the job.” Other community resources named were Autism Society, mentor services, and in-home health services.

With any service comes great expectation. When asked about their [parent] expectations from the program, P1 responded, “Just being able to help him [his son] get a job.” P2 expressed,

I expected them to teach him how to work. How to do a job. How to live on his own. How to live his life like I do. Like his sister does. Like everyone else he sees living by themselves, going to work, paying bills and stuff like that. Learn how to be an adult.

P3 shared, “I just wanted him to be able to get a job and do good so that he could keep the job. And to be able to manage money.” P4 stated,

I just expected them to teach him how to get a job. I didn't really have too many expectations about him living independently because he is not a good discerner of character and chooses the wrong people to hang around. So I feel most at comfort with him living at home with me.

P5 said her expectations were that “that they would give him the help that he needed so that he could be functional on his own or need minimal assistance.” P6 was quoted as saying that his expectations were for the program “to help him grow as a man. Teach him about working. Teach him to be independent. Teach him some responsibility.” There was a unanimous expectation among all the parents that the transitional program would help their child learn to work, get a job, and be

independent. Five of six parents said their expectations were met.

When asked what components of the transitional program proved most valuable to their child, P1 adamantly declared, “The job part. Getting a job.” P2 expressed, “Learning how to work. He learned how to interview. He did learn how to handle his money. He learned how to look for a job.” P3 shared, “Learning to communicate, finding a job, managing money and job security. He's been working at the same job since he finished the program. He's been working for almost 13 years.” P4 stated,

Just the overall structure of the program. They had a plan. Well first they had a plan that was personally his and of course that was his IEP. I think it's called his transitional plan. But from there they had a solid program with a plan of action on how to teach these children how to compete and function out here in this world with everyone else.

P6 was quoted as saying,

Learning about working, how to find a job. How to handle responsibility. How to get up and go to work every day, or most days, just like I do. He's able to do what other young men his age are doing.

Research Question 2. To What Extent Do the Parents and Teachers of Students With Moderate to Severe Disabilities Perceive That a Transitional Program Is a Necessity for Post-High School Success?

The following data were collected when research participants were asked whether or not they perceived participation in the transitional program was a necessity for their child. The consensus was unanimous (100%) among all the parents that participation in a structured transitional program was necessary for their

child. According to P1, his son was able to better himself and obtain more skills because of his participation in the transitional program. P2 stated,

It helped him mature a lot. He stopped acting so childish. He learned how to do a lot of different things at work that he didn't know before. He enjoyed having his own money, and I noticed he wanted to save his money sometime.

P3 added,

It helped him to get a job and to be so professional. He learned to pay attention to time and understand it is important to be on time. He's learned how to care about the customer and help them in every way he can.

P4 declared,

By participating in the program he became employable. Even though he couldn't keep a job he still has no problem getting a job. Him not being able to keep a job is his fault and based off his lack of maturity.

P6 proclaimed, "My son became employable and is now employed, and so far he's been able to keep his job."

The parent participants articulated further evidence of why they viewed structured transitional programs to be a necessity for their child. A couple of the parents spoke about the skills their child gained and how it helped them maintain a job and be competitive in society. P1 relayed, "They were able to help him get the skills that he needed and to be able to maintain a job." Regarding her son's gains, P2 noted, "It helped him. It taught him how to get a job and go to work every day. He even learned how to make a plan for getting somewhere to live. They did real good helping my son." P3 stated, "He has grown so much as a man and a member of

our community. He's very responsible and he helps me out so much.” P4 was quoted saying, “He became employable. He also learned other skills that helped him to be competitive in society.” P6 divulged,

He has grown so much in his maturity and just being responsible. In addition to working I don't have to stay on him as much as I use to about daily responsibilities and completing chores and tasks. He keeps up after himself a lot better now.

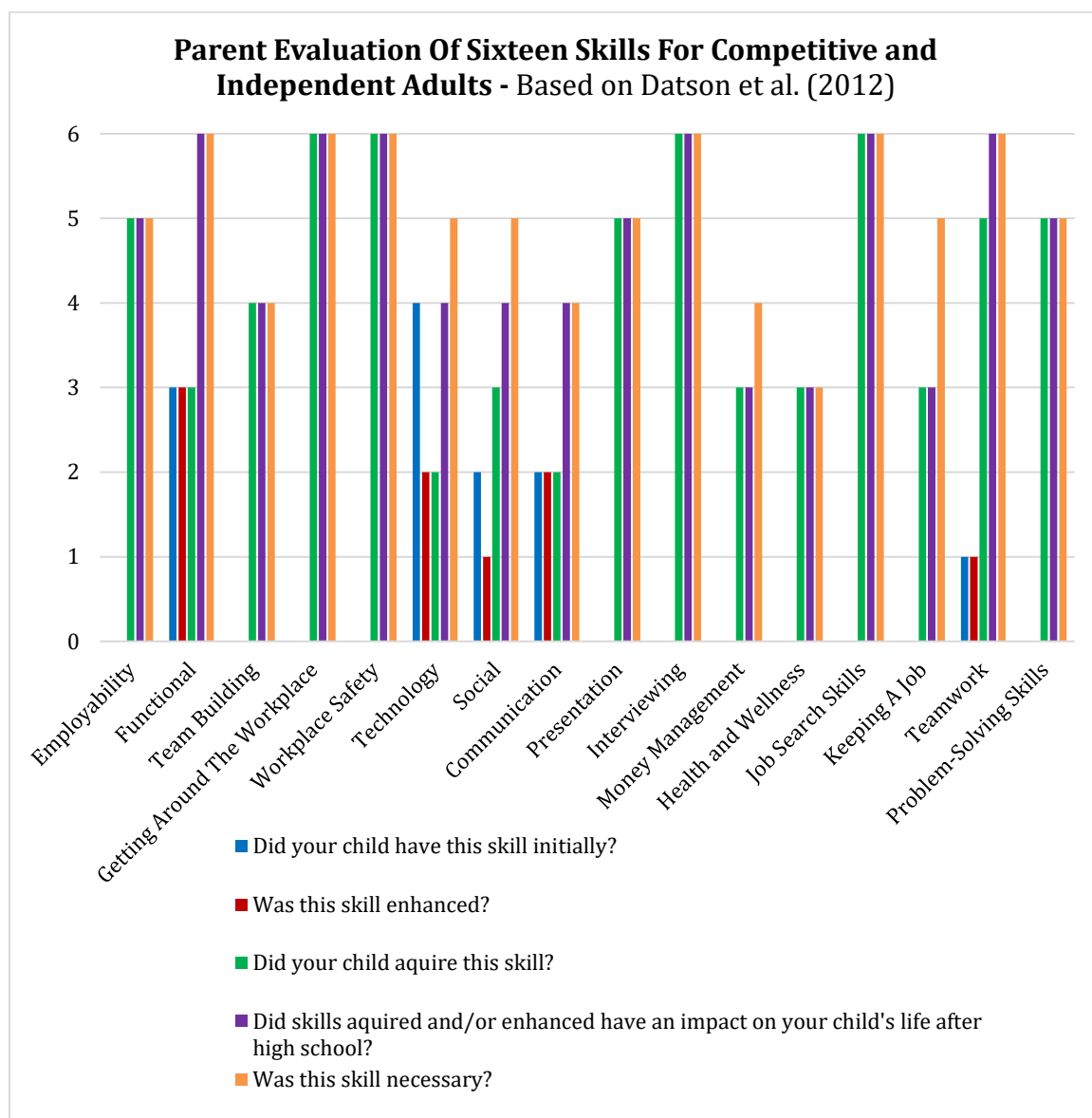
Datson et al. (2012) provided a list of 16 skills they believed are needed by anyone who aims to be successful and competitive as an independent adult. These skills are employability, functional, team building, getting around the workplace, workplace safety, technology, social, communication, presentation, interviewing, money management, health and wellness, job search skills, keeping a job, teamwork, and problem-solving skills (Datson et al., 2012). A few of the parent participants interviewed shared that their child already possessed some of those skills. However, most of the parents elected that their child did acquire many of the skills listed as a result of participating in the transitional program, and those skills have had an impact on their child's post-high school life.

Specifically, when asked about employability, presentation, and problem-solving skills, none of the parents said their child had the skill initially; but five of the six parents did say their child acquired the skill, which is necessary and has an impact on life after high school. When asked if their child was functional, three of the six parents said their child had the skill initially, while the other three parents said their child acquired the skill as a result of participation in a transitional program.

Additionally, all six parents said the skill of functionality was necessary and has an impact on life after high school. Parents were asked about their child's skill of team building, keeping a job, money management, and health and wellness. None of the parents said their child had these skills prior to participation in the transitional program. However, at least half of the parents said their child acquired these skills through participation in the transitional program, and these skills are necessary and have been impactful on life after high school. When asked about getting around the workplace, workplace safety, interviewing and job search skills, none of the parents said their child had the skill initially; but all six of the parents did say their child acquired these skills, which are necessary and have an impact on life after high school. When asked about technology, four of the six research participants said their child had the skill initially, while the other two parents said their child acquired the skill as a result of participation in a transitional program. Four of the parent participants said the skill of technology has an impact of life after high school. Five of the six parents deemed the skill as necessary. Parents were asked about social and communication skills. Two of the parents said their child had the skill initially. Roughly half of the parents said their child acquired the skill through the transitional program. More than half of the parents view the skill as necessary and impacting on life after high school. Last, only one of the parents said their child initially had the skill of teamwork. Upon completion of the transitional program, five parents said their child acquired the teamwork skill. All six parents felt the skill is necessary and has impacted life after high school. Figure 1 represents the evaluation of each of the 16 skills relative to each parent's child.

Figure 1

Parent Evaluation of 16 Skills for Competitive and Independent Adults



Parents were asked to name the skills of most value gained or enhanced by their child's participation in the transitional program. Employment led the list of skills named by all the parents. Other skills named were being able to do hands-on work, job security, handling money responsibly, social and communication skills, interview skills, problem-solving skills, job searching, responsibility, and being

functional.

Parents were asked what skills they felt their child still needed to increase or develop. P1 stated, “Just a little bit more being able to do things so that he can be a little bit more productive.” P2 said,

Not trying to act like the boss. He had a job when he finished the program.

He had two jobs actually. They got him the jobs. But he was always in trouble for trying to be the boss and tell everyone what to do. That's why he doesn't have a job anymore.

P3 expressed, “Picking good friends and company and not trusting the wrong people so that he can live in his own place and be safe.” P4 declared,

Money management. He does not know how to save money or how to budget. He also needs more instruction in how to respond to authority. He's been through many jobs because of his temper and not knowing how to appropriately respond to authority, mainly his supervisors.

P5 proclaimed,

He needs occupational therapy. They'd been telling me he need to increase his occupational therapy skills but they never got him the services until he was 16. By that time he was too set in his ways. He still needed money management skills, self-care, job retention skills. He had great janitorial skills but he learned that on a volunteer job at a school where the head janitor to the time with him to teach him those skills.

P6 shared, “Communication. He has a speech impediment. So finding other ways to effectively communicate would benefit him.”

Of the six parents interviewed, one did not have as pleasant an experience with her son's transitional program. When asked what skills she felt were enhanced or gained as a result of her child's participation in the transitional program, P5 responded, "None." P5 went on to disclose,

The work they did with him while he was in school was great. The transitional program they enrolled him after high school was great. But that program could only work with him until a certain age. So they turned him over to Vocational Rehab and they pulled away from him after a while because they said he worked fine as long as someone was there beside him to work with him; and they couldn't stay with him.

P5 further added,

They left him. They told me there was nothing they could do for him because he required so much monitoring. They just gave up on him. Didn't even point me in the direction to get him any other type of help that would benefit him.

Teacher Demographics

The next phase of this study involved interviewing teachers to get their perceptions of the necessity of transitional programs and how well these programs facilitate success after high school for students with disabilities. The participant role to the student was teacher. The age range of the participants was from 20-50: one being in the 20-30 age group, one being in the 30-40 age group, and one being in the 40-50 age group. One participant was an African American female; and two of the participants were Caucasian, one female and one male. The highest level of educational degree ranged from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree, with two of

the teachers having obtained a master's degree. One teacher has attained the title of specialist as their highest level in the education field. Years in the field of education were 6, 12, and 17. Years in the current county and current position were 3, 7, and 12. When asked how the teachers learned of the transitional programs, T1 responded, "It is offered by my county and I have to let all of my parents know about it by their child's 11th grade year." T2 replied, "Our county offers it to all special needs 12th graders." T3 stated, "It's offered by our county. We have to tell our students and their parents about it and offer them an application in 12th grade." When asked whether participation in the program was voluntary or required, 100% of the teachers said participation was voluntary. Finally, teachers were asked if they have had involvement with any other transitional programs; one teacher answered "yes," and two teachers answered "no."

Table 3 displays teacher basic demographics. Table 4 displays professional demographics of the teachers and also tells us how the teachers learned of the transitional program and whether participation was required or voluntary.

Table 3*Teacher Basic Demographics*

Role to the student	Age range	Race/ gender	Highest level of education	Years in the field	Years in current county	Years in current position
[T1] Teacher	30-40	African American, female	Master's degree	17	7	7
[T2] Teacher	40-50	Caucasian, male	Master's degree	12	12	12
[T3] Teacher	20-30	Caucasian, female	Bachelor's degree	6	3	3

Table 4*Teacher Professional Demographics*

Role to the student	Highest level attained in the education field	Current teaching assignment	How did you find out about transition program?	Was participation in the program voluntary or required?	Have you had involvement with any other transition programs?
[T1] Teacher	Specialist	Exceptional Children's Teacher – Self-Contained – Autism	It is offered by my county and I have to let all of my parents know about it by their child's 11 th grade year.	Voluntary	Yes
[T2] Teacher	Teacher	Exceptional Children's Teacher – Self-Contained – IDMO	Our county offers it to all special needs 12 th graders.	Voluntary	No
[T3] Teacher	Teacher	Exceptional Children's Teacher – Self-Contained – IDMO	It's offered by our county. We have to tell our students and their parents about it and offer them an application in 12 th grade.	Voluntary	No

Teacher Results by Research Question

Research Question 1. Based on Parent and Teacher Perspectives, How Did the Transitional Program Facilitate Success After High School for Students With Moderate to Severe Disabilities?

It is important to understand that teachers were asked to focus on a student or students who have completed the transitional program. Students referenced in teacher interviews are not the same students referenced by parents who were interviewed. Students have already graduated, and it is impossible to match students. The goal is to understand the successful components and necessity for transitional programs. Overall, the teachers who participated in the interview sessions exhibited a positive attitude towards their experience with transitional programs. All of the teachers revealed that transitional students in question are currently employed, to which they articulate a correlation as a direct result of participation in the transitional program. Teachers expressed that many skills were enhanced or gained, such as task completion, time management, team work, independence, and productivity. Employment, appearance, responsibility, and maturity were skills named unanimously among the teachers.

Teachers understood the profound role community resources play in bridging the gap between high school and adult life. All of the teachers interviewed stated that their student was put in touch with other community resources upon or before completion of the transitional program and that this resource has been of help. Vocational rehabilitation was consistently named among the teachers as a frequented community resource.

Great anticipation comes with services rendered. T1 expressed, “I expected them to help him to become employed.” T2 stated, “I expected that he'd learn how to work and

keep a job. I was hoping he'd find somewhere to live on his own, but that's not really what the program does.” T3 shared, “My expectation was that he would increase his independence, learn how to attain a job and become employed.” All the teachers said that their expectations were met.

Teachers were asked what components of the transitional program proved most valuable to their students. T1 expressed, “job retention and team work.” T2 shared, “self-presentation.” T3 stated, “money management.” Employment, functionality, and problem-solving were components that were consistently named among the teachers. In the hopes that the teachers had experience with more than one transitional program, I asked if the teachers would rank the programs in order of most beneficial to least beneficial. T1 was the only teacher who had involvement with more than one transitional program thus far in her career. She asserted, “I have only had involvement with two. The other was in the previous county I worked in. That one seemed most beneficial as it also places students in independent living environments.”

Research Question 2. To What Extent Do the Parents and Teachers of Students With Moderate to Severe Disabilities Perceive That a Transitional Program Is a Necessity for Post-High School Success?

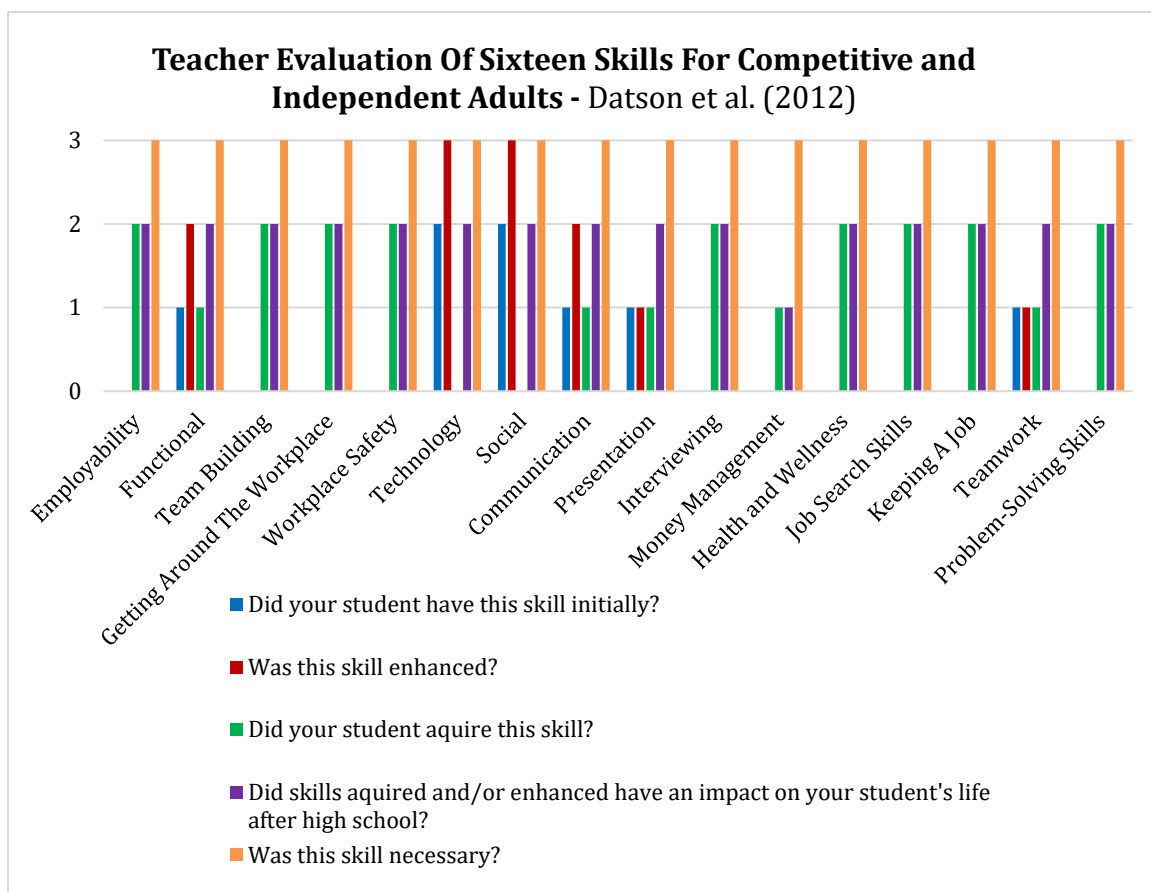
Teachers were asked to evaluate their students based on the same list of 16 independent readiness skills provided by Datson et al. (2012). Similar to parents, teachers felt their students did not possess many of the 16 skills believed to be needed by anyone who aims to be successful and competitive as an independent adult. Teachers did, however, convey that their students did acquire many of the skills listed as a result of participating in the transitional program, and those skills have had a great

impact on their students' post-high school life.

Specifically, when asked about employability, team building, getting around the workplace, workplace safety, interviewing, health and wellness, job search skills, keeping a job, and problem-solving skills, none of the teachers said their students had these skills prior to entering the transitional programs. However, after participation in the transitional programs, two of the three teachers said their students acquired each of the skills, which the teachers view as necessary and having an impact on life after high school. None of the teachers said their students had the skill of money management before participating in the transitional programs. Upon completion of the transitional programs, however, one teacher said their student acquired the skill, and the skill has been impactful on the student's post-high school life. All three teachers deem this skill as necessary for successful competition in adult life. When asked about functional and communication skills, one teacher expressed their student had the skill initially, one teacher said their student acquired the skill from participation in the transitional program, and both teachers said the skill was enhanced via the transitional program; and all three teachers believed the skills are necessary. Finally, in regard to technology and social skills, two of the three teachers said their students had the skill initially, while the third teacher did not say their student acquired the skill upon participation in the transitional program. All three teachers were unanimous that these two skills are necessary. Figure 2 represents the evaluation of each of the 16 skills relative to each teacher's student.

Figure 2

Teacher Evaluation of 16 Skills for Competitive and Independent Adults



It was universal among the teachers that participation in a structured transitional program was necessary for their student. T1 was quoted as saying, “He needed to learn structure for working as an employed individual. He needed to learn time management. He needed to learn task completion for a reward that is not immediate. He needed to gain some maturity.” T2 stated, “Where he was once a very sporadic and disheveled young man who stayed in mischief, he is now a responsible young man who works, keeps himself up and stays out of trouble.” T3 added, “He was extremely dependent on his family, especially his grandmother, and he was spoiled and non-independent.”

The teachers agreed unanimously that structured transitional programs were found to be beneficial. All of the teachers spoke about how much their student had grown in competitiveness and productivity as a result of participating in the transitional program. Regarding her student's growth, T1 noted, "He's employed and he's learned skills to make him a productive citizen, and to help him ease the workload of his mother." T2 stated, "He is now a competitive and productive member of society." T3 divulged, "He's employed now and he's definitely increased his independence. He's way more productive and puts a lot more effort and focus into completing tasks."

Teachers were asked to name the skills of the most value gained or enhanced by their student's participation in the transitional program. Just as the parents' list, employment led the list of skills named by all the teachers. Other skills named were job retention, self-presentation, functionality, responsibility, maturity, and money management. Teachers also were asked what skills they felt their student still needs to increase or develop. All three teachers noted independent living as a skill in need of increase. To add to the list of deficient skills, T1 named maturity and T3 named money management.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to evaluate the effectiveness of transitional preparatory programs from the perspective of parents and teachers in North Carolina. It was essential to understand from parent and teacher perspectives whether transitional programs positively impacted the successful transition from life in high school to life after high school. This study explored parent and teacher stories relative to the impact of transitional programs. Additionally, this study assessed from the perspective of the parents and teachers whether transitional programs can be deemed beneficial for the successful transition of students to life after high school. Although the students referenced by parents were not the same as those referenced by the teachers, the goal of this study was to answer the following research questions:

1. Based on parent and teacher perspectives, how did the high school transitional program facilitate success after high school for students with moderate to severe disabilities?
2. To what extent do the parents and teachers of students with moderate to severe disabilities perceive that a transitional program is a necessity for post-high school success?

Six parents and three teachers served as research subjects for this study. Each research participant was asked the same interview questions, specific to their title of parent or teacher. Interview questions for parents included educational background, gender, and age. Interview questions for teachers included the same as well as years of teaching experience, years of experience with transitional programs, number of different

transitional programs experienced, and highest position held as an educator. I considered this information to be of high importance because it could have affected participant responses and perceptions.

Findings

Parents

The point of view of the parent is vital when evaluating services or programs, especially when it comes to children who do not have the ability to voice their opinion themselves. Of the six parent participants, five conveyed positive experiences with the transitional program in which their child participated. Eighty-five percent of parents felt the structured transitional program was beneficial to their child. Parents expressed that many skills were enhanced or gained as a result of participation in the transitional program. Nearly 85% of parents revealed that their child is currently employed. Over half of the parents identified a correlation to participation in a transitional program to the ability to find and keep a job. Vocational rehabilitation, community services, Autism Society, mentor services, and in-home health services were named as the most helpful community resources to which their child was referred upon completion of the transitional program. Five of six parents said their expectations for the transitional program were met. There was a unanimous expectation among all the parents that the transitional program would help their child learn to work, get a job, and be independent. Parents felt the transitional program having an individual plan for their child was the ultimate key to successful completion of the transitional program and effective transition into the real world as an independent adult.

Research participants were asked whether or not they perceived participation in

the transitional program was a necessity for their child. The consensus was unanimous among all the parents that participation in the transitional program was necessary. Parents believe their child is more skilled, mature, responsible, and independent as a result of participation in the transitional program. Based on a list of 16 skills believed by Datson et al. (2012) to be needed by anyone who aims to be successful and competitive as an independent adult, parents were asked to evaluate their child's attainment and/or growth of each skill. The majority of the parents shared that their child did not possess many of the skills prior to entrance into their transitional program. Five of the six parents said their child acquired and/or showed growth to some degree in all 16 skills through participation in a transitional program. All six parents felt all 16 skills are necessary for successful competitiveness in society. Parents were also asked to name the skills of most value gained or enhanced by their child's participation in the transitional program. Employment led the list of skills named by all the parents. Parents shared what skills they felt their child still needs to increase or develop. Money management, self-care, and job retention skills were among the concerns. Only one of the parents expressed a negative experience with her son's transitional program. She felt the program instructors left her son and gave up on him, instead of modifying his individual plan to meet his specific needs. This parent went on to share that as a result of the abandonment, her son did not gain or enhance any of the needed skills for success as an independent adult.

Teachers

As the provider of transitional services, school staff offer valuable insight into the transitional planning process and program delivery. Teachers were asked to focus on a student or students who have completed the transitional program. Teachers expressed that

many skills have been enhanced or gained. Employment, appearance, responsibility, and maturity were skills named unanimously among the teachers. Teachers understand the significant role community resources have in bridging the gap between high school and adult life. Vocational rehabilitation was consistently named among the teachers as a frequented community resource. Just as parents, teachers held great anticipation for positive outcomes with the transitional programs. All the teachers said their expectations were met. Teachers were asked what components of the transitional program proved most valuable to their students. Employment, functionality, and problem-solving were consistently named among the teachers. Only one of the teachers has had experience with more than one transitional program. That teacher identified a noticeable difference in the two programs, ultimately favoring one over the other.

Teachers were asked to evaluate their students based on the same list of 16 independent readiness skills provided by Datson et al. (2012). Like the parents, teachers felt their students did not demonstrate many of the 16 skills prior to their transitional program experience. Teachers named employability, team building, getting around the workplace, job searching skills, keeping a job, and problem-solving skills as the skills of most importance they felt their students needed to gain and maintain. The teachers felt all of the 16 skills are necessary and impactful on life after high school. Teachers were unanimous in feeling that a structured transitional program is necessary and beneficial for their students' post-high school life. All the teachers spoke about how much their student had grown in their competitiveness and productivity as a result of participating in the transitional program. Teachers were asked to name the skills of most value gained or enhanced by their students' participation in the transitional program. Just like the parents'

list, employment led the list of skills named by all the teachers.

Overall Findings

There is consistency among the perspectives of parents and teachers in regard to the effectiveness and necessity of transitional programs. Both parents and teachers expressed that students gained many skills. Both participant groups also agreed that many skills were enhanced. Employment was unanimous among parents and teachers as the skill of most value. Parents and teachers both felt a student's ability to retain a job is a direct correlation to participation in the transitional program. Both parents and teachers agreed the 16 independent readiness skills provided by Datson et al. (2012) are fundamental and poignant on students' lives after high school. The most common community resource among both groups of participants was vocational rehabilitation. Aside from one parent, both participant groups felt their expectations of the transitional programs were met. Ultimately, the consensus among both parents and teachers was that participation in transitional programs is a necessity for students with moderate to severe disabilities. As well, aside from one parent, the consensus between the groups was that transitional programs are beneficial to post-high school life for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

Recommendations

Data do not answer questions; however, data do provide the scope through which educators and administrators reflect to further understand their situations and make informed and data-driven decisions (Earl & Katz, 2010). The following recommendations are based on legislation from IDEA (2004b), which does not require schools to establish or use a formal transitional program or program model but does mandate the

implementation of an approach to assessing gaps, system needs, and necessary skill development to support transition of students with disabilities into postsecondary educational programs and employment (North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

For this research, I found that the most commonly named community resource among parents and teachers was vocational rehabilitation; however, there are other community resources available. It is my recommendation that transitional programs and practices establish and/or increase connections to community resources and services. IDEA (2004b) mandated that students with disabilities have IEPs that must include transitional activities that address community experiences (McPartland, 2005). Parrish (2006) conducted a qualitative study in which administrators expressed a need for expanded community resources to establish ties with agencies and other related services.

My second recommendation is for transitional programs and practices to ensure parents are knowledgeable of programs, their components, and the required skill level of the student. All the parents in this research study said they were informed of the transitional program through their child's school. Unfortunately, for one of the parents in this research study, the transitional program's requirements were too high for her son's ability level. IDEA (2004b) stated that it is the mission of the legislation to guarantee that educators and parents have the required tools to improve educational outcomes for children with disabilities and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Bahn-Kraatz (2017) completed a study which presented data that revealed gaps in parental knowledge regarding the transitional planning process, and parent perceptions suggested a lack of faith in the postsecondary

transitional planning process to provide successful outcomes for their children.

With the evidence of transitional gaps in mind, it is my third recommendation for schools to assess any transitional gaps within their programs and practices and make the necessary adjustments and modifications to close these gaps. Schools should consider alternative transitional programs or opportunities for students who demonstrate lower ability levels. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (2018) identified the gaps in the transition from children services to adult services as the transitional cliff, caused by barriers that prohibit successful postsecondary transitions. In a study completed by Kelley (2014), several barriers were identified by parents and educators: lack of programs and resources and the absence of general information, guidance, and program alternatives.

Implications

I conducted this study in eastern North Carolina with random subjects from different cities. I believe the findings from this study are beneficial to school districts that already have or are looking to implement postsecondary transitional programs for high school students. For sure, transitional programs are needed in eastern North Carolina, as evidenced by the finding of this study that programs are needed that accommodate different ability levels of students with disabilities. As well, a representative from NCDPI (N. Johnson, personal communication, March 22, 2019) shared that only 20 of the 184 school districts in North Carolina have a formal postsecondary transitional program. There are clear barriers to adequate postsecondary transitional practices, whether it be lack of formal programs, lack of ability-level appropriate programs, or lack of sufficient transitional planning. School districts need to research and find ways to implement

transitional programs and practices that operate per IDEA (2004b) mandates, which place great emphasis on effective transitional services and challenge educators to improve the post-high school outcomes of students with disabilities by doing a better job of planning and preparing students and families for the challenges and complexities of the adult world (Cobean, 2000).

Future Research

In an attempt to verify the results of prior studies, a replication study usually adjusts one or more variables of the original study. In doing so, the previous study is verified to be both specific and widely applicable. Outcomes consistent with a prior report will raise confidence in the claim (Nosek & Errington, 2020). A replication of this study in eastern North Carolina and other regions in North Carolina as well as other states and school districts would provide valuable data that would allow districts to make well-informed and data-driven decisions about transitional practices and program implementation. Future studies should include more participants. This study was never intended for large populations; however, a study of more participants will offer more comparison data and opportunity for more correlation analysis. Further research should consider asking parents and teachers, “Although your child gained [name specific skills], if they could have nothing else, what would you say is the best skill gained?” Further research should also consider asking parents and teachers, “What additional skills would you have wanted your child/student to have?” Finally, future research should rank parent perceptions of components of program and skills earned.

Conclusion

Overall, the transitional programs did facilitate success after high school,

especially in the area of employment. Nearly 85% of parents and 100% of teachers revealed that their child and student are currently employed. The majority of parents and 100% of teachers interviewed expressed a positive experience with their child's transitional program. Parents and teachers expressed that many skills were enhanced or gained as a result of participation in the transitional program. Over half of the parents and all of the teachers link a direct correlation to participation in the transitional program. Eighty-five percent of parents and 100% of teachers felt the structured transitional program was beneficial to their child and student. The consensus was unanimous (100%) among all parents and teachers that participation in a structured transitional program was necessary for their child and student.

Perception is essential for leaders who want to evade making mistakes when working with people and events (Oliver et al., 2003). Although literature from Snyder (2014) showed the consensus was split evenly and showed that parents are either satisfied with the transitional process in general and view themselves as very involved or feel their child's school needs to provide more information about the transitional process, communicate better, and collaborate more with outside agencies; and literature from Bahn-Kraatz (2017) found that data revealed gaps in parental knowledge regarding the postsecondary transitional planning process, and parent perceptions suggested a lack of faith in the postsecondary transitional planning process to provide successful outcomes for their children; the findings from this study indicate an overall positive attitude and perception from parents and teachers with their experiences with transitional programs and practices.

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Appendix A

North Carolina Disability Data Table

Table 3.1
Learning Disabilities and Intellectual Disability Are the Most Common
Disabilities Among North Carolina Students Ages 14-21

Disability Category	Total	Percent
Specific learning disability	27,857	45.6%
Mental retardation ^o	12,689	20.8%
Other health impairment	10,938	17.9%
Emotional disturbance ^o	4,565	7.5%
Autism	1,976	3.2%
Multiple disabilities	903	1.5%
Hearing impairment	783	1.3%
Speech or language impairment	526	0.9%
Orthopedic impairment	333	0.5%
Traumatic brain injury	269	0.4%
Visual impairment	258	0.4%
Deaf-blindness	18	0.0%
Developmental delay	0	0.0%
Total	61,115	100.0%

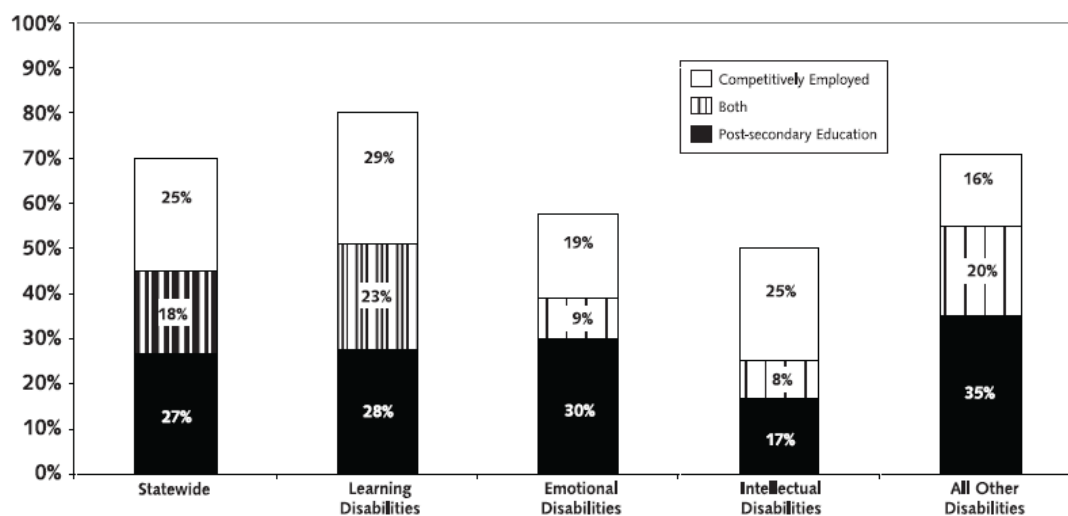
Source: North Carolina Institute of Medicine calculations using Office of Special Education Data Analysis System. US Department of Education. EDFacts: North Carolina Report of Children with Disabilities for Ages 6 through 21 by Age and Disability for SY 2006-2007.
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(North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2009)

Appendix B

Disabled Persons Community Engagement Data Figure

Figure 3.2
50% of Young Adults with Intellectual Disabilities are *Not Currently Engaged* in Their Communities



Source: Exceptional Children Division, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. North Carolina Part B Annual Performance Report (APR) for 2006-2007. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/ec/plan/2006-07apr.pdf>. Published April 14, 2008. Accessed February 24, 2009.

(North Carolina Institute of Medicine Task Force, 2009)

Appendix C

Informed Consent

Gardner-Webb University IRB
Informed Consent Form

Title of Study

Life After High School for Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities: An Assessment of Post-Secondary Preparedness

Researcher

Audrey A. Moore

Doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction

Purpose

Some schools find it essential to have transitional programs, but do these programs really make a difference in a student with moderate to severe disabilities ability to find work, living, or educational placement after high school? If these programs are so successful, why does every school district not find it essential to offer structured transitional programs for the success of their students with moderate to severe disabilities? The purpose of this study is to determine whether structured transitional programs really matter to the parents and/or guardians of students with moderate to severe disabilities. Validation of such inquiry is most reliable when done through relevant and quality research. Therefore, to accomplish this objective, this research will follow a qualitative research approach.

Procedure**What you will do in the study:**

Participation in this study requires that you be interviewed individually, via telephone, by the researcher at a time of your convenience. Your responses will be used to provide information regarding how parents perceive the effectiveness of the transitional program and students' preparedness for the post-secondary transition. During the interview, you may skip any questions causing discomfort and/or stop the interview at any time.

Time Required

It is anticipated the interview will require approximately 20 minutes of each participant's time.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality

When responses are transcribed, interview subjects will be referred to as Parent 1 (P1), etc. Transcribed files will be password-protected. Digitally recorded interviews will be uploaded onto a flash drive and secured in a lock box at the researcher's house when not in use. Digital files of the interviews will be destroyed within seven days of the researcher's graduation from the doctoral program.

Data Linked with Identifying Information

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code name and number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is complete and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report. Digital files of the interviews will be destroyed within seven days of the researcher's graduation from the doctoral program.

Anonymous Data

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to gauge the effectiveness of the program in question and implement changes that will enhance the post-secondary transition of students with moderate to severe disabilities. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment

You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Right to Withdraw From the Study

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your digitally recorded file will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw From the Study

If you want to withdraw from the study, tell the researcher to stop the interview. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals.

Audrey A. Moore
Student in Curriculum and Instruction
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
XXXXX
XXXXX

Dr. Kathi Gibson
Curriculum and Instruction
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
XXXXX
Kgibson1@gardner-webb.edu

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

Dr. Sydney Brown
IRB Administrator
Gardner-Webb University
Boiling Springs, NC 28017
Telephone: 704-406-3019
Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.

_____ I agree to participate in the confidential survey.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the confidential survey.

_____ I agree to participate in the focus group.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the focus group.

_____ I agree to participate in the interview session(s). I understand that this interview may be

video/audio recorded for purposes of accuracy. The audio/video recording will be transcribed and destroyed.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the interview session(s).

_____ Date: _____
Participant Printed Name

_____ Date: _____
Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix D

Interview Instruments

Parent Perception Interview Instrument

1. What is your relationship to the child that participated in the transitional program?
2. Is your age 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, 60-70, 70-80, 80-90?
3. What is your race and gender?
4. What is your child's race and gender?
5. What is your highest level of education?
6. How did you find out about the transitional program?
7. Was participation in the program voluntary or required?
8. Is your child currently employed, and/or actively enrolled in educational activities, and/or living outside of the home?
 - a) Do you feel this is a direct result of his/her participation in the transitional program?
9. What skills do you feel were enhanced or gained as a result of your child's participation in the transitional program?
10. What skills do you feel your child still needs to increase or develop?
11. I am going to call a list of skills that are believed to be needed by anyone who aims to be successful and competitive as an independent adult. As I read each one, I will need for you to answer yes or no in regards to your child having enhanced or gained that skill as a result of participation in the transitional program.

Skill	Did your child have this skill initially? (Y/N)	Was this skill enhanced? (Y/N)	Did your child acquire this skill? (Y/N)	Did skills acquired and/or enhanced have an impact on your child's life after high school? (Y/N)	Was this skill necessary? (Y/N)
Employability					
Functional					
Team Building					
Getting Around The Workplace					
Workplace Safety					
Technology					
Social					
Communication					
Presentation					
Interviewing					
Money Management					
Health And Wellness					
Job Search Skills					
Keeping A Job					
Communication					
Teamwork					
Problem-Solving Skills					

12. Upon completion, or before completion of the transitional program, were you and your student put in touch with other community resources?

- a) Which ones?
- b) Have these resources been of any help?

13. Did you feel that participation in a structured transitional program was necessary for your child?

- a) Why or why not?

14. What were your expectations for the transitional program?

- a) Were your expectations met?

15. Do you feel this structured transitional program was beneficial to your child?

- a) How? Or Why not?

16. What components of the transitional program proved most valuable to your child?

17. Of all of the skills your child gained or enhanced through participation in the transitional program, which are the skills of most value to your child?

Teacher Perception Interview Instrument

1. What is your role to the child that participated in the transitional program?
2. Is your age 20-30, 30-40, 40-50, 50-60, 60-70, 70-80, 80-90?
3. What is your race and gender?
4. What is your current teaching assignment?
5. What is your highest level of education?
6. What is the highest level you've attained in the education field?
7. How many years have you been an educator?
8. How long have you been teaching in this county?
9. How long have you been teaching in your current position?
10. How did you find out about the transitional program?
11. Was participation in the program voluntary or required?
12. Is your student currently employed, and/or actively enrolled in educational activities, and/or living outside of the home?
 - a) Do you feel this is a direct result of his/her participation in the transitional program?
18. What skills do you feel were enhanced or gained as a result of your student's participation in the transitional program?
19. What skills do you feel your student still needs to increase or develop?
20. I am going to call a list of skills that are believed to be needed by anyone who aims to be successful and competitive as an independent adult. As I read each one, I will need for you to answer yes or no in regards to your student having enhanced or gained that skill as a result of participation in the transitional program.

Skill	Did your student have this skill initially? (Y/N)	Was this skill enhanced? (Y/N)	Did your student acquire this skill? (Y/N)	Did skills acquired and/or enhanced have an impact on your student's life after high school? (Y/N)	Was this skill necessary? (Y/N)
Employability					
Functional					
Team Building					
Getting Around The Workplace					
Workplace Safety					
Technology					
Social					
Communication					
Presentation					
Interviewing					
Money Management					
Health And Wellness					
Job Search Skills					
Keeping A Job					
Communication					
Teamwork					
Problem-Solving Skills					

21. Upon completion, or before completion of the transitional program, were you and your student put in touch with other community resources?
 - a) Which ones?
 - b) Have these resources been of any help?
22. Did you feel that participation in a structured transitional program was necessary for your student?
 - a) Why or why not?
23. What were your expectations for the transitional program?
 - a) Were your expectations met?
24. Do you feel this structured transitional program was beneficial to your student?
 - a) How? Or Why not?
25. What components of the transitional program proved most valuable to your student?
26. Of all of the skills your student gained or enhanced through participation in the transitional program, which are the skills of most value to your student?
27. Have you had involvement with any other transitional programs?
28. Rank the programs in order of most beneficial to least beneficial.

Appendix E

Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel - VREP©

Survey/Interview Validation Rubric for Expert Panel - VREP©

By Marilyn K. Simon with input from Jacquelyn White

Criteria	Operational Definitions	Score				Questions NOT meeting standard (List page <u>and</u> question number) and need to be revised. <i>Please use the comments and suggestions section to recommend revisions.</i>
		1=Not Acceptable (major modifications needed) 2=Below Expectations (some modifications needed) 3=Meets Expectations (no modifications needed but could be improved with minor changes) 4=Exceeds Expectations (no modifications needed)				
		1	2	3	4	
Clarity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The questions are direct and specific.• Only one question is asked at a time.• The participants can understand what is being asked.• There are no <i>double-barreled</i> questions (two questions in one).					
Wordiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions are concise.• There are no unnecessary words					
Negative Wording	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Questions are asked using the affirmative (e.g., Instead of asking, “Which methods are not used?,” the researcher asks, “Which methods <i>are</i> used?”)					
Overlapping Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No response covers more than one choice.• All possibilities are considered.• There are no ambiguous questions.					
Balance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The questions are unbiased and do not lead					

	the participants to a response. The questions are asked using a neutral tone.					
Use of Jargon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The terms used are understandable by the target population. • There are no clichés or hyperbole in the wording of the questions. 					
Appropriateness of Responses Listed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The choices listed allow participants to respond appropriately. • The responses apply to all situations or offer a way for those to respond with unique situations. 					
Use of Technical Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of technical language is minimal and appropriate. • All acronyms are defined. 					
Application to Praxis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The questions asked relate to the daily practices or expertise of the potential participants. 					
Relationship to Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The questions are sufficient to resolve the problem in the study • The questions are sufficient to answer the research questions. • The questions are sufficient to obtain the purpose of the study. 					
Measure of Construct: A: ()	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The survey adequately measures this construct.*<i>[Include Operational Definition and concepts associated with construct]</i> 					
Measure of Construct: B: ()	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The survey adequately measures this construct.*<i>[Include Operational Definition and concepts associated with construct]</i> 					

Measure of Construct: C: ()	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The survey adequately measures this construct.* <i>[Include Operational Definition and concepts associated with construct]</i> 					
Measure of Construct: D: ()	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The survey adequately measures this construct.* <i>[Include Operational Definition and concepts associated with construct]</i> 					

* The operational definition should include the domains and constructs that are being investigated. You need to assign meaning to a variable by specifying the activities and operations necessary to measure, categorize, or manipulate the variable. For example, to measure the construct *successful aging* the following domains could be included: degree of physical disability (low number); prevalence of physical performance (high number), and degree of cognitive impairment (low number). If you were to measure creativity, this construct is generally recognized to consist of flexibility, originality, elaboration, and other concepts. Prior studies can be helpful in establishing the domains of a construct.

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Appendix F

Parent and Teacher Interview Protocols

Parent Perception Interview Protocol

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Participant: _____

Interview Conductor: _____

My name is Audrey Moore. I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Gardner-Webb University, conducting a research study examining life after high school for students with disabilities who have completed a post-secondary transitional program. Your responses will help me to understand from the perspective of the parents whether transitional programs positively impact the successful transition from life in high school to life after high school for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

The purpose in meeting with you today is to learn your thoughts, feelings, and experiences with the transitional program your child previously participated in. Your insights will help administrators and transitional program staff make improvements.

Anything you tell me is confidential. Nothing you say will be personally attributed to you in any reports that result from this interview. All of the reports will be written in a manner that no individual comment can be attributed to a particular person.

Your participation in this interview is totally voluntary. Are you willing to answer the interview questions?

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Teacher Perception Interview Protocol

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ End Time: _____

Participant: _____

Interview Conductor: _____

My name is Audrey Moore. I am a doctoral student in the School of Education at Gardner-Webb University, conducting a research study examining life after high school for students with disabilities who have completed a post-secondary transitional program. Your responses will help me to understand from the perspective of the teacher whether transitional programs positively impact the successful transition from life in high school to life after high school for students with moderate to severe disabilities.

The purpose in meeting with you today is to learn your thoughts, feelings, and experiences with the transitional program your student(s) previously participated in. Your insights will help administrators and transitional program staff make improvements.

Anything you tell me is confidential. Nothing you say will be personally attributed to you in any reports that result from this interview. All of the reports will be written in a manner that no individual comment can be attributed to a particular person.

Your participation in this interview is totally voluntary. Are you willing to answer the interview questions?

Do you have any questions before we begin?