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EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A SECONDARY TRANSITION
PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN IN FIVE HIGH SCHOOLS

By
Karyn Lyndsey Herring

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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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Karyn Lyndsey Herring 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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“It always seems impossible until it is done.”
Nelson Mandela

Abstract

EVALUATION OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A SECONDARY TRANSITION PROGRAM FOR AT-RISK EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN IN FIVE HIGH SCHOOLS.

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Secondary transition support is an important part of the IEP requirements for high school exceptional children. Designed to help guide students toward their postschool goals, transition support should not only help identify goals but also help prepare them by teaching skills, building relationships, and imparting knowledge of the community they will join after graduation. The researcher completed a program evaluation for the FAST secondary transition support that was put into place in a large school district in North Carolina during the 2016-2017 school year to provide additional support to at-risk exceptional children on the Future Ready Course of Study graduation track. In the fall 2016 semester, the school district implemented a secondary transition support program for repeating and incoming high school freshmen classified as at-risk in five target high schools. The schools received support from the district transition team in the form of professional development, altered school schedules for participating students, student lessons provided by district transition leaders, career-readiness software utilized by participating students during transition preparation time, and a commitment to transitional support in the district for the students until they graduate. The program, titled “FAST,” entered its second year of implementation in the 2017-2018 school year, and the first cohort of students received their second year of services. This study examined the implementation of the program in its initial phases throughout the first two years of the program. This study found FAST had begun to address specific transition needs of

students in the district, but still had transition components that needed further development. The study highlighted the strength of staff support but also showed a need for development of program structure. The study also compared the implemented best practices for both new program implementation and secondary transition practices to give feedback to stakeholders on successes and potential drawbacks of the program's implementation. Using the work of Paula Kohler and other experts in the field, the researcher found that FAST had begun to address several key components of secondary transition such as Student Development and Vocational Education. The study also pointed to program gaps in areas such as Interagency Collaboration and Family Engagement. Lack of sufficient data lead to an unclear picture of FAST functioning at each site, but the researcher did evaluate overall program trends. FAST proved to have some merit for meeting the needs of at-risk secondary Exceptional Children on the Future Ready Course of Study.

Keywords: exceptional children, secondary transition/at-risk students, students with disabilities

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In 2005, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), one of the longest running national transition studies to date, published findings from over 11,000 young adults who received Exceptional Children (EC) services while in school. The NLTS2 was designed to determine how successful these persons with disabilities were in meeting post high school goals in the areas of postsecondary education, employment, independent living, and social domains over a 10-year period (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). Results were staggeringly telling.

- Only one in five youth with disabilities are attending postsecondary school, less than half the enrollment of nondisabled peers.
- Seven in 10 youth with disabilities have worked for pay since leaving high school – 10% lower rate than nondisabled peers.
- Two thirds of employed youth with disabilities receive no benefits such as paid sick leave, health insurance, or retirement benefits.
- Only 4% of working disabled youth receive accommodations for their disabilities, primarily due to lack of self-advocacy.
- Three fourths of disabled youth are still living with family due to an inability to self-support.
- One in 10 disabled youth participate in government benefit programs.
- Two thirds of disabled youth do not have checking accounts.
- Four of five disabled youth do not have a credit card or charge account in their own name.

- 8% of disabled youth are parents.
- One third of disabled youth are not registered to vote.
- Approximately half of disabled youth have been stopped by the police for something other than a traffic violation, 16% have spent a night in jail, three in 10 have been arrested at least once, and one in five are on probation or parole (Wagner et al., 2005).

Because youth with disabilities face so many issues, especially in comparison to their nondisabled peers, it is essential to help them learn the appropriate transitional skills needed to find success after graduating high school. In response to the gap between disabled and nondisabled youth during and after high school transitions, the United States Department of Labor has established the Office of Disability Employment Policy which follows five guideposts to help youth with disabilities successfully transition into adulthood: These are “school-based preparatory experiences, career preparation and work-based learning experiences, youth development and leadership, connecting activities, and family involvement and support” (National Collaboration on Workforce and Disability, 2018, para. 5). In addition to the Department of Labor, the U.S. Department of Education has also incorporated policies specifically designed to help youth with disabilities successfully achieve their adulthood transitional goals. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a student being served by special education services in a school must have an individualized education plan (IEP) that includes

appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where

appropriate, independent living skills as well as the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the student with a disability in reaching those goals. (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2017, p. 7).

In compliance with federal law and according to student needs, transition programs have been developed across the nation to help students with disabilities recognize their own goals for their lives after high school and help them develop the skills to accomplish those goals.

North Carolina acknowledges the need for secondary transition planning and has thus provided state legislation to address the transitional needs of students with disabilities in public schools. In accordance with IDEA legislation, North Carolina adopted NC 1500-2.37 which mandates a coordinated set of transition activities designed for any identified student with a disability who qualifies for EC services. In North Carolina, special education staff members develop specific transition plans for high school students each year and help students participate in programs or opportunities that will help them master those goals, working towards the ultimate goal of achieving adulthood goals after high school graduation.

The topic. In the fall 2016 semester, the school district implemented a secondary transition support program for repeating and incoming high school freshmen classified as at risk in five target high schools. The five target schools received support from the district transition team in the form of professional development, altered school schedules for participating students, student lessons provided by district transition leaders, career-readiness software utilized by participating students during transition preparation time,

and a commitment to transitional support in the district for the students until they graduate. The remaining 10 district high schools received professional development training and consultative support from the district transition team. The program, titled “FAST” (Focus on Achievement for Successful Transition) by the district, was in planning for over a year; and the implementation began in late August 2016. This study examined the implementation of the program in its initial phases throughout the first 2 years of the program. The study also compared the implemented best practices for both new program implementation and secondary transition practices in an effort to give feedback to stakeholders on successes and potential drawbacks of the program’s implementation.

The research problem. The district of focus in this study, like many others in North Carolina and across the nation (Lloyd, 2015), has experienced less success in graduation and postschool outcomes from students with disabilities than from nondisabled students in the district. While the district has seen an increase in the graduation rate of students with disabilities, currently 70.2%, this percentage is much lower than the district average of 81.2%. Sadly, this trend is the case across the state. In 2012-2013, approximately 62% of students with disabilities in North Carolina graduated with a regular high school diploma by age 21, compared to a graduation rate of 83% for the state (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction [NCDPI], 2015). Nationally, only 62% of students with disabilities graduate, compared to a graduation rate of 81% for the country (NCDPI, 2015). Although federal initiatives such IDEA, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 were initiated to better support students with disabilities in public schools so they can not only graduate

but also transition successfully into postschool environments, statistics show students with disabilities are still lagging behind. The FAST program was designed to provide additional support to at-risk EC students, so they can be more successful in high school and after they graduate.

Audience/stakeholders. The study of the implementation of this program will provide valuable input to the transition team leaders at the district level and the EC staff members working with students, as it will provide an objective overview of the program that can be used to modify the program for additional effectiveness. It will highlight the strengths and weaknesses for those responsible for initiating this program. The study will also be of interest to the participating students and their families, as it will detail the district's effort to provide extra layers of support and tailored instruction for the students. Finally, the study will provide information to interested district staff and school board members with invested interest in the success of the FAST program.

Program

Implementation of the FAST program began in the fall 2016 school year in five traditional high schools. Students eligible for the program exhibit at-risk characteristics in addition to already being classified as disabled under EC programming. The at-risk characteristics necessary for participation in the program, as defined by the program for the initial implementation, are students with an IEP enrolled in the Future Ready Course of Study for graduation track and students who have at least one of the following identifiers: standardized testing achievement scores of level I or II; students with alternate setting placements or multiple suspensions; students who have failed or are currently failing multiple classes; students identified as LEP or English Language Learner (ELL);

students who are pregnant or are currently parents; students on the Autism spectrum; or students with other risk factors that have been approved by the FAST program coordinators. Schools that had over 15 students who qualified as both EC and at-risk became eligible for direct support from the district's two EC transition specialists. Schools with qualifying students totaling less than 15 will receive consultative support from the two county specialists but will not receive the personalized lessons and career preparation software that will be employed at the five qualifying priority schools.

State accountability model. Each school in North Carolina is awarded an accountability score and corresponding letter grade based on measures of performance and measures of growth. Performance scores are determined by a formula that uses EOC achievement data, ACT test scores, graduation rates, upper math course enrollment statistics, WorkKeys (a Career and Technical Education [CTE] test given to students taking these courses at the completion of the course) achievement results, and the requirement of students to complete a graduation project as a component of graduation (NCDPI, 2016c). Growth is determined using a formula that involves student projected scores on assessments and actual scores achieved. Growth is measures as the positive, negative, or null impact that a teacher has on the progress of a student over the course of 1 academic school year. School growth is determined by the overall growth of the student population and is reported as exceeded growth expectations, met growth expectations, or did not meet growth expectations (NCDPI, 2016a). Achievement scores comprise 80% of a school's performance score, and growth accounts for the other 20%. A 15-point grading scale is used to assign a letter grade to schools based on the performance score: 85-100 is an A; 70-84 is a B; 55-69 is a C; 40-54 is a D; and 0-39 is a

F. North Carolina schools that receive letter grades of D or F, regardless of meeting or failing to meet growth expectations, are deemed “low-performing schools” (Identification of low performing schools, 2016). Schools that are determined to be low performing must create improvement plans to submit to NCDPI that show planned strategies that will be implemented to address areas of concern for the school and will hopefully improve the school’s performance and growth scores.

School district overview. The school district of focus for this study is located in central Triad region and is the fourth largest school system in North Carolina. The district educates approximately 54,000 students in its 81 schools. There are 43 elementary schools, 14 middle schools, 15 high schools, and nine special schools. The district has 7,000 employees, 4,000 of whom are teachers. District wide student demographics are as follows: 40.2% White, 28.5% African-American, 24.5% Hispanic, 4% multiracial, 2.5% Asian, and 1% American Indian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific (NCDPI, 2016a). The district has a population of approximately 54,471 students yearly, and approximately 13.68% of those students are serviced through site-based EC programs.

By 2020, the district strives to have 90% of third-grade students reading on or above grade level. By 2018, the school system would like to have a minimum graduation rate of 90% while also closing the achievement gap between subgroups by 10%. To achieve this, the district sets a culture of “high expectations and high accountability in a psychologically safe environment” (School District Website, 2016). District priorities involve maximizing student potential, supporting staff, and building connections between schools and outside stakeholders.

Priority School 1. School 1 is located within an economically disadvantaged area of the largest city in the district. The school is classified as Title 1 and has free or reduced lunch enrollment of 82%. The school has a student enrollment average of 674, lower than the district average of 1,106 and the state average of 848. The demographics of this school are 1% Asian, 70% African-American, 23% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and 3% White.

In the 2015-2016 school year, School 1 did not meet growth; it had a North Carolina School Report Card letter grade of F and an achievement score of 32 (NCDPI, 2016a). The school has 50 classroom teachers, 75.9% of whom are fully licensed. Teacher turnover at School 1, at 17%, is higher than both state and district averages. The school has a 4-year graduation rate of 68%, which is lower than the district average of 81.2%. Based on School 1's academic achievement levels and growth progress, it has been labeled a North Carolina low-performing school.

School 1 has approximately 17% of the population classified as EC. School 1 qualified for the program with 20 students projected to be eligible for the FAST program as of June 14, 2016; however, due to student movement in the district and one student becoming a sophomore after a summer school course made him eligible for promotion, School 1 will begin the 2016-2017 school year with 14 students participating in the program. These 14 students have been given altered schedules that have been reviewed by both the school's counselor and a member of the district transition team. The 14 students will be enrolled in varying sections of Foundations of Math 1 in the Fall semester and a year-long Study Skills course that meets every other school day and is open to only EC students. During the Study Skills course, FAST students will work with

the online work-readiness curriculum purchased by the district, receive secondary transition lessons from school and district personnel, and receive intensive academic support for their other courses. School 1's plan is for students in the FAST program to work in an online individualized supplemental math program in the spring semester each week during their Study Skills class time. The students will take Math 1 in their sophomore year, 2017-2018, and continue on in the FAST program.

For the 2017-2018, there were a total of four students who were classified as sophomores who were considered FAST students. Five students who participated in the program in the 2016-2017 year remained in the program but received the same services as the previous year, because due to course failures, they remained classified as freshmen. Ten new students began as freshmen in the program as FAST students in the 2017-2018 school year. In the second year of enactment, School 1 had 19 total students participating in FAST transition support.

Priority School 2. School 2 is located centrally in the largest city in the district, across the street from the district central administrative office. The school is classified as Title 1 and has free or reduced lunch enrollment of 69%. The school has a student enrollment average of 1,228, higher than the district average of 1,106 and the state average of 848. The demographics of this school are 1% Asian, 38% African-American, 35% Hispanic, 4% Multiracial, and 22% White.

In the 2015-2016 school year, School 2 did not meet growth; it had a North Carolina School Report Card letter grade of D and an achievement score of 52 (NCDPI, 2016a). The school has 83 classroom teachers, 85.5% of which are fully licensed. Teacher turnover is higher than state and district averages at 17.5%. The school has a 4-

year graduation rate of 83%, which is equal to the state average (NCDPI, 2016a). Based on School 2's academic achievement levels and growth progress, it has been labeled a North Carolina low-performing school.

School 2 has approximately 7% of its population classified as EC. School 2 qualified for the program by projecting an enrollment of 24 students in the FAST program on May 20, 2016. In May 2017, had a total of 18 students participating in the FAST program. Ten of these students were classified as sophomores and had received FAST services in the 2016-2017 school year. Four students were repeating freshmen and received the same FAST services for a second year in a row due to retainment. Four new students were added to the freshmen FAST cohort due to qualification of at-risk factors.

Priority School 3. Like Schools 1 and 2, School 3 is located in an economically disadvantaged area in the largest city in the district. School 3 is one of the district's magnet schools, meaning it is a center of concentrated study in addition to offering traditional courses of high school study. School 3 is an International Baccalaureate (IB) high school which means students participating in the IB courses at the school are part of an advanced international course of study in addition to North Carolina graduation requirements. Not all students enrolled in School 3 participate in the IB program, but many students attend this school specifically for the program. This has increased the enrollment of the school to 1,451, which is larger than the district and state school enrollment averages. The school does classify to receive Title 1 funding. The demographics of the school are 1% Asian, 41% African-American, 42% Hispanic, 3% Multiracial, and 13% White. The free or reduced lunch population constitutes 73% of the enrollment of the school.

According to the school's North Carolina School Report Card for 2015-2016, the school did not meet growth. This was due to an achievement score of 44 and a growth score of 57.2, which gave it a letter grade of D and school performance score of 47 (NCDPI, 2016a). School 3 has 86 teachers, with 85.5% of them fully licensed. Teacher turnover at School 3 is approximately the same as the district average of 12.1%, lower than the state's 14.8% average. The school has a 4-year graduation rate of 83%, but overall struggles in student achievement keep it classified as a North Carolina low-performing school.

School 3 has approximately 11% of its population classified as EC. Of that population, it reported that 27 students qualified for the FAST program as of May 20, 2016. In the 2017-2018 school year, School 3 had the largest FAST student population of 43 students. Of that total, 19 students were sophomore students who received FAST services as freshmen. Twenty-four students were freshmen receiving FAST support for the first time. There were no repeating freshmen involved in the FAST program at School 3.

Priority School 4. School 4 is one of the oldest and largest high schools in the district and is located in the center of the largest city, like Schools 1, 2, and 3. School 4 is classified as an Arts Magnet School. Because of this classification, students from across the district can apply to the enrollment lottery system to be admitted to the school even if they do not live in the school's enrollment zone. The school offers 62 visual and performing arts classes in addition to core curriculum classes required for graduation. School 4 is also unique in the district, as it has the largest population of students from other countries. With over 20 countries represented at any given time, the school offers

special services for ELLs and students new to the country. The school's population consists of 4% Asian, 34% African-American, 16% Hispanic, 5% Multiracial, and 41% White. Unlike Schools 1, 2 and 3, School 4 is not classified as a Title 1 school with only 45% of its over 1,700 students receiving free or reduced lunch.

School 4 was the only priority school to meet growth in the 2015-2016 school year with an achievement score of 67, a growth score of 81.9 and a school performance grade of 70, or letter grade B (NCDPI, 2016a). The school has 98 classroom teachers, 88.8% of them fully licensed. Teacher turnover is the highest of any priority school at 21.7%; however, this is not impacting the school's higher than district average 4-year graduation rate of 87%. Because of the school's outstanding performance, it is the only priority school in the district not listed as low performing by North Carolina.

School 4 has approximately 8% of its population classified as EC. In May 2016, the school reported a predicted FAST program participation enrollment of 26 students. In May 2017, School 4 reported 33 students eligible to participate in FAST services. Twenty of those students were sophomores and had received FAST support the previous year as freshmen. Thirteen of the FAST students were freshmen who were qualifying for services for the first time. No FAST students were repeating freshmen at School 4.

Priority School 5. School 5 is located in a smaller, more rural city in the district, making it more isolated than the other priority schools participating in the program in the 2016-2017 school year. The school is not currently receiving Title 1 funding but has in the past. In 2016, 54% of the school (1,632) received free or reduced lunch. The school is composed of 1% Asian, 27% African-American, 25% Hispanic, 4% Multiracial, and 43% White students.

According the 2015-2016 North Carolina State Report Card, School 5 did not meet growth, scoring a 62 achievement score, a 58.2 growth score, a letter grade of C, and a school performance score of 61. The school has 97 classroom teachers, 87.6% of whom are fully licensed. Like most other priority schools, School 5 has a higher than average teacher turnover rate of 15.1%. Despite these challenges, School 5 maintains the same 4-year graduation rate as School 4 at 87%; however, although the school has better achievement scores than Schools 1, 2, and 3, it too remains on the North Carolina low-performing schools list.

School 5 has approximately 15% of its population classified as EC. Of that population, the school reported that 25 students should be eligible to participate in the FAST program in the 2016-2017 school year. School 5 reported the second highest population of FAST students participating in the program in the 2017-2018 school year. Thirty-six total students began receiving services through FAST in August 2017. Twenty-five of those students were classified as sophomores and were receiving their second-year services through FAST support. One student was classified as a freshman again and thus received the same FAST support for a second year. Eleven students joined the new freshmen cohort of FAST students.

Table 1

Priority Schools' Demographic and Population Information

Demographic Category	Priority School 1	Priority School 2	Priority School 3	Priority School 4	Priority School 5
Classified as Title 1 School	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Free/Reduced Lunch Population	82%	69%	73%	45%	54%
Average Daily Enrollment	674	1228	1451	1713	1632
Asian Population	1%	1%	1%	4%	1%
African-American Population	70%	38%	41%	34%	27%
Hispanic Population	23%	35%	42%	16%	25%
Multiracial Population	3%	4%	3%	5%	4%
White Population	3%	22%	13%	41%	43%
EC Population	17%	7%	11%	8%	15%
FAST Program Number of Eligible Students	20	24	27	26	25

Table 1 shows the varying populations at each of the targeted priority schools that will be implementing the FAST program in the 2016-2017 school year. The classification as a Title 1 school relates to Title 1, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), a federal program that provides financial assistance to schools who have high enrollments of students from families that are considered to be low income and may therefore need additional assistance in providing materials to supplement their children's education (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2015). This status, in conjunction with the

percentage of students receiving free or reduced lunch through the state's nutrition program, helps paint a picture of the economic status of the population of students enrolled in the priority schools.

Table 1 also shows the average daily enrollment (the number of students usually enrolled in the school on any particular day) as well as the percentage of that population participating in the EC program at each school. The school district of focus in this study has an average EC population of 12.57% for students enrolled in Grades K-12 according to the December 2016 Child Count Report provided to NCDPI (2016a). This information is relevant as it shows that the priority schools have EC populations lower or only slightly higher than the district average.

The student demographic data provided in Table 1 helps provide a snapshot of the student population in regard to minority student enrollment. These numbers tend to correspond with the population in the community surrounding the school and can thus also provide insight into community demographics.

Table 2

EOC Achievement Data for Priority Schools

2015-2016 School Report Card Category	North Carolina Average	School District Average	Priority School 1	Priority School 2	Priority School 3	Priority School 4	Priority School 5
English 2 Achievement Level 1	20.40%	22.40%	49.70%	36.90%	41.60%	21.10%	29.30%
English 2 Achievement Level 2	20.80%	20.80%	34.60%	28.10%	28.00%	20.30%	25.70%
English 2 Achievement Level 3	9.20%	8.60%	5.20%	8.80%	8.50%	8.30%	10.20%
English 2 Achievement Level 4	43.90%	42.40%	9.80%	25.90%	21.30%	42.40%	33.50%
English 2 Achievement Level 5	5.70%	5.80%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	7.90%	0.00%
Math 1 Achievement Level 1	25.00%	29.10%	71.80%	57.10%	59.60%	33.30%	38.00%
Math 1 Achievement Level 2	14.50%	15.40%	13.40%	22.40%	22.40%	18.90%	22.30%
Math 1 Achievement Level 3	10.70%	10.60%	6.50%	8.80%	8.40%	11.20%	13.30%
Math 1 Achievement Level 4	34.30%	32.90%	8.00%	10.40%	8.90%	28.30%	22.10%
Math 1 Achievement Level 5	15.60%	12.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	8.40%	0.00%
Biology Achievement Level 1	23.20%	26.20%	63.40%	36.70%	51.30%	24.70%	29.60%
Biology Achievement Level 2	21.20%	20.20%	24.00%	26.00%	24.60%	19.20%	22.30%

(cont.)

2015-2016 School Report Card Category	North Carolina Average	School District Average	Priority School 1	Priority School 2	Priority School 3	Priority School 4	Priority School 5
Biology Achievement Level 3	8.30%	7.50%	0.00%	8.90%	5.10%	9.60%	10.30%
Biology Achievement Level 4	31.50%	50.00%	8.00%	22.90%	16.40%	31.80%	30.10%
Biology Achievement Level 5	15.80%	16.70%	0.00%	5.50%	0.00%	14.60%	8.30%

Table 2 shows the achievement level statistics from the priority schools in the 2015-2016 school year. North Carolina currently requires students to take three end-of-course exams (EOCs) before graduating. Achievement Level 3 equates grade-level proficiency of the course's content and is considered a passing score. Achievement Levels 4 and 5 show mastery levels that indicate that the student is ready for college. Levels 1 and 2 are not considered passing achievement levels and are not representative of content mastery (NCDPI, 2016a). This information is used by the state to determine student achievement levels, student growth levels, and overall school performance.

Table 3

Priority Schools' Accountability and Performance-Related Data

2015-2016 School Report Card Category	North Carolina Average	School District Average	Priority School 1	Priority School 2	Priority School 3	Priority School 4	Priority School 5
Student Enrollment	860	1122	638	1155	1350	1713	1547
Number of Classroom Teachers	54	70	50	83	86	98	97
Percent of Fully Listened Teachers	90%	91%	75.90%	85.50%	85.50%	88.80%	87.60%
4-Year Graduation Rate	N/A	N/A	68%	83%	83%	87%	87%
Growth Status	N/A	N/A	Not Met	Not Met	Not Met	MET	Not Met
Achievement Score	N/A	N/A	32	52	44	67	62
Growth Score	N/A	N/A	59.9	58.1	57.2	81.9	58.2
School Performance Score	N/A	N/A	37	53	47	70	61
School Performance Grade	N/A	N/A	F	D	D	B	C

Table 3 shows factors that are used to determine a school's performance and its daily functions. The school district of focus determines classroom teacher allotment based on a formula that stems most heavily from student enrollment. Fully licensed teachers are those who have fully completed all components of North Carolina teaching certification and have thus been issued a teaching license. This statistic is of value as it removes teachers who have not yet completed the licensure process and may not be fully trained in state educational expectations. The 4-year graduation rate is the percentage of grade-level students who successfully graduate in 4 or less years. This figure is used in

state accountability formulas to determine a school's performance during an academic year.

Professional evaluation standards. This study held to the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation's (JCSEE) program evaluation standards as a guiding factor to assure that the evaluation of the FAST program was done in accordance with professional standards for educational program evaluation (Yarbrough, Shulha, Hopson, & Caruthers, 2011). As such, the program evaluation was done in such a way that it was of benefit to program stakeholders and was minimally invasive. The evaluation was done by a credible researcher, gave due consideration to all program stakeholders, was done so that the evaluation changed as stakeholder needs changed, procured and produced information relevant to stakeholders involved in the program, was designed to obtain fair and unobtrusive opportunities for evaluation, was done in a timely manner that provided adequate feedback, and attempted to avoid negative consequences or misuse by promoting appropriate use of findings (Yarbrough et al., 2011). The evaluation was managed with efficiency, followed appropriate and logical procedures, and was mindful of cultural and political influences (Yarbrough et al., 2011). The evaluation supported fairness and equality by responding to not only the stakeholders but also their community, had formal agreements that spoke to the needs of stakeholders, protected human and legal rights of all participants, was done in a way that was transparent and equitable, was done with honesty and integrity, and complied with any relevant fiscal procedures (Yarbrough et al., 2011). Further, the evaluation was done in such a way as to promote honest, dependable results; this was done by providing justification for conclusions and decisions, providing valid results and information,

documenting full details within the scope of the program, utilizing a systematic approach to data collection, evaluating data appropriately, using appropriate judgments to shares conclusions and interpretations, and communicating findings in a way that shields against bias and error (Yarbrough et al., 2011). Finally, the study documented the design, procedures, data and outcomes; it also used appropriate internal and external meta-evaluation to develop a fully developed perspective of the program evaluation (Yarbrough et al., 2011).

Purpose of Evaluation

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the implementation of a district led secondary transition program in five targeted high schools. Through the program evaluation, it was determined how the program's structure aligned with best practices in the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities. The evaluation also determined the fidelity with which the program was enacted in each school and the effectiveness of the implementation at the site level. The evaluation provided the district team with objective feedback as to program strengths and weaknesses and it helped streamline program implementation as the secondary transition program plans expansion in the future.

The central concepts involved with this study were effective secondary transition practices and best practices for new program implementation. This study strived to investigate established best practices and investigate the alignment of the FAST program to those best secondary transition practices. Second, the study evaluated best practices in program implementation and evaluated the fidelity to which the FAST program was implemented according to best practices in five different sites.

This study utilized the CIPP (context, input, process, and product) evaluation model introduced by Daniel Stufflebeam in the 1960s. The CIPP model was effective for the purposes of this study because it is both proactive and reactive (Stufflebeam, 1971). The CIPP model focuses on the continuing evolution of a program and is centered on giving constructive feedback to stakeholders for the betterment of the program (Stufflebeam, 1971). Throughout the CIPP evaluation process, the program was analyzed based on its “planning, structuring, implementing, and recycling” (Stufflebeam, 1971, p. 4) to assure that the program was as effective as possible. Using the structure of the CIPP model, this study focused on the program context, target population, opportunities for addressing needs, problems associated with the needs, and the alignment of goals to target population’s needs (Fischer, 2015). Next, the study described the utilized resources, compared the program to similar programs, evaluated the design proposal for the program, and made alternate suggestions (Fischer, 2015).

Research Questions

1. How does FAST address the secondary transition needs of students in the district?
2. How does FAST align with established best practices in the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities?
3. How does FAST function in each priority school?

Definition of Terms

Secondary transition. Preparing students for the process of moving from the high school support system to the community-based support system that will be faced after graduation whether students enter the workforce, college or training, or another post

high school option.

Stakeholder. Someone involved in the program or affected by the implementation of the program; primarily students in the program, teachers working with students in the program, priority school guidance counselors, priority school administrators, family members or guardians of program participants, outside agencies participating in the program, vocational rehabilitation specialist assigned to priority schools, mentorship program volunteers, outside agencies offering partnership opportunities, and other support staff who may have interaction with program participants at priority schools.

FAST program. Program of focus in this study; a secondary transition program initiated in the 2016-2017 school year to work with at-risk students with disabilities enrolled in the Future Ready Course of Study; stands for Focus on Achievement for Successful Transition Person with a disability/disabled person – a person who has proven a medical diagnosis or some other approved form of verification of one of the 13 federally approved special education categories: autism, blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment.

Participant. For the purpose of this study, a student who is enrolled and receiving the services of the FAST program.

EC. Students classified as having one of the 13 federally approved special education category disabilities; see “person with a disability/disabled person.”

Evaluation. An assessment of the value added by the program and its ability to

solve the targeted problem as it was identified in a formal or informal needs assessment.

Context. Part one of the Stufflebeam CIPP evaluation model; provides a formal needs assessment of area of need of the program which includes assets and problems that will be targeted; answers the question “what needs to be done” (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

Input. Part two of the Stufflebeam CIPP evaluation model; provides an analysis of other strategies in contrast to the strategic plan that has been chosen, along with that plan’s budget and proposed implementation process; answers the question “how should it be done” (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

Process. Part three of the Stufflebeam CIPP evaluation model; provides documentation of the program’s activities, progress towards goal, and other notes on the program’s functions; answers the question “is it being done” (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

Product. Part four of the Stufflebeam CIPP evaluation model; provides an evaluation of the success of the installed program towards meeting the needs expressed in the context phase; answers the question “did it succeed” (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007).

Program. For the purpose of this study, the term “program” refers to “a plan or system under which action may be taken toward a goal” (Program [Def. 3], 2019). This district does not use the term as a title for FAST, but rather considers it a system of support as an extension of the district EC department.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Literature Review of Secondary Transition

Overview. Secondary transition is the process by which students with disabilities move from high school and its corresponding support systems into adulthood and the support systems offered to disabled persons following high school graduation. Secondary transition is an important stage of development, and successful transition can determine the success of a person with a disability in his or her ability to meet adulthood goals. Failure to successfully transition to life after high school for persons with disabilities can be especially grim; unemployment, legal problems, poverty, and increased health issues are just some of the problems that can develop as a result of unsuccessful secondary transitions (Hicks & Knollman, 2014).

Because of its importance, secondary transition support is a federally mandated component of education for students with disabilities who are eligible for EC services through IDEA (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2017). In North Carolina, the components of secondary transition support that must be addressed in the student's IEP are education/training, employment, and independent living (if appropriate; NCDPI, 2016b). Where applicable, these goals are further broken down into student specific goals in the areas of adult living skills, community experiences, employment, instruction, related services, daily living skills, and functional vocational evaluation (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2017).

Secondary transition defined. Transitions are common for all students as they travel through their educational career. Transitions mean a change is going to occur for

the student and that his or her way of accessing education will become altered. Typically in education, as students progress from one grade to another, expectations increase and support decreases. For students with disabilities, these transitional times can be especially difficult since these students typically need a different or additional support system to allow them to reach their goals. Special education programs, those legally required to support students with disabilities throughout their public educational career, are put in place to give additional support to students with disabilities as they make key transitions toward an ultimate goal of educational completion (diplomas or alternate completion certificates).

The most difficult transition for most special education students is the transition from high school to a postschool environment; this is called secondary transition. The adult world is abundant with new and often scary experiences that come with little or no guidance. The level of support provided to students with disabilities is much different for adults who are no longer serviced by public schools. While agencies exist to offer support, even knowing how to access and utilize services from these agencies becomes the responsibility of the student or the student's guardian.

In an effort to ease the difficult transition for special education students into a postschool world, school personnel who work with students with disabilities must plan ahead to assure that all special education students have the skills they need to successfully adapt to secondary transition. Teachers, school personnel, families, community agencies, and the disabled student must all work together to set appropriate postschool goals and make action plans to achieve those goals (The IRIS Center, 2014). The goals should include work (a job they desire and can be skilled at), living (a place

they desire to live and is appropriate for them), and community involvement (activities that they can become involved in that will satisfy social and personal priorities); these goals are incorporated into student IEPs (The IRIS Center, 2014).

Legal requirements for secondary transition.

Federal directives. In 2004, President George W. Bush reauthorized IDEA, which provides federal regulations regarding the educating and treatment of persons with disabilities within school systems (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). As part of the changes made in the reauthorization, there were crucial changes to secondary transition requirements as provided for in disabled student IEPs. Under current IDEA legislation, the following mandates exist:

Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include:

- Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills;
- The transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals; and
- Beginning not later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under State law, a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under Part B, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under §300.520 (Definition of individualized education program, 2011).

Because of the IDEA legislation, EC programs in every state must provide the appropriate secondary transition services to students during or prior to their high school years.

Under IDEA, transition services are considered “a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that” (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2000, p. 10) are created to improve the functional and academic performance of the student with a goal of successful movement to postschool activities; are built upon a student’s personal skill set and deficiencies; and involve instructions and relevant experiences and/or services that are appropriate for the student’s individual postschool goals. Under this definition, for an IEP to be in federal compliance, it “must include measurable postsecondary goals in the areas of training, education and employment” (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2011, para. 39); if appropriate, goals designed to help the student gain independent living skills might also be required. Therefore, for a student receiving special education services to legally be provided with his or her free and appropriate public education (FAPE), he or she must have personalized goals in at least three areas of secondary transition that can be monitored and measured included in the IEP. The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC, 2012) developed an eight-point checklist of questions for educators to use as they are developing transition goals (with the initial six points being directly tied to goals):

- Is (are) there an appropriate postsecondary goal(s) in this area (i.e., employment, education/training, independent living)?
- Is (are) the postsecondary goal(s) updated annually?

- Is there evidence that the measurable postsecondary goal(s) were based on age appropriate transition assessment?
- Are there transition services in the IEP that will reasonably enable the student to meet his or her postsecondary goal(s)?
- Do the transition services include courses of study that will reasonably enable the student to meet his or her postsecondary goal(s)?
- Is (are) there annual IEP goal(s) related to the student's transition service(s) needs?
- Is there evidence that the student was invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services were discussed?
- If appropriate, is there evidence that a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority? (p. 1)

To help determine appropriate goals, special education staff are required to use evaluations called transition assessments that allow educators to gauge a student's current skill set and identify his or her goals in the areas of education/training, employment, and independent living. According to the Division on Career Development and Transition, transition assessments are an "ongoing process of collecting data on the individual's needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, educational, living, and personal and social environments" (Sitlington, Neubert, & Leconte, 1997, pp. 70-71). In the NSTTAC (2012) Transition Assessment Guide, educators are encouraged to use two or more of the following instruments as transition assessment: "behavioral assessment information, aptitude tests, interest and work values

inventories, intelligence tests and achievement tests, personality or preference tests, career maturity or readiness tests, self-determination assessments, work-related temperament scales, and transition planning inventories” (p. 1). These assessments can be administered formally or informally by way of tests, interviews, observations, or curriculum-based assessments (NSTTAC, 2012).

Not only does IDEA set standards for expectations regarding secondary transition goals, but it also provides requirements for determining the appropriate goals that should be written for each student based on the student’s present levels of performance. Called Summary of Performance (SOP), all IEPs must include “a summary of the child’s academic and functional performance, which shall include recommendations on how to assist the child in meeting the child’s postsecondary goals” (Additional requirements for evaluations and reevaluations, 2018, para. 3). SOP will link a student’s current abilities with his or her postschool goals and design IEP secondary transition goals that will improve deficient skills that will be necessary to achieve the desired postschool goals. IDEA purposefully left the requirements for SOP broad to allow for adaptation for individual student goals and skill sets, though there is allowance for states and local educational agencies to set mandated requirements regarding SOP (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2011). Once established, SOP becomes a roadmap for special education students to reach their secondary transition goals.

Progress monitoring is the use of research-proven practices and assessments given to a student to measure the progress toward mastering his or her goal. Special education teachers are expected to gather regular progress monitoring data on students to chart

student progress toward goal completion. Reports will be provided to students, families or guardians, and other stakeholders periodically in reporting formats as dictated by state policy. Progress monitoring is a key component to assuring that students are making adequate progress towards meeting goals. Should a lack of progress be noted, it becomes the educator's job to determine the cause of the progress deficiency. At that point, it may be necessary to reevaluate service delivery or the appropriateness of goals.

State directives. North Carolina legal requirements mirror federal IDEA statutes. Transition services are covered by NC 1500-2.37 which defines transition according to federal guidelines (Education of Individuals with Disability Act, 2018) and states that transition services should include “(i) instruction; (ii) related services; (iii) community experiences; (iv) the development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives; and (v) if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skill and functional vocational evaluation” (Education of Individuals with Disability Act, 2018, para. 34). In NC 1503-4.2, the state requires that the student with the disability must be invited to the IEP transition meeting and that if he or she cannot attend, his or her preferences and interests are considered by the LEA by taking additional steps (Referrals, evaluations and reevaluations: Initial evaluations, 2017).

In 2007, NCDPI released a manual with district and school expectations for transition practices for all students enrolled in Grades Kindergarten through 12. While the Transition Planning for 21st Century Schools manual is not an EC directive, as it applies to all students, students with disabilities benefit from the district and school specific goals set by the state in regard to expected transition practices and supports. The manual begins with directives to school districts that require the formation of district

level transition teams; these teams should have the support of the superintendent and the financial officer and be provided with adequate resources to accomplish their goals (NCDPI, 2007, p. 5). The goals for district transition teams are

- Implement a district plan that will ensure successful transitions for children and their families from preschool through high school.
 - Conduct a needs assessment in order to determine current transition activities and services as well as issues or possible barriers.
 - Create a district transition plan by identifying district goals, strategies, and outcomes.
 - Support schools in creation and implementation of school transition plans using identified district transition goals and strategies.
- Collaborate with community and district stakeholders by utilizing the talents of business and community leaders and agencies that align their services with the transition goals and strategies.
- Build and sustain relationships that will provide support to the schools, staffs, families, and students for implementing transition goals and strategies.
- Plan professional development opportunities for all personnel to support transition issues and barriers as identified in the needs assessment.
- Work with the local school board to provide continued financial support for sustaining transition planning within other district initiatives. (NCDPI, 2007, p. 5)

Each goal has four or more suggested strategies along with timelines and personnel involvement provided by the state to help the district fulfill the goals (NCDPI, 2007, pp.

6-11). For reference, the manual has also aligned the district transition goals to the State Board of Education goals to highlight alignment and compliance with state educational expectations; goals; and most importantly, the overall educational vision of North Carolina (NCDPI, 2007, pp. 6-11). This state vision is, “Every public-school student will graduate ready for postsecondary education and work, prepared to be a globally engaged and productive citizen” (NCDPI, 2016c, para. 1). Transition is a key part of meeting the state’s vision.

The Transition manual published by NCDPI (2007) also discussed the formation of school-based transition teams to help meet district transition goals (p. 12). Alternately, existing teams or positions could be utilized at the school level to achieve the following objectives in support of district transition goals:

- Review the district plan.
- Add additional goals for diverse populations.
- Identify additional strategies to address the specific needs of their community.
- Integrate the school transition goals into the school improvement plan.
- Evaluate the school transition plan by identifying strengths and needs, revising as needed.
- Support each classroom teacher in identifying classroom transition strategies to be implemented throughout the year. (NCDPI, 2007, p. 12)

The manual builds the connection between transition expectations and 21st century learning by showing correlations between the district transition goals (“implement a district plan, collaborate with community, build and sustain relationships, plan professional development, and work the local school board” [NCDPI, 2007, p. 14]) and

key elements in 21st century learning elements (“core subjects, learning skills, 21st century tools, 21st century context, 21st century content, and 21st century assessments” [NCDPI, 2007, p. 14]).

The manual then goes on to outline goals and suggested strategies for transition at crucial transitional phases throughout a student’s educational career. These are preschool to kindergarten, second grade to third grade, elementary to middle grades, middle grades to high school, and high school to college and careers (NCDPI, 2007, pp. 15-32). In the “high school to college and careers” section, NCDPI (2007) referenced suggestions provided to the state from the Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB) in the 2005 report provided to the state following the yearly audit. The suggestions, provided by SREB and promoted by NCDPI, include many suggestions for school and district transition teams, including

- Implement a teacher adviser system where each professional educator in the high school assists a group of students and their parents from grade nine through twelve to set postsecondary goals.
- Use data for decision-making to ensure the best opportunities for high school students to make transitions from high school to postsecondary studies.
- Provide opportunities in the ninth-grade curriculum for students to explore a wide range of career and educational options.
- Require students to develop at least six-year career pathways (SREB, 2005; NCDPI, 2007).

District requirements. The district of focus follows federal and state guidelines in regard to transition practice. The district encourages EC staff in middle and high

school to complete transition assessments including interest inventories, skill assessments, and work inventories during the ages of 14-18. EC staff members should discuss postgraduation plans in areas of independent living, employment, and further education or training. Through the use of assessment data, student and family interviews, and other transition planning activities, EC staff members in the district will work with the student to plan transition activities in up to seven areas that, during the course of the student's year-long IEP, help him or her get closer to the goals that have been set. These transition activity categories are adult living skills, community experiences, employment, instruction, related services, daily living skills, and functional vocation evaluation. Not only will students work towards goals during the duration of the IEP, but progress towards goals will be monitored by EC staff members. Goals will be updated at least once a year when the previous IEP is updated. Should goals change, new plans to meet these goals will be devised. If goals remain the same, new activities will be created to get the student even closer to his or her ultimate postgraduation goals. During this time, students and their families will be provided with and informed of their rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act. Upon turning 18, a student with a disability shall receive all rights as a person with a disability under law and take over those rights previously held by a parent or guardian in the IEP process. The district encourages students to be well-informed in these rights and to take an active role in EC procedures, such as helping to run their own IEP meeting.

Importance of secondary transition planning. The 2015 Current Population Survey results released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that 11.86% of the population is disabled (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016, Table A). While the disabled

population's employment rate experienced a brief increase in 2014, the 2015 results showed that the rate of employment has receded to the 2013 percentage of 17.5%; this compares to an employment rate of 65% for nondisabled persons (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016, p. 2). Of those persons with a disability who are employed, 32% are considered part-time workers, compared to 18% of the nondisabled population (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016, p. 2). Conversely, the "unemployment rate for persons with a disability was 10.7%" (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016, p. 2), almost twice the percentage of nondisabled persons at 5.1%. An exceptionally large portion of persons with a disability, eight in 10, were neither employed nor unemployed, which, according to the Current Population Survey, means they are unable to work or are not attempting to find work (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016, p. 3). This is significantly higher than the nondisabled persons who are not in the workforce, which equates to approximately three in 10 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016, p. 3).

The median annual earnings of persons with a disability aged 21-64 years old in the United States in 2014 was \$39,300 (Erickson, Lee, & von Schrader, 2016), which is \$14,357 less than the median annual income of the entire U.S. population in 2014 (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015, p. 5). In fact, in 2014, 27.8% of Americans with a disability aged 18-64 lived below the poverty line compared to a lesser 12.2% of nondisabled persons (DeNavas-Walt & Proctor, 2015, p. 13). Approximately 19.5% of disabled Americans aged 18-64 received Social Security income benefits in 2014 (Erickson et al., 2016), costing the nation almost \$10.8 million yearly (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2015).

The picture this paints is that Americans with disabilities are less likely to get

adequately paying, full-time work following graduation from high school such that they can live independently without government support; and while many nondisabled people also face the bleak future, the disproportionality of disabled persons to nondisabled persons is strikingly disturbing. Research has shown that people who experience unemployment lose a great deal of self-confidence in their ability to work; further, they also lose their work skills and habits with the prolonged absence of use (“United States: Unemployment,” 2009). Those who find themselves unemployed typically become reliant on government assistance which they may be ill-equipped to obtain or utilize while simultaneously facing a workforce that is unfavorable to them (“United States: Unemployment,” 2009).

The high rate of poverty among disabled adults is also problematic as it exposes this group to the Poverty Disability Model as established during a research study conducted by Lustig and Strauser (2007). This model, created by the researchers based on a review of over 50 studies, shows the interconnectedness between poverty and disability. Because it is often difficult to obtain access to large samples of persons with disabilities, combining the research of others to study each individual relationship proved more valuable than attempting a large-scale study.

According to the Poverty Disability Model, individuals living in poverty have less access to resources which in turn leads to increased risk of the individual acquiring a chronic health problem or disability (Lustig & Strauser, 2007, p. 195). Since those with disabilities already have health problems, the factors measured in the Poverty Disability Model can lead to escalated or additional health problems for Americans with disabilities. There are other negative consequences for those impacted by the factors associated with

the Poverty Disability Model that can impact the life of a disabled person who is living below the poverty line.

People in poverty or those without jobs are less valued by society and as a result often face inappropriate or poor treatment from others (Lustig & Strauser, 2007, p. 195). This can take the form of lesser treatment from professionals in social or health services (Lustig & Strauser, 2007, p. 196), further complicating a disabled person's existing disability. Individuals locked in the cycle of the Poverty Disability Model are susceptible to feelings of loss of control and negative self-images (such as feelings of "being dependent, lazy, or a welfare recipient"; Lustig & Strauser, 2007, p. 196). Those with low incomes or no incomes are less likely to escape their income bracket. A study done by Kimberlin (2013) utilized data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics to determine the connections among "household income, benefits, and expense information" (p. 1) to determine factors most impacting poverty. Kimberlin found, "particularly high risk of chronic poverty associated with long-term disability ... reflects the fact that individuals with disabilities rely on federal disability benefits (SSI or SSDI) as a primary income source" (p. 117) rather than being able to find adequate employment to provide for their needs.

People living below the poverty line are prone to living in communities with limited employment promoting social networks, meaning that it is less likely that will be provided with new employment opportunities than those in higher income brackets (Strauser, 2014, p. 68). As people tend to learn behaviors from those around them (Bandura, 1977, p. 247), individuals with a disability living in low-income communities with limited access to social connections exhibiting employment-obtaining and

employment-maintaining traits are further impaired in gaining or maintaining employment due to a lack of appropriate work related social skills (Lustig & Strauser, 2007, p. 197). In a 2012 study conducted by Lustig, Zanskas, and Strauser, 42 clients of vocational rehabilitation with life-long disabilities were evaluated to determine if they had a dysfunctional career mindset as influenced by factors in the poverty cycle which negatively impacted their efforts or ability to find employment. They found that not only did the study participants have a skewed career mindset leading to underemployment or lack of employment, but they also experienced other social problems as a result (Lustig et al., 2012).

The impact on society of the poverty and unemployment cycles are just as significant as those experienced by the individual with the disability. Statistics have shown that unemployment rates have a significant effect on crime rates, particularly on burglary (Fallahi, Pourtaghi, & Rodriguez, 2012). This may be further explained by the negative peer influences in regard to “drug use, alcohol use, and criminal activity” (Lustig & Strauser, 2007, p. 198) that can occur because of peer interactions and a dangerous climate that often grows in poverty-stricken communities. While there is not a direct link to people with disabilities turning to crime, it can be noted that disabled people living in communities of poverty are exposed to higher rates of crime and substance abuse.

Unemployment and poverty also have economic repercussions for the nation. Unemployment offices are becoming increasingly overwhelmed as more and more people seek job placement; there simply are not enough available positions for all those seeking employment, and the burden is great on the agencies assigned to help the unemployed

(“United States: Unemployment,” 2009). For those unemployed who are unable to gain work placement, public assistance becomes the next option. Many states have limited budgets to assist the unemployed or nonworking, and federal assistance is required to supplement the state funds causing increased taxation from the federal level (“United States: Unemployment,” 2009). With such high stakes, it is vital to find strategies that can help promote successful secondary transition.

Recurrent themes in secondary transition literature.

Family participation. Family involvement in the secondary transition planning and implementation is one of the key components that positively impacts a student’s success in accomplishing his or her postschool goals (Balcazar, Ostrander, & Garate, 2006; Kohler & Field, 2003; Miller-Warren, 2016; Peterson, 2004; Wehmeyer, 2014). Parents of children with disabilities take a number of responsibilities during their children’s lives; they frequently are caretakers, advocates, teachers, and structures of support for their disabled children (Ankeny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009; Peterson, 2004; Wehmeyer, 2014). These roles often carry into adulthood; and as parents continue to play such an important role in student lives even after graduation, it is vital to incorporate them in the transition process as soon as it begins (Ankeny et al., 2009; Peterson, 2004; Wehmeyer, 2014).

Newman (2005) found that students with disabilities who had family involved in aspects of their schooling were less behind grade level, received better grades, and were more likely to participate in nonmandated or extracurricular activities than disabled peers lacking familial involvement. Newman also noted that those students with disabilities who had family involvement during their school years showed greater independence and

rates of employment after high school than those students with disabilities who had no familial involvement.

Parents and other invested family members can play a significant role in the planning process because they have a different, in-depth perspective of the whole child including a deeper understanding of how his or her culture, environment, and other outside factors impact his or her postschool goals (Ankeny et al., 2009; Balcazar et al., 2006; Gramlich, Crane, Peterson, & Stenhjem, 2003). A family member's input during an IEP meeting can help special educators better understand the student's individual needs, strengths and weakness, desires, and outside support systems which can lead to the development of more appropriate goals for the student. In a 2009 study conducted by Ankeny et al., four mothers of children with disabilities were interviewed to determine the impact their role in their children's educational plans had on the outcome of their children's postschool success (as measured by the obtainment or progress towards obtainment of goals set by the child and mother during high school). Ankeny et al. determined the mothers' active roles in the planning of transitional goals and the constant communication between school staff and the mothers led to appropriate goal setting and follow through of activities designed to help the children prepare to meet set goals.

Unfortunately, schools frequently report low familial participation not only in IEP meetings (Gramlich et al., 2003; Kohler & Hood, 2000; Kohler & Rusch, 1996) but even more commonly in implementing transition strategies inside or outside the school environment (Gramlich et al., 2003; Kohler & Hood, 2000). Many times, this lack of involvement does not stem from disinterest but is the result of inability to participate due to scheduling or transportation conflicts (Ankeny et al., 2009; Kohler & Rusch, 1996;

Peterson, 2004) or reluctance to participate due to lack of preparation for involvement by the school (Ankeny et al., 2009; Martinez, Conroy, & Cerreto, 2012). In a study conducted by Landmark, Zhang, and Montoya (2007), the researchers found that disabled students belonging to a racial or ethnic minority group reported lack of knowledge about the importance of attending IEP transition meetings and did not understand the link between those meetings and future employment. The parents interviewed were unclear of the importance of support systems in the home and their role in their child's transition to independent living after high school (Landmark et al., 2007).

Since parental participation has such a great impact, those involved in transition team planning should make efforts to bolster parent confidence and make special considerations in planning so parents can play a role in the process. Building parental collaboration can be accomplished by "building parent rapport, developing a communication system with a maintenance plan, and creating additional special event opportunities for parent involvement" (Staples & Diliberto, 2010, p. 60). Establishing a framework of communication, respect, and mutual support will strengthen parental involvement for the betterment of the student's secondary transition plan and, later, successful completion of that plan (Ankeny et al., 2009; Kim & Morningstar, 2005). Once a solid framework has been built, school personnel should work to maintain lines of communication by scheduling meetings so family members can attend, getting input on progress made toward goals, enlisting help at home reinforcing goals, and continuously explaining vital aspects of the transition process in language that is easily understood by the family (Kohler & Field, 2003; Kohler, Gothber, Fowler, & Coyle, 2016; Kohler & Rusch, 1996; Miller-Warren, 2016). Families should also be made aware of the services

and agencies available to support the student after graduation and be introduced to them early on in the student's transition plan (Kohler & Field, 2003; Kohler et al., 2016; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012). This includes providing information about federal programs such as Supplemental Security Income, Social Security Disability Insurance (Gramlich et al., 2003) and Vocational Rehabilitation (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2012). In a study conducted by Milsom (2007), she found that while the federal government mandates that information be provided to families regarding postsecondary transitions, school counselors and other staff members can prove to be powerful student advocates in helping students begin making progress towards transition goals while they are still in high school. Milsom stated that the school counselor can, by communicating clearly and regularly with parents or guardians, "bring to attention ... the importance of early prevention and intervention activities during times of transition" (p. 277).

Beyond providing information, procedure, and communication support to families of students entering the transition process, transition team members must also be aware of fears and anxieties families often face as their student prepares for a postschool life. Many parents have experienced intense bonds with their disabled child through medical challenges, societal obstacles, and educational hurdles (Balcazar et al., 2006; Kim & Morningstar, 2005; Wehmeyer, 2014). Because the disabled child is often more reliant than his or her nondisabled peers, it can be difficult for parents to step back and allow the child to become more self-sufficient as is required by the secondary transition process (Balcazar et al., 2006; Wehmeyer, 2014). Some parents face fears of how their child will fare physically as they gain independence (Shapland, 2006) or how the child's

independence will impact the family financially due to loss of benefits (Balcazar et al., 2006). Timmons, Whitney-Thomas, McIntyre, Butterworth, and Allen (2004) interviewed 30 parents of young adults with disabilities and found they are intimidated and confused by the complex systems that exist to support disabled persons following high school graduation. Further, parents felt that these support systems would not be responsive to the level of needs presented by their children and this led to anxiety and fear for their children's future ability to live and function independently (Timmons et al., 2004).

The secondary transition process can trigger feelings of grief or stress as parent roles begin to shift (Timmons et al., 2004). With the extensive changes and charged emotions of families of students involved in the secondary transition process, schools and transition teams must provide families with additional layers of understanding and support (Staples & Diliberto, 2010; Wehmeyer, 2014). An abundance of information about the process and realistic insight as to how the process will impact the student can also assuage familial fears (Balcazar et al., 2006; Kohler et al., 2016; Martinez et al., 2012; Shapland, 2006).

Student self-determination. Self-determination is “based on the assumption that people have inborn tendencies to grow and develop psychologically, to strive to master challenges in the environment, and to integrate experience into self-concept” (Bremer, Kachgal, & Schoeller, 2003, p. 1). Students who possess strong self-determination act independently when possible; regulate their own behavior; respond to life changes and challenges appropriately and in an empowered manner; have an understanding of their strengths, weaknesses, and desires; and practice self-reflection and personal progress

monitoring (Bremer et al., 2003; Kohler & Field, 2003; Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). Building self-determination is an important part of the secondary transition process, because studies have shown that disabled people who possess strong self-determination skills have more success after graduation (Bremer et al., 2003; Garrett, 2010; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Wehmeyer et al., 2011). Equally important, self-determination skills are in alignment with IDEA IEP regulations that require students take an active role in the transition process by way of aligning transition goals to student skill sets, needs, and goals for his or her future (Definition of individualized education program, 2011; Transfer of parental rights at age of majority, 2018). In a study conducted by Herbert (2017), it was determined that self-determination curriculum for special education classrooms was seen as the most necessary need expressed by special education teachers who participated in the study (2017). Teacher feedback showed that self-determination curriculum was believed to have the greatest impact on student success (Herbert, 2017).

Historically, students with disabilities have shown less self-determination than nondisabled peers with similar demographics (Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Wehmeyer, 2014; Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). This is not due to the disability (Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013) but more because of decreased opportunities to learn skills due to adult tendency to remove opportunities where failure, and subsequently growth of self-determination, may occur (Bremer et al., 2003; Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). In a 2013 review of research spanning several decades, Wehmeyer and Abery (2013) found that research starting in the early 1990s through present day shows that people with intellectual disabilities showcase much lower evidence of self-determination skills than their nondisabled counterparts. They made it clear that this discrepancy was not due to a

lack of ability to master self-determination skills but rather less opportunity to become exposed to such skills (Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013).

Fortunately, best practices for building self-determination in students with disabilities is to embed self-determination building opportunities within the process of planning for transition (Kohler & Field, 2003; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013) and throughout the transition plan's implementation (Bremer et al., 2003; Kohler & Field, 2003; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013). The IEP stipulates that transition goals be student specific (Definition of individualized education program, 2011; Transfer of parental rights at age of majority, 2018), so students should be heavily involved in the process of determining their transition goals. While there are many good transition assessment tools available, students should have a role in interpreting the results of their transition assessments and linking them to appropriate goals (Kohler & Field, 2003; Kohler et al., 2016; Wehmeyer, 2000; Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). Transition goals are far more meaningful to students when they have actively participated in forming them and when they fully understand what the goals mean in the scope of their secondary transition plan (Garrett, 2010; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Wehmeyer, 2014; Wehmeyer et al., 2011). Once goals are set, experiences and school courses that match the needs of the student should be assigned to the student with the knowledge and understanding of their purpose being discussed openly (Kohler & Field, 2003; Kohler et al., 2016). Students who understand their individual transition plan and feel ownership towards the plan are more likely to experience success in achieving their postschool goals (Garrett, 2010; Martin & Williams-Diehm, 2013; Wehmeyer, 2014; Wehmeyer et al., 2011). Throughout the transition process, students should be prepared to take on greater

roles in the IEP process (Kohler & Field, 2003; Wehmeyer, 2014). Students can be trained to monitor their own progress toward their goals, lead their own meetings, reflect on their role in the process, and communicate with agencies involved in their plan (Bremer et al., 2003; Kohler & Field, 2003; Wehmeyer, 2014). In a study conducted by Smith (2014), it was found that “while more students participated in rather than led their IEP meetings, both groups frequently talked during the IEP meetings about their likes, dislikes, skills, challenges, needs, and disability [including] their transition assessments, postsecondary goals and course of study” (p. 103). This shows a knowledge of transitional needs and goals that can come from active student participation in the transition process.

This involvement not only builds self-determination, but also trains students for many of the tasks they will face as disabled citizens following graduation (Bremer et al., 2003; Martin, Van Dyke, D’Ottavio, & Nickerson, 2007; Wehmeyer, 2014). To gauge the effectiveness of instructing students in transition planning for the purpose of building self-determination, EC staff should be sure they are providing guidance that “is based within an empowerment evaluation framework, is future-oriented, employs multiple measurement techniques that include participant self-report indicators, and involve key stakeholders in the process” (Wehmeyer & Field, 2007, p. 111).

Kohler’s *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0*. Dr. Paula D. Kohler, a critically acclaimed expert in secondary transition for over a decade, worked with others to review the relevance of her own initial *Taxonomy for Transition* first published in 1996 (Kohler et al., 2016). The latest *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* was written after extensive review of the latest research studies on secondary transition including

“predictors of postschool success, strategies to increase graduation and reduce dropout, school climate, and vocational rehabilitation services focused on fostering successful transition of youth with disabilities in college and careers” (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 2) and contains an expanded view of the five components of the original *Taxonomy*. Figure 1 shows the 2016 model that contains provisions for student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, program structures, and family engagement (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 2).

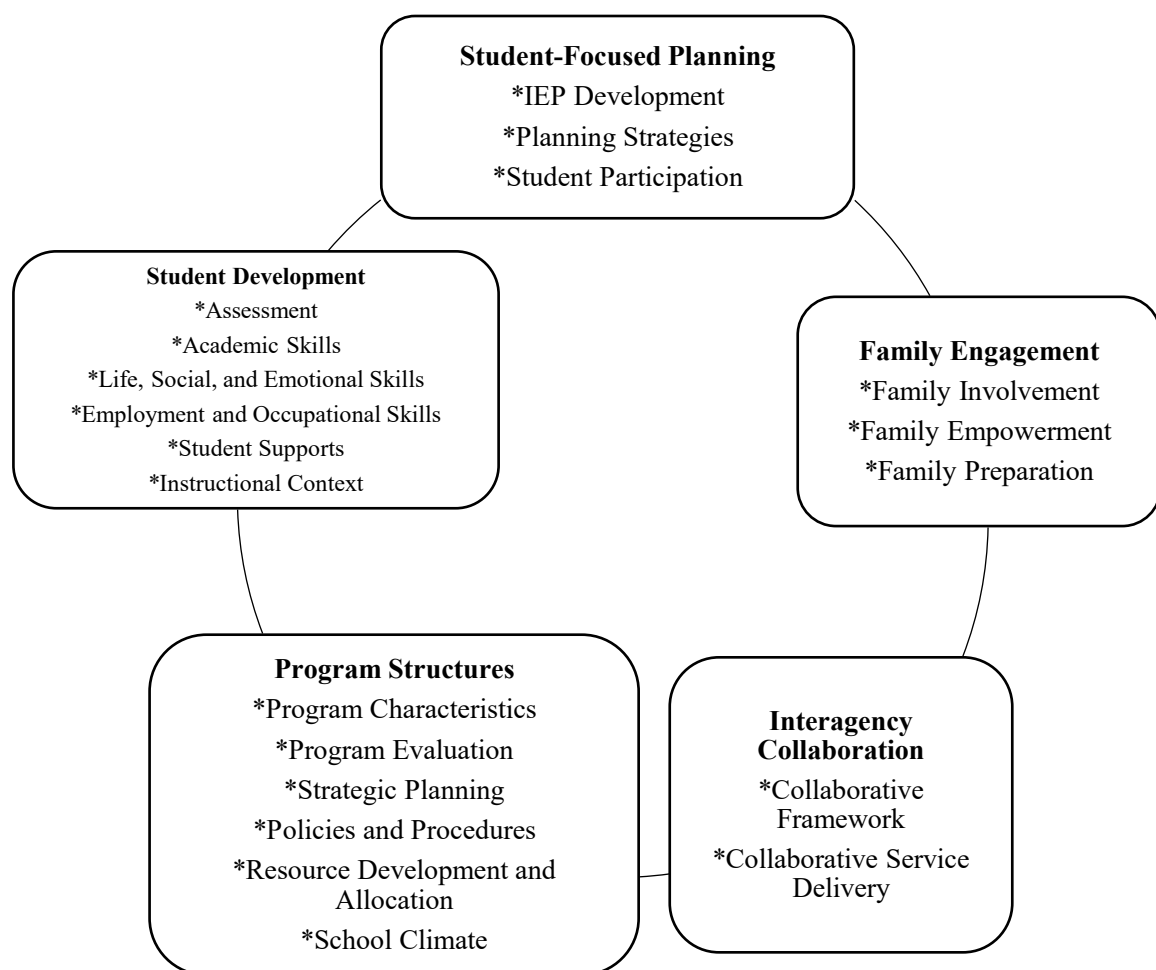


Figure 1. *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 Model* (Kohler et al., 2016).

Student-focused planning. The first component of the *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* is student-focused planning. This contains provisions for IEP development, planning strategies, and student participation (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 3). IEP development contains all legal requirements for the IEP in regard to secondary transition, but the checklist highlights also contain elements of student interests and preferences, personal needs to accomplish postschool goals, and student choices (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 4). The checklist, while still complying with legal IEP obligations, becomes driven by the student.

Planning strategies push legal requirements a step farther, requiring transition planning to begin by at least age 14 (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 4) as opposed to age 16 as federal regulations require (Definition of individualized education program, 2011; Transfer of parental rights at age of majority, 2018). The new *Taxonomy* also stresses the importance of outside factors that impact the student's future beyond just the academic or those traditionally considered as part of secondary transition. These include cultural and linguistic considerations, special considerations to allow for family and stakeholder involvement in planning and implementation of transition plans, student-centered planning for all steps in creating the transition plan, and referral to adult services while the student remains serviced by the school system (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 4).

Student participation is only narrowly touched upon by IDEA legislation in that efforts must be made to include the student in the IEP meeting and the goals written for transition should be based on student abilities and desires (Definition of individualized education program, 2011; Transfer of parental rights at age of majority, 2018). Under the new *Taxonomy*, the student is encouraged to take on an increased role that fosters

ownership of his or her secondary transition plan. Students are expected to be trained to participate in all transition planning and IEP meetings, drive decision-making in regard to their transition goals, evaluate their own progress toward accomplishing transition goals, and evaluate their participation in the transition planning process (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 4).

Student development. Under the new *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0*, student development includes assessment; academic skills; life, social, and emotional skills; employment and occupational skills; student supports; and instructional context (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 5). Where IDEA legislation does not provide requirements for transition assessments beyond them being appropriate and being used as a component of goal construction (Definition of individualized education program, 2011; Transfer of parental rights at age of majority, 2018), the *Taxonomy* outlines more specific expectations for transition assessments. These expectations include career interest and aptitude inventories are required as a guiding factor for instruction delivery, results of assessments and progress monitoring toward goals should be shared with students and stakeholders alike, and remediation and retesting opportunities should be incorporated into high stakes tests for EC (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 5).

Academic skills are traditionally considered those required for graduation or high school program completion by the student's school; however, under the *Taxonomy*, academic skills are considered those that relate to student secondary transition goals. Students should be exposed to career and college preparation information, college-ready curriculum (if applicable to student goals), and academic success skill curriculum (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 5). This framework blends academic and transition planning curriculums

by requiring that the two are interconnected as a required component of the secondary transition plan.

The updated *Taxonomy* gives additional clarification and guidance for setting appropriate, individualized, student-focused secondary transition goals in each of the mandated IEP transition categories of training, education; employment; and if applicable, independent living skills (Definition of individualized education program, 2011; Transfer of parental rights at age of majority, 2018). The *Taxonomy* strives to promote self-determination (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 5) where the student learns to gain a better understanding of his or her own strengths, limitations, and needs and desires such that he or she is able to become a well-rounded and successful individual in the postschool world in which he or she will live. In the “Life, Social, and Emotional Skills” section of student development in the *Taxonomy*, students should learn additional skills in areas such as interpersonal, leisure, transportation, appropriate behaviors, social, autonomy, and independent living (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 5).

Employment and occupational skills focus on guiding the student to become prepared for his or her postschool career goal. In this category, it is the expectation that relevant job skills are embedded into academic skill delivery as much as possible (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 6) so that students are learning the practical implications of the academic content. Additional career-readiness instruction should be delivered by way of advancing levels of CTE courses, on-site job trainings and internships, career awareness opportunities, and job-placement service introductions (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 6).

Student development within the *Taxonomy* also requires student supports. These supports are typically identified in other aspects of the IEP as they are needed to help the

student engage in the curriculum; however, the *Taxonomy* also mentions the importance of these services in the secondary transition planning process (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 6). The student supports section also requires adults from the community, agencies, and school system to step in and provide guidance and instruction throughout the secondary transition process. This may include academic or career enrichment or remediation; counseling or advising; community partnership building; resource identification and obtainment support; and communication assistance (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 6).

The *Taxonomy* addresses elements of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE; Least restrictive environment requirements, 2018) as they pertain to secondary transition within the instructional context section of student development as well as elements of the Free Appropriate Public Education (2018) requirement from IDEA (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 6); however, this section of the *Taxonomy* also addresses the extracurricular, community, service, and other nonacademic interests of the student, assuring that are promoted, recognized, and accommodated (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 6). This further develops the secondary transition plan by painting a broader picture of the student in goal setting and a more meaningful, individualized action plan to help the student obtain those goals.

Interagency collaboration. The interagency collaboration component of the *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* includes a collaborative framework and collaborative service delivery. A successful secondary transition program first builds a framework of collaboration that can support all exceptional children in the building and implementation of their transition plans. The collaborative team, made up of the student, the student's family, the school members assisting the student, relevant outside agencies, and other invested stakeholders, will work together to define expectations and roles, set

up communication strategies, plan trainings to assist one another, share data, remove or reduce possible barriers to success, and reflect frequently (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 7).

Once the framework has been established, students can be effectively serviced as they progress through the transition planning process. This includes frequent meetings inclusive of all team members, analysis of data in regard to progress, sharing of resources, and problem-solving for the purpose of helping students meet their transition goals (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 7).

Family engagement. A common component of the *Taxonomy* is the involvement of family in the transition program. Historically, parental involvement in student IEP planning, implementation, and progress monitoring has greatly improved the relevance, fidelity, and ultimate success of plans for the student in achieving his or her goals (Miller-Warren, 2016, pp. 31-36; PACER Center, 2006; Wehmeyer, 2014, pp. 178-183). Family involvement is interwoven throughout the *Taxonomy* and is also given its own category that defines how to best involve the student's family in the transition process. In the family engagement section, there is involvement, empowerment, and preparation. The involvement phase encourages involvement of parents who have intimate knowledge of the student and the outside factors that impact his or her life; this is important throughout all phases of the student's IEP and should be obtained either orally or in writing (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 8). Parents should not only provide information, share concerns and needs, and provide insight, but they should also be active participants in the plan by becoming involved in service delivery and being members of the networks being built for the student (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 8).

To bolster family empowerment, Kohler et al. (2016) reiterated that secondary

transition information should be provided to families by at least age 14 and should be, as all communication with parents, provided respectfully in the family's ordinary language. Other ways to motivate families to participate are to have pre-IEP meetings with only the family to prepare them for the upcoming meeting, provide care for siblings or elderly members in family members' care so they can attend meetings, and assist family members in supporting the student as he or she begins making contacts for his or her postschool future (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 8). To further facilitate family preparation, schools should be sure there are guidance and practice opportunities in each of the following:

- Transition-related planning process
- Empowerment strategies
- Setting high expectations
- Promoting child's self-determination with respect to cultural views and values
- Advocacy
- Natural supports
- Agencies and services
- Facilitating community experiences for youth with disabilities
- Legal issues (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 8).

Program structure. The final part of the *Taxonomy* is program structure, which includes its “characteristics, evaluation, strategic planning, policies and procedures, resource development and allocation, and school climate” (Kohler et al., 2016, pp. 9-10). While programs may differ from school to school or even among students within the same school, there are some characteristics that are considered best practices and should

be included in each program. As with all effective school programming, having high expectations that focus on desired outcomes along with clearly defined requirements (Lezotte & McKee, 2002) is a key aspect to the *Taxonomy* (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 9). Flexibility and multiple options within the program are important, as they allow for differentiation to meet each student's unique needs; the options should allow for various ways to not only meet individual secondary transition goals, but also to meet broader academic goals such as graduation (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 9). While differing graduation pathways are important, the program should still attempt to graduate each special education student with a diploma by age 21 if possible (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 9).

Program evaluation is an important part of any program (Mertens, 2015).

Without evaluation, ineffective programs continue to neglect meeting student needs. The *Taxonomy* expects evaluation to be an ongoing process for any transition program; the program should not only monitor progress being made by students and staff, but also the fidelity to which the program's vision is being upheld (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 9). The program should be driven by data and various data figures should be collected; beyond IEP transition data, Kohler et al. (2016) recommend tracking the following:

- Dropout risk
- Attendance
- Behavior
- Course completion
- Course performance
- Social performance
- CTE enrollment and completion patterns

- Disciplinary actions
- Truancy
- Retentions
- Support needs.

Planning involved in a secondary transition program should be strategic; it should be done regularly, include multiple stakeholders and cooperating agencies, be based on evidence-based practices, and be done after conducting a needs assessment (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 9). Once the program is planned, it should be evaluated by experts or supervisory staff for feasibility and effectiveness (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 9). Within the course of program planning, the team should establish policies and procedures that contribute to vision of the program, are positive and encouraging, and are based on the policies and procedures of similar programs that have proven effective (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 10). Those policies and procedures should outline a structure that is built upon a model of continuous reflection and improvement which is led by progress monitoring of data (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 10). When possible, policies and procedures should align with those of organizations that students will interact with after they graduate (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 10).

During the planning phase of programming, it is often easy to make a plan that cannot be sustained; therefore, the *Taxonomy* specifies that programs must consider available resources and ways to develop what existing resources do exist (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 10). Effective programs should be led by high-quality, well-trained staff who continuously receive staff trainings and are evaluated based on multiple measures (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 10). Staff expectations should high in a model of the high

expectations held for students.

While programs cannot dictate school culture, school culture can impact transition programming. A supportive climate that breeds trust and fairness is beneficial (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 10). School climates that have high expectations and defined procedures positively impact transition programs that do the same (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 10). Just as the program is expected to respond to student cultural needs, schools that can create an accepting and welcoming climate are more likely to have effective secondary transition programs with stakeholder and familial support (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 10).

Literature Review of Program Evaluation

Overview. “Program evaluation is the use of social research procedures to systematically investigate the effectiveness of social intervention programs” (Rossi, Freeman, & Lipsey, 1999, p. 20). Program evaluation is useful to determine the success or lack of success an organization has in meeting objectives through a program. Different types of program evaluations can be used to determine different outcomes and evaluate overall effectiveness. They can be used to make program “decisions that relate to effectiveness, efficiency, value, and adequacy based on a variety of systematic data collections and analyses” (Rossi et al., 1999, p. 20). Program evaluation can be used at all steps of programming from the initial stages of development, implementation, daily functioning, program conclusions, or program revisions. With social programming, evaluations often serve the important role of determining effectiveness from a cost-benefit standpoint. Since social programs impact program participants and often participant communities, they play an important role in accountability and transparency of information.

History of evaluation. The earliest traces of program evaluation in America can be traced back to the 1800s when the Industrial Revolution began taking hold and changing the dynamics of daily life for many Americans, especially those living in urban areas (Rossi et al., 1999). During this time, many reforms attempted to obtain federal support in order to better life for citizens; educational and social reformers especially found issues with the way the new labor market affected the young and the poor (Wang, 2010). Government-organized commissions were often instituted to investigate problems or to evaluate programs and agencies assigned to combat problems. While typically backed by the government, the commissions were typically run informally without a common structure, method of reporting, or safeguard against impressionability (Rossi et al., 1999). While presidential commissions are still an institution, the commission approach to evaluation is no longer the preferred approach to evaluation.

During the 1900s, evaluation began to adopt a more data-driven form. In the early 1900s, many school districts in the country had developed their own criteria for evaluating teacher and school effectiveness (Hogan, 2007). The data gathered from these evaluations was used to develop common objectives and assessments to measure those objectives. The problem with these early evaluations was that they were often politically driven and partial; results of the evaluations were frequently used improperly to drive political agendas (Madaus & Stufflebeam, 2000). Evaluations were developed and utilized locally, so comparing data from one school system to another was impossible. Further, these early evaluations also were heavily linked to standardized testing which became a private sector market during this time, a link that still exists today (Hogan, 2007).

In the 1930s, Ralph W. Tyler created a study to analyze the collegiate and secondary academic performance of students from differing educational backgrounds in an effort to determine what best prepares students for higher educational expectations. Tyler's study was designed to compare intended outcomes to actual outcomes (Madaus, Scriven, & Stufflebeam, 1996). The focus on outcomes rather than inputs was a new approach and the standardized questions combined with the longevity and consistency of the study gained attention by researchers and educators alike (Madaus et al., 1996). This led to a more streamlined approach to program evaluation and research studies, especially of social and educational programming.

During the 1940s and 1950s, educational testing services grew; and most school systems began purchasing the standardized testing instruments they developed. This boom in testing provided school systems with new sources of standardized data that could be evaluated locally or nationally. This was also a time of development in educational taxonomies where the practice of teaching was becoming a research-based career as opposed to a subjective art. Despite the rapid changes in education, there was little public push for evaluation and thus little public funding was fueled into educational evaluation.

Program evaluation in the United States began to become a formal process to be conducted in a sequential and thorough process during the 1960s when President Lyndon B. Johnson began enacting domestic programs to combat racial and economic problems sweeping the nation (Madaus & Stufflebeam, 2000). Since federal funding began supporting controversial social programs, there had to be public accountability, and program evaluation served as a means of justifying public spending for the betterment of

taxpayers (Madaus & Stufflebeam, 2000). Program evaluations that proved to be of little utility or relevance were harshly criticized; the need for evaluations to be done formally and with justifiable purpose began the new wave of what would become formal program evaluation methods (Madaus et al., 1996).

In 1965, under the direction of Senator Robert Kennedy and in response to many of President L. B. Johnson's directives, ESEA was written to include specific evaluation requirements as well as to create Title 1 which provided federally funding for disadvantaged students (Madaus et al., 1996). The federal mandate to perform educational evaluations brought to light the deficiencies in the current evaluation methods and began a wave of new evaluation model inception.

Since 1965, program evaluation has become a studied science. There are organizations and publications dedicated to program evaluation and the models that are research based. Each model is dedicated to the study of a program or practice in order to assure that it is obtaining the desired change (Frye & Hemmer, 2012).

Types of evaluation designs.

Formative. Formative evaluation is evaluation that considers the program's effectiveness before it begins or at a program's earliest phases of implementation (McNamara, 2017). The purpose of formative evaluation is to consider how the program will function and determine if changes should be made to improve the effectiveness of the program prior to its implementation or if modifications should be made to the program once it has been put into place. Formative evaluation is best suited for use in the early phases of program development or implementation (McNamara, 2017). Formative evaluation can answer questions about the effectiveness of program delivery and

determine strategies for program improvement (McNamara, 2017).

Summative. Summative evaluation provides information regarding a program's effectiveness after it has been put into place and must be completed only after all program design choices have been made (Wang, 2010). The purpose of summative evaluation is to decide the future of a program: Should it be continued or discontinued; should it be replicated or expanded; or should it be downsized? Summative evaluation can answer questions about the performance of the program and its ability to meet the needs it was designed to meet. It can help when making decisions about funding and future plans for the program (McNamara, 2017).

Process. Process evaluation is designed to determine the extent to which program components were implemented (Hogan, 2007). This evaluation analyzes the fidelity with which the program design was upheld once the program was put into effect. Process evaluation can be used to determine causes of program changes over time since the beginning of the program. It can be used to investigate ineffectiveness in program actualization as well to provide outside parties with valuable information about the program enforcement, replication, and sustainability (Hogan, 2007). Process evaluation can be used to answer questions about program service delivery, participation, and adherence to goals (Rossi et al., 1999).

Outcome. Outcome evaluation is designed to measure the changes that have happened since the implementation of the program (Frye & Hemmer, 2012). It determines the extent to which goals for the program were met and the results of the program. It can include long-term or short-term results for the program (Rossi et al., 1999). Outcome evaluation is used to determine the effectiveness of the program in

affecting participants in the desired way (Rossi et al., 1999). It proves the validity and benefit of the program if positive results are relayed. Outcome evaluation looks at participant results or changes and determines what the outcomes of participation in the program are.

Impact. Impact evaluation looks at long-term effectiveness and sustainability of a program (Hogan, 2007). It determines all results of the program over an extended time period and proves whether or not a program can maintain intended results over time. It can be used to influence policy changes, and data from impact evaluations can be compared against other long-term project data to make evaluative decisions (Rossi et al., 1999). Impact evaluation can make more definitive claims of program effectiveness and help rule out outside factors as potential causes of results.

Examples of program evaluation models.

Logic model. Logic model evaluations are used to determine a program's impact on participants over a span of time. Logic models help researchers judge effectiveness of programs rather than attempting to determine program worth (McLaughlin & Jordan, 2004). "Developing logic models provides the opportunity to develop an agency-wide understanding of the program, its intended impact, and how the work of each staff person contributes to the success" (Leahy, Thielsen, Millington, Austin, & Fleming, 2009, p. 71). Logic models attempt to draw links among inputs, activities, outputs, scope of influence, and outcomes (McLaughlin & Jordan, 2004). Downfalls of the logic model of evaluation are timeliness of construction and necessity of constant maintenance. Many logic models require considerable resources to enact and can therefore draw funding away from the program for which the evaluation is being designed to critique.

In 2013, Trinidad used the logic model to conduct a formative program evaluation of the Crucial Conversations program which was produced by VitalSmarts. In his report, Trinidad used the logic model to determine that “there was no fidelity between the major medical center’s Crucial Conversations program ... and the [original] VitalSmarts’ Crucial Conversations program” (p. 12). This report used the logic model to show that the major medical center attempting to utilize the program had not done so according to program guidelines and therefore was not seeing the intended results of program implementation.

PDCA model. PDCA stands for plan-do-check or study-act. The PDCA model is a circular model in which evaluation is a constant component and change of the program is frequent (Leahy et al., 2009). This model is best used with flexible programming where constant change is acceptable and there is time for frequent reflection. The plan stage of this model involves identifying prominent needs where programming might provide a solution. In this step, goals are clearly stated, methods of measuring results are determined, desired outcomes are decided, and timelines are established (Leahy et al., 2009). The do stage of the model is when the plan is put into place according to the process developed in the previous stage. In this step data, are gathered and experiences are documented for future analysis (Leahy et al., 2009). In the check stage of the model, the results of the plan are analyzed and evaluated. This is the stage where reflection is vital and stakeholder feedback is as essential to determining the program’s future as the quantitative data collected in the do stage (Leahy et al., 2009). In the act stage, decisions are made about how the program should be run moving forward (Leahy et al., 2009). Improvement, revision, abandonment, or expansion are options as program leaders make

decisions about the program.

In 2013, Moule, Evans, and Pollard evaluated the use of the PDCA model in the Pacesetters Programme which had been used to sustain change projects associated with the Labour government initiative whose goal is to reduce gaps among diverse groups in receiving health care in England. In this study, the research determined that in four studying programs associated with the Pacesetters initiative, all four were more successful due to the implementation of the PDCA model of evaluation which served as a checks and balances system in program development, initiation, and sustainability (Moule et al., 2013).

Utilization-focused evaluation (UFE) model. The UFE model relies on the relationship between program participants and program researchers. This model is less formulaic than other models but instead develops from interaction between the program users and researchers (Marzano, Frontier, & Livingston, 2011). In this model, researchers are part of the program development, especially in regard to finding potential clients for the program. The researchers are involved throughout the program's inception, implementation, and ongoing operations. Researchers mold participant interview or survey questions based on their observations, and data collection is subject to change based on changes that take place within the program. While this model is useful for flexible programming and has been found especially useful in the rehabilitation profession, it relies heavily on participant feedback, and its variable nature makes standardized data analysis difficult (Leahy et al., 2009).

In a 2017 study, Rehman, Alis, Moazzam, and Shaikh used a UFE model to evaluate the programming at Bahria University and Dental College in an effort to

determine why some students in the neuroscience courses were failing to master important topics which were required in later demonstrations of treatment protocol in the undergraduate curriculum. Rehman et al. used a mixed-method design which included academic data and focus group discussions with all stakeholders to determine expectations and results. Based on findings, Rehman et al. determined that integrated curriculum was most effective and worked with program coordinators to implement the curriculum.

CIPP model. The CIPP (context, input, process, and product) model evaluates the management of programs and provides important information in an impartial and data-driven way that can be used to make important decisions about a program's value. The context phase of the CIPP model evaluates "strengths, weaknesses and changes that can be made to produce better outcomes" (Leahy et al., 2009, p. 74). It provides a pretext for the program, an overview of program expectations, and an initial blueprint for program development. The input phase of the CIPP model assesses program goals and designs methods of meeting those goals by considering the needs of future participants, possible service integration, available resources, and applicable stakeholders or program staff (Stufflebeam, 1971). The process phase determines the effectiveness of program functioning as it is being delivered (Madaus et al., 1996). This phase also provides needed support to program staff members as they maintain the daily functionality of the program (Leahy et al., 2009). The product phase of the model analyzes the achieved results of the program and a comparison of those results and initial program goals. The CIPP model is both formative and summative in nature (Leahy et al., 2009). It is formative because it documents the program over time, from its initial phases through its

ongoing enactment, by using a set of standardized criteria aligned to program goals. It is summative because it determines the degree to which program goals were met and procedures were followed. Effectiveness of the program is determined by a predetermined set of predicted outcomes as well as the adherence to program guidelines. Because of the intricacy of the program, organizations may be reluctant to utilize the CIPP model; however, because of its ability to look at a program holistically, it is a more comprehensive model than some others. It is also possible for organizations to utilize components of the CIPP model rather than attempting to complete all phases of the model.

In 2013, Tokmak, Baturay and Fadde used the CIPP model to evaluate an online master's program titled Fuzzy Logic. The researchers used participant surveys to determine that the majority of the 60% of responders believed the course did not fully meet their needs (Tokmak et al., 2013). Based on their findings, the program was redesigned and reevaluated to determine that adequate improvements were made to better the Fuzzy Logic program in order to meet participant needs (Tokmak et al., 2013).

Input-intervention-output (IIO) model. The IIO model is similar to the CIPP model but requires more qualitative data and usually spans a longer period of time (Leahy et al., 2009). The input phase of the IIO model includes demographic and other personal participant data that are not included in the CIPP model. These data are continuously tracked over an extended period of time. In the intervention phase, services delivered are tracked. In the output phase, the precise goals set during the development of the program are tracked to determine the extent to which they were successfully achieved (Rossi et al., 1999). "IIO provides a useful framework to organize variables for display, and to

guide the analysis of outcomes, particularly in relation to large data sets” (Leahy et al., 2009, p. 75). Since this model is more statistical by nature, it is best suited for longitudinal quantitative evaluation rather than determining qualitative evaluation.

In a 2006 study, Johnson, Dow, Lynch, and Hermann conducted research to determine the significance of clinical changes in rehabilitation research. Johnson et al. determined that rehabilitation is an IIO model because regardless of settings and participants, there is an input phase where individual assessments are taken, an intervention phase where appropriate treatments are provided based on the knowledge garnered in the input phase, and an output phase where desired consequences of treatment are measured to determine treatment success. Therefore, this model of evaluation is effective in use to determine effectiveness in rehabilitation programming.

Walker Model. The modern version of the Walker Model, also commonly referred to as the Naturalistic Model, combines a community-based approach with an empowerment model to work for ongoing improvement to programming based on continuous evaluation and reflective practices (Rossi et al., 1999). The original Walker Model established in 1971 consisted of setting initial goals, designing modes of measuring those goals, statements of standards and expectations for program leaders, and measures of program participant satisfaction (Walker, 1971). While this model produces highly adaptive and effective programs, it is time consuming to conduct and requires a highly structured and consistent framework for the evaluation network to run according to the stringent guidelines. The programs also must be highly adaptable in order to change in response to the frequent evaluation results.

The Peckham, Inc., an organization stationed in Lansing, Michigan, added

regimented analysis that takes place three times a year throughout various departments within the organization to obtain a thorough view of the program from various angles (Leahy et al., 2009). Participants in the program also have a say concerning needed improvements. Community forums help to illicit feedback from possible participants and concerned citizens who might be impacted by programming. Programs are constantly changed or improved upon based on the frequent evaluation results that flood in from all levels of involvement (Leahy et al., 2009).

Kirkpatrick Model. The Kirkpatrick Model is most frequently used for training programs. The Kirkpatrick Model evaluates training programs based on “four separate levels: reaction (how training participants react to the training), behavior (the extent to which change in behavior occurs) and results (the final results of the training)” (Bates, 2004, p. 341). The model is simple, flexible, and easy to use; so it is popular when evaluating training programs. The evaluation model is easily adaptable and can take into consideration both qualitative and quantitative measures. One drawback of the Kirkpatrick Model is that it is very vague and is really more of a framework than a formal model (Bates, 2004).

In 2014, Van Sloten used the Kirkpatrick Model to predict Navy landing signal officer performance based on evaluation of the training program. Van Sloten examined “trainee satisfaction and learning reactions, learning and post-training job performance behaviors, and a combination of satisfaction reactions plus learning compared to job performance behavior” (p. ii). Using the model, Van Sloten was ultimately able to measure areas of success within the training program as well as to find several areas of improvement the training program coordinators might need to consider.

The Project Excellence Model. The Project Excellence Model was developed in the late 1990s to fill a need for a “management model that helps project managers deal with large and complex projects” (Westerveld, 2002, p. 1). Because many models were developed to evaluate programs with permanence or yet-to-be determined end dates, this model was designed to evaluate projects that are short term in scope (Westerveld, 2002). The Project Excellence Model is built upon the UFE model and builds a connection between participating agencies (Madaus et al., 1996). This model measures six key areas: project results in budget, schedule, and quality; appreciation by the client; appreciation by project personnel; appreciation by users; appreciation by contracting partners; and appreciation by stakeholders (Westerveld, 2002). The model measures results by organizing the project into six areas: leadership and team, policy and strategy, stakeholder management, resources, contracting, and project management (including scheduling, budget, organization, quality, information, and risks; Westerveld, 2002).

In 2013, Hajrovic, Milacic, and Nicic introduced the Project Excellence Model into the international division of labor in Serbia where there were increasing demands for projects that would produce high-quality but low-cost goods that could be created or obtained through temporary organizations. In an effort to maintain high-quality products that exceed customer expectations, the Project Excellence Model was adopted to evaluate these temporary organization projects and the evaluation results were used to present awards to successful projects (Hajrovic et al., 2013). The awards system based on the model was proven successful and continued to be adopted in subsequent years.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Program

The FAST program was conceived by a member of the school system's Secondary Schools EC Transition Team. While the district has had a strong program in place to support all students during the transition planning and preparation process for high school students participating in the Occupational Course of Study for several years, exceptional children enrolled in courses on the Future Ready Course of Study track receive inconsistent and sparse transition preparation and support. The purpose of the FAST program is to lessen discrepancy of services for Future Ready track at-risk students who may be particularly prone to falter during their transition from high school to life after graduation. The concept was to provide intense support for this group of students (identified by risk factors of low standard achievement test performance, multiple suspensions or alternative placements, attendance issues, failure of multiple courses, ELLs, teen parenthood, placement on the autism spectrum, or other significant impacting factors). Because these students have needs beyond the typical students with a disability, it is important to provide additional layers of support for them so they are more likely to graduate equipped with skills and knowledge needed to cope with the world they face after high school graduation.

The FAST program is intended to provide support through face-to-face instruction, digital instruction, specialized scheduling with an altered graduation track, mentorship opportunities, and real-world experiences that will provide additional training for enrolled students. The coordinators of the FAST program created sheltered Study Skills classes in which only FAST participants were enrolled whenever possible. These

classes were taught by licensed EC teachers with assistance from district level transition coaches. These FAST Study Skills classes also utilized a district provided computer program that provides transition assessments, interest inventories, and transition training for the enrolled students. In conjunction with targeted school guidance counselors and parental support, FAST program coordinators personally scheduled high school courses each semester for program participants. These students, because of their academic struggles, will participate in an altered math track with fewer core math courses and more math-themed CTE courses that can be counted as math credits according to North Carolina graduation requirement policy (NCDPI, 2017). FAST coordinators plan to initiate a mentorship program into the FAST program experience that will begin upon enrollment in the program as freshmen and support the students through graduation. Finally, the FAST coordinators hope to provide program participants with at least one volunteer experience that is community based and will provide students with both work experience and skills that can be helpful in future searches for employment.

Program participants. The targeted population for this program was at-risk students with disabilities who had an IEP and who were current or rising freshmen at a targeted school participating in the FAST program. These students were identified by EC caseworkers and guidance counselors at the five target high schools and the feeder middle schools for those five high schools. While at-risk students meeting the criteria were identified at all high schools and feeder middle schools in the district, students at high schools with less than 20 identified FAST eligible students received only consultative services which were not evaluated in this study. Beginning in year two of the FAST program, two additional high schools obtained the 20 or more student

requirement to move from consultative support to full program support. These three schools were not included in this study, as the focus was on the first 2 years of implementation and 2017-2018 was the first year of full program support at those schools.

To be eligible to participate in FAST programming, students were required to be on the Future Ready Course of Study graduation track, be classified as a special education student with an IEP, and have at least three at-risk factors. The at-risk factors were (a) EOC achievement levels I or II, (b) alternate setting placements or multiple suspensions, (c) attendance issues, (d) multiple class failures, (e) Limited English Proficiency identification, (f) pregnant or already a parent, (g) identified as being on the Autism spectrum, and (h) other risk factors that have met with program coordinator approval. Any student with an IEP on the Future Ready Course of Study graduation track who also had three or more at-risk factors was identified and classified as a FAST student; however, only those at the targeted schools (five in the first year and seven in the second year) received the full program. Once students were identified as a FAST student, they were allowed to remain in the program and receive FAST benefits until their graduation, even if their at-risk identifiers changed or if they moved to a different school in the district.

The five target high schools chosen for participation in the FAST program and thus studied for the focus of this study were selected because they had, at the time of program creation, 15 or more students qualifying for participation. Table 1 shows the numbers of qualifying students at each target high school based on risk factor identification for year one, and Table 4 shows the data for year two of the original five

target schools.

Table 4

2016-2017 FAST At-Risk Identified Characteristics by School

Priority School	Achievement Level I or II	Alternative Placement or Multiple Suspensions	Attendance Issues	Failing Multiple Classes	LEP/ELL Status	Pregnant Students	AU Spectrum	Other Risk Factors
School 1	11	11	2	8	3	0	0	6
School 2	14	6	11	12	2	1	1	14
School 3	8	8	8	8	3	0	0	0
School 4	23	5	10	9	5	0	1	6
School 5	16	2	10	14	7	0	1	5

Table 5

2017-2018 FAST At-Risk Identified Characteristics by School

Priority School	Achievement Level I or II	Alternative Placement or Multiple Suspensions	Attendance Issues	Failing Multiple Classes	LEP/ELL Status	Pregnant Students	AU Spectrum	Other Risk Factors
School 1	19	15	17	15	2	0	0	7
School 2	18	5	8	13	5	0	3	6
School 3	43	19	20	22	13	0	0	15
School 4	33	8	14	17	6	0	2	14
School 5	36	4	15	28	20	0	1	14

While the FAST program coordinators implemented both full program services and consultative program services and all students classified by the risk-factor identification formula were labeled as FAST students across the district's 17 high schools, this study's evaluation only focused on the implementation of the full FAST program at the original five target high schools. The FAST coordinators expressed that these schools and students showcased the greatest need and therefore received the bulk of the program's resources. Because the target schools were made a priority of the program, the program evaluation only focused on the implementation of the full FAST program at the five target schools. As the FAST program grows and expands implementation across

the district, further evaluation should be conducted.

Study participants. For the purpose of this evaluation, EC teachers and other staff members involved in the FAST program, either through delivery of program instruction or through supervision of identified at-risk students, were provided a survey to complete and were offered the chance to participate in a focus group. Participants were confined to staff members at the original five target high schools. Participants included EC teachers, EC caseworkers, graduation coaches, community liaisons, and guidance staff members depending on how the target school has integrated FAST programming at its site. Program coordinators were asked to complete a separate survey and follow-up interview. Program coordinators were provided a consent form prior to the interview as shown in Appendix A.

Participation in the survey and focus group was voluntary yet encouraged. Since site-based staff members had the greatest insight on the success of implementation as well as the functionality of integrated components of the FAST program, their input was crucial to understanding the successes and areas for future growth that existed at each of the five target schools. Their feedback was beneficial to the future of the program as it provided valuable yet confidential feedback to program coordinators and district staff members who oversaw the program. The focus group provided more detailed information about survey results and gave the opportunity for facilitators of the program to voice issues not addressed in the survey.

While FAST student participants were at the center of the program, their input was not considered in this program evaluation. The majority of the participants were minors and their anonymity and the confidentiality of their at-risk factors were

maintained with fidelity. Throughout the evaluation, the researcher avoided collecting any demographic or otherwise identifying data that might risk exposing participating students. While student opinions of programming are valuable, the right of student confidentiality outweighed the benefit of surveying students at the time of the study. Instead, their thoughts and feelings of the program were monitored and expressed generically by site-based personnel informally. As this was an evaluation of implementation and best practices, the lack of student feedback did negatively impact the study.

Evaluation Model

This program evaluation utilized the CIPP model as updated by Daniel L. Stufflebeam in 2007 (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). Because the CIPP model was designed to evaluate programs with long-term, sustainable goals, it was appropriate to apply to the FAST program which required a minimum of a 4-year application to participating students to fulfill the program's ultimate goals. Due to time limitations and unknown variables in the future of the FAST program, this study focused on implementation of the FAST program in its first year and continued fidelity in its second year.

Stufflebeam's CIPP model was first developed in the late 1960s as a new way to approach program evaluation (Madaus et al., 1996). Stufflebeam's goal was to make program evaluation a formal approach that would yield results that could help decision makers better the programs they studied while answering key questions that stakeholders may pose. In response to increasing government accountability legislations, the need for educational programming that was both academically effective as well as cost effective

grew. With that, increasing need for affordable, timely, and accurate evaluation grew. Stufflebeam's original model met many needs and has been expanded upon by subsequent researchers. Its most refined version, published by Stufflebeam and Shinkfield in 2007, has been utilized by many school systems and social programs as an evaluation model to understand the value and determine the worth of programs.

The CIPP model is based on four primary components: context, input, process, and product evaluations. The product evaluation also consists of impact evaluation, effectiveness evaluation, sustainability evaluation, and transportability evaluation (Stufflebeam & Shinkfield, 2007). Each component can be utilized in a formative evaluation role where "prospective application of CIPP information assist[s] decision making and quality assurance" (Stufflebeam, 2003, p. 96) as well as a summative evaluation role where "retrospective use of CIPP information sum[s] up the program's merit, worth, probity and significance" (Stufflebeam, 2003, p. 96).

Context evaluation. In the context component of the CIPP model, needs are assessed, assets are noted, and environmental factors are taken into consideration. Formative evaluation in the context phase focuses on setting appropriate goals and ranking those goals by level of importance as determined in a thorough needs assessment. This is also the phase in which needed interventions are determined to help fulfil goals. Summative evaluation in the context phase allows for a comparison among prioritized goals and needs, areas of concern, resources, and opportunities (Stufflebeam, 2003). Context evaluation gives programs direction by answering the question, "what should we do?"

In this evaluation, the context evaluation phase included a summary of a needs

assessment informally completed by district transition specialists during the planning phases of the FAST program. This phase also included program and planning information gathered through program coordinator interviews, handouts, and monthly stakeholder meetings.

Input evaluation. In the input component of a CIPP evaluation, research is done to determine which existing strategies can be utilized to help meet program goals. Plans for implementation and program functioning are considered in conjunction with the budgetary constraints. Formative evaluation in the input phase focuses on choosing the best strategy or program to meet the needs of the organization following a careful study of existing strategies or programs with already proven track records. Program plans are studied to determine how the program should be put into place. Summative evaluation in the input phase involves “comparison of the program’s strategy, design and budget to those of critical competitors and to the targeted needs of beneficiaries” (Stufflebeam, 2003, p. 97). Input evaluation gives programs focus by answering the question, “how should we do what needs to be done?”

For this study, input evaluation included budget information for the program, personnel allotments and chains of command, and coordinator interviews that spoke of the origin of implemented strategies and resources.

Process evaluation. The process component of a CIPP evaluation oversees the program from its beginning stages and through daily functioning. Data are gathered to determine how the program is working. Formative evaluation in the process phase guides program leaders as they put their program plan into place. Summative evaluation in this phase provides detailed notes on how the program is functioning, especially cost and

result records. A comparison between the proposed design and the actual program processes is made. The process evaluation phase answers the question, “is the program being implemented correctly?”

The process evaluation phase is one of the primary phases that was focused on in this study. Process evaluation was measured by a survey provided to both program coordinator and site-based staff members involved in the FAST program implementation. The survey, FAST Transition Support Survey, was designed to gauge the effectiveness and fidelity of implementation as a whole and at each of the five original targeted schools. Process evaluation was further explored in a focus group of willing site-based personnel. The focus group gathered more in-depth data about the program’s implementation, successes, and areas of concern. Finally, program coordinator interviews were also used to help clarify how daily functioning of the program was monitored and reported.

Product evaluation. The product component of the CIPP evaluation model determines the effectiveness of the program in meeting its goals. It assesses the value of the program by comparing used resources to results and determining the worth of the program. Formative evaluation in the product phase guides program leaders “for continuing, modifying, adopting, or terminating the effort” (based on assessing outcomes and side effects; Stufflebeam, 2003, p. 97). Summative evaluation in this phase compares program results – both intended and unintended – to resource allocation. The results are measured against the context, inputs, and processes. Product evaluation answers the question, “did the program work?”

Product evaluation can be further broken down into impact, effectiveness,

sustainability, and transportability. Impact evaluation determines whether the program reached its intended audience. It answers the question, “were the appropriate beneficiaries reached by the program?” Effectiveness evaluation details the outcomes and determines if the outcomes sufficiently meet program expectations. It answers the question, “were participants’ needs met?” Sustainability evaluation assesses the ability of the program to continue to meet needs and obtain desired results over extended time periods. It answers the question, “were the benefits to participants maintained over time?” Transportability evaluation determines if the program could be utilized in other environments beyond its initial implementation site. It answers the question, “can this program be duplicated elsewhere with similar results?”

In this study, product evaluation was determined by measuring the research-based best practices in transition programming that were incorporated into the implementation of the FAST program. Product evaluation was done predictively and was also a primary focus of this study. While long-term goals of the program could not be measured at the time of the study, short-term goals and practices were evaluated. This was done with the same aforementioned FAST Transition Support Survey that was distributed to program coordinators and site-based staff members. The focus group previously mentioned also lent clarity into short-term successes and incorporation of research-based transition practices known to yield postgraduation success for at-risk students with disabilities.

Product evaluation focused on impact ascertained whether all identified at-risk exceptional children were properly identified and serviced through FAST support at the five original target high schools. Schools were examined to determine if identifiers used to locate FAST students were being used at each site to find and place the correct

audience for FAST support. Product evaluation focused on effectiveness was used to predict if future needs of FAST students were being evaluated and if goals were being set. Survey and focus group data helped determine if student transition goals were being worked towards through IEP incorporation and FAST support. Product evaluation with a focus on sustainability was evaluated by monitoring student mobility and retention rates. It was also measured by plans and provisions for FAST program continuation in budgeting, staffing, and other resources. Product evaluation focused on transportability must be explored in future studies as feedback on the implementation into other schools is gathered and plans to move or grow the program are discussed by district leaders.

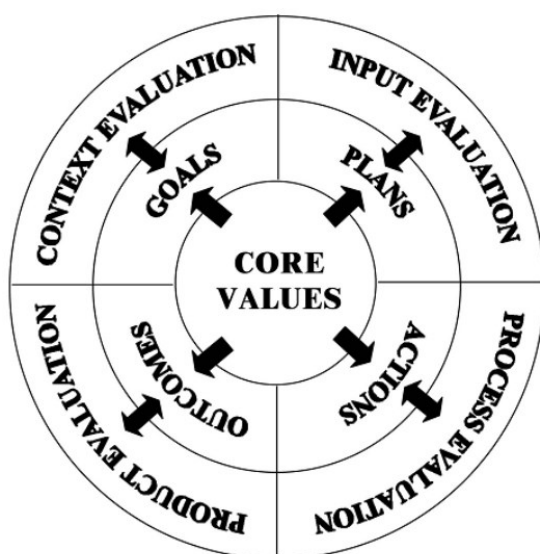


Figure 2. Key Components of the Stufflebeam's (2003) CIPP Evaluation Model.

Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study to collect data was the FAST Transition Support Survey. The survey was created from two documents, the first one titled "Predictor Implementation School/District Self-Assessment" (Predictor) was published

by the National Post-School Outcomes Center at the University of Oregon (NPSOC) and NSTTAC at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte in December 2015. The researcher received permission to use this instrument by both publishing bodies in March 2016. Documentation of this permission is included in Appendix B. The second document used to create the survey is a public document titled “NTACT Evaluation Toolkit” (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition [NTACT], 2016) which provides a framework for evaluating transition programs. This document, built as a reference to schools or districts designing transition programs, is based on Kohler’s and other experts’ collective research in the area of secondary transition. The questions used from the tool are those advised by the authors for use in determining transition program effectiveness in both practice and implementation areas.

Focus group questions were written to garner clarification of information and more extensive data based on the same documents used to create the survey. Questions were aligned with the Predictor details and Kohler’s *Taxonomy*.

The Predictor was created based on the work of Kohler’s *Taxonomy for Transition Programming* (Kohler, 1996). The choice of the *Taxonomy* as a model for survey questions was based on Kohler’s extensive research and prestige in the field of secondary transition for persons with disabilities. Her work is most representative of industry best practices and research-based strategies, and Dr. Kohler is currently seen as an expert in the field. The Predictor is a useful instrument to use as a guide for the survey creation as it incorporates all elements of Kohler’s *Taxonomy* thoroughly yet concisely. The Predictor is also a useful instrument as it aligns with required transition components for secondary student IEPs as mandated by state and district policy (i.e., training,

instruction, employment, independent living skills, community experiences, related services, and functional vocational evaluation). An example of North Carolina IEP transition requirements is included in Appendix C. Further, as a published and tested instrument, its use lends credibility to the survey. A copy of the Predictor is included in Appendix D.

Reliability and validity. While the survey instrument used in this program evaluation was designed based on two published and research-driven documents – the Predictor (NPSOC & NSTTAC, 2015) and NTACT Evaluation Toolkit (NTACT, 2016), the researcher wished to provide additional validity by having program coordinators review the survey and test its validity. The two coordinators were emailed an online version and a PDF version of the survey to review it for errors or areas of possible bias. Both coordinators are district-level employees who oversee secondary transition for students with disabilities and both coordinators have knowledge of North Carolina a district policy regarding secondary transition for students with disabilities. One coordinator recommended a change in language of the original terminology from “program directors” to “program coordinators.” The second coordinator recommended changing the phrasing of “occupational courses” since this district has a separate course of study called Occupational Course of Study which has its own set of courses for students with more academic- and behavior-limiting disabilities than those involved in the FAST program. After consulting with the coordinator, the researcher and the coordinator settled on the term “career readiness courses” instead of “occupational courses” which conveys the same idea with less confusing terminology.

Procedures

Design. The survey is comprised of two types of questions: open response items where a text box is provided and Likert scale items where respondents can make choices along a spectrum from negative or not demonstrated to positive or demonstrated. The survey is divided into four sections, each section appearing as its own page. The sections are school site information, FAST support information, FAST transition practices, and FAST support feedback. Although the survey was delivered via an online platform (SurveyMonkey.com), a PDF copy is included in Appendix E.

Section 1 of the survey was school site information. Questions 1 and 2 in this section asked for the respondent's job and school site in an open-ended format below instructions that stated that the information was confidential and would not be used to identify respondents.

Section 2 of the survey was FAST support information. Question 3 in this section used a Likert scale to determine how many FAST students each respondent worked with, and Question 4 used a Likert scale to determine how frequently the respondents worked with those FAST students. Question 5 used a Likert scale to determine the attendance rate of the respondent at the monthly program meetings (called stakeholder meetings). Question 6 used a Likert scale to determine the frequency of consultations with the site's transition coordinator. These questions were designed to measure the level of support the respondents provided to FAST program students and the level of support each respondent received from program coordinators.

Section 3 of the survey was FAST transition practices. Questions 7-22 in this section were all based on the Predictor (NPSOC & NSTTAC, 2015). Each question was

formatted in the same way; a definition of the key element from the Predictor was provided, then an open-ended comment box was provided for the respondent to explain how that element was demonstrated at his or her school. The measured elements were career awareness, community experiences, exit exams and diploma status, inclusion in general education, interagency collaboration, occupational courses, work experience, parent involvement, program of study, self-care/independent living skills, self-determination, social skills, student support, transition programs, vocational education, and work study programs. These questions were designed to gauge which established best practices were being implemented at each school and the degree to which they were made available for FAST students.

Section 4 of the survey was FAST support feedback. Each of these questions was adapted from the recommended questions presented in the NTACT Evaluation Toolkit (NTACT, 2016). Questions 23-45 in this section were all presented in the same format with an opinion-based question and a continuous Likert scale response that had negative responses on the left side of the scale, neutral responses in the center, and positive responses on the right side of the scale. The questions in this section were designed to gauge the level of perceived value and usefulness site-based teachers and staff members attributed to the FAST program. Questions 23-28 addressed Level 1 of the NTACT Evaluation Toolkit and pertained to the “quality, usefulness and relevance” of the program (NTACT, 2016, p. 20). Questions 29-31 addressed Level 2 and pertained to the program’s “participant learning outcomes” (NTACT, 2016, p. 21). Questions 32-36 addressed Level 3 and pertained to “organizational policies, procedures and support” (NTACT, 2016, p. 21). Questions 37-45 addressed Level 5 and pertained to “in-school

and post-school outcomes” (NTACT, 2016, p. 23). Level 4, program implementation, and Level 6, evaluation use and dissemination, were not addressed by this survey and were measured to the best degree possible at the program’s second year during the focus group where more detailed responses and feedback were gathered (NTACT, 2016).

Data collection procedures. Upon district approval of the survey and study, the survey was delivered to all staff members involved with FAST students at the initial five target schools via school email addresses by transition department secretarial staff. The staff members were provided a link to click that directed them to the online version of the survey. The email, included in Appendix F, stated that the survey was optional, but participation was encouraged in an effort to better evaluate the program and give feedback to district staff members. The survey was deployed in May 2018, and respondents were given approximately 4 weeks to respond. Reminders were provided by transition coordinators and their staff via email and in person. Once the survey was closed, all data were collected by the researcher and disseminated to find trends, areas of strength, and areas of concern.

Based on the guidelines established in the NTACT Evaluation Toolkit (NTACT, 2016), a list of hypothetical focus group questions was developed. The focus group was held during the May 2018 stakeholder meeting which served as the monthly meeting of FAST school personnel. Participation was optional, and potential participants were notified that the focus group would be held during the stakeholder meeting via email by transition coordinators. In addition to school staff, district level staff members were present and were permitted to lend additional insight and clarification of program details.

Data analysis. Once the survey was closed to respondents, responses were

categorized and coded to determine what data trends existed. Thematic patterns found in responses were recorded to determine differences among target schools as well as overall program trends.

The focus group was recorded and then later transcribed to evaluate responses for further clarifying trends and site comparisons. Results of the survey and focus group were compared and contrasted against results found in the program coordinator interview and survey responses. An overview of the research is presented in Table 6.

Table 6

Overview of Research Methodology

Method of Collection	Type of Data	Information Source	Analysis Procedures	Interpretation Procedure & Criteria
Survey	Qualitative & Quantitative	Site-based staff members	Thematic content analysis	Median and Inter-Quartile Range for Likert scale items; Deductive Coding for open response
Focus group	Qualitative	Site-based staff members, district stakeholders, community service providers	Thematic content analysis	Deductive Coding
Interview	Qualitative	Program coordinators	Thematic content analysis	Deductive Coding

Professional Evaluation Standards

As recommended by NTACT (2016), the universal design was applied. This ensured that all persons with a disability had equal access to program evaluation components. The seven principles of universal design are “equitable use, flexibility in use, simple and intuitive use, perceptible information, tolerance for error, low physical effort, and size and space for approach and use” (Story, Mueller, & Mace, 1998, pp. 34-37). In addition, the researcher also reviewed and followed, to the best of her ability, *The*

Program Evaluation Standards: A Guide for Researchers and Evaluation Users (3rd ed.), which was recommended for educational researchers by the JCSEE (Yarbrough et al., 2011). This publication contains standards for educational evaluation that include utility, feasibility, propriety, accuracy, and accountability (Yarbrough et al., 2011).

Limitations and Delimitations

Although the researcher attempted to provide a thorough and holistic evaluation of the FAST secondary transition student support program, there were some limitations. One limitation was a lack of student data. While this was a program designed for the benefit of a specific population of special education students, no quantitative or qualitative student data were collected. This, in part, was due to school district restrictions on conducting research with students. Further, in weighing the benefits of potential exposure of confidential student information regarding student disability and at-risk identifying information, the researcher felt the need for student privacy outweighed the potential benefit of collecting student data at this point of the program's implementation. Once the program has been in place for 4 or more years and an entire cohort of students has experienced 4 or more years of FAST services, the need to collect student data will likely be more pressing and worth exposure of student data.

A second limitation of this study was a lack of information from other years of the program. Since the first year of implementation was a chaotic and busy time for program coordinators and school staff members learning the new transition support system, the researcher avoided burdening stakeholders with program evaluation instruments such as focus groups and surveys. Instead, the researcher attended monthly program meetings to take note of program development and monitor staff member feedback. In conjunction

with program coordinators, it was decided that the second year of implementation would yield more conclusive evidence of program strengths and limitations; however, since this study monitored feedback and practices of the program in year two of implementation, staff turnover between years one and two may have impacted results.

Another limitation to having only year two data was that it was too early in the program's execution to measure the long-term goals of the FAST program. For example, one program goal was to increase graduation rates for the targeted population of students with disabilities. While the year two data showed if students had dropped out of school at that point, it could not show successful graduation as years four and five data may show. The researcher and program coordinators discussed the possibility of reissuing the survey each year and incorporating new instruments into a future longitudinal study, but this particular study only shows data through year two and attempted to make predictions based on the current staff perceptions measured at that time.

A final limitation to the study was that the two new school sites added in year two of the program were not evaluated in this study. Because the researcher was employed at one of the newly added target schools, staff members at that school could not be included in the study due to district policy. Since one of the three newly added schools could not be evaluated, the researcher thought it best to only focus on the original five target schools at the time of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to provide a program evaluation of the FAST program which targets at-risk exceptional children on the Future Ready Course of Study graduation track. The program evaluation sought to determine the successfulness of implementation of a secondary transition program and the use of effective strategies within that program in the second year of the program's existence within a large school district in North Carolina.

The FAST program was first implemented in 2016-2017 in five traditional high schools that had 20 or more current or rising freshman students identified as both at risk and EC according to district and federal classification guidelines. The program continued to grow within those five original schools in the 2017-2018 year by adding at-risk exceptional children who were rising freshmen, repeating freshmen, rising sophomores, and repeating sophomores. The program also expanded to include two additional schools during its second year. The FAST program's primary long-term goal is to improve the post high school success rate of at-risk exceptional children from the Future Ready Course of Study pathway by instilling secondary transitional skills and support prior to graduation.

The researcher has compiled information about the FAST program from monthly stakeholder meetings, documents provided by program coordinators, information presented orally at EC meetings, surveys, a focus group, and interviews.

The researcher selected the CIPP evaluation model to determine the successfulness of contexts, inputs, processes, and products of the FAST program. The

researcher strived to use the information gathered regarding the CIPP elements to provide a holistic program evaluation that would better assist program stakeholders in planning as well as to provide further insight into the answers of the research questions at the heart of this evaluation.

The researcher collected data through the use of surveys, interviews, and a focus group in an attempt to answer the following research questions:

- How does FAST address the secondary transition needs of students in the district?
- How does FAST align with established best practices in the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities?
- How does FAST function in each priority school?

Context

The context component of this evaluation determined the problems that the FAST program was created to solve. The researcher wished to learn how program coordinators assessed student and programing needs, evaluated existing plans to determine a best fit for district needs and resources, and created an action plan (i.e., a plan to enact FAST). Interviews with program coordinators, email communications with the coordinators, and stakeholder meeting minutes were used to assist the researcher in compiling this information.

According to one of the FAST program coordinators (referred to as Coordinator A for anonymity), FAST is the result of many years of concerns from EC teachers, EC case managers, high school administrators, and parents. The concerns of these stakeholders were echoed in the data evaluated by Coordinator A. Graduation rates for Future Ready

Course of Study EC students collected over a 5-year period showed a gap between these students and their nondisabled peers as well as a gap between their more disabled peers who receive more intensive transitional support. Coordinator A also stated that Indicator 13 (the part of an EC student's IEP that addresses secondary transition through postsecondary planning) from previously studied years showed that secondary transition was a need among EC students on the Future Ready Course of Study. The district's Academy for Continuing Education (ACE), a team that works on dropout prevention, investigated the issue of at-risk, exceptional children on the Future Ready graduation track. At an EC division case manager's training meeting held on March 9, 2016, the dropout prevention director for the district presented the framework for the support system that would become FAST. Coordinator A and Coordinator B were then given the title of Future Ready transition coordinators. This established them as leaders of FAST and led to the development of the support system.

In planning the framework for FAST, Coordinator A and the ACE team were unable to find a current program that supported the specific population of students FAST wished to serve (Future Ready graduation tracked students who were both at risk and in the EC program) and thus relied heavily on the National Drop Out Prevention guidelines (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance, 2008) and additional research on best practices for dropout prevention. The team initially reviewed the district's Occupational Course of Study program (a program for students with cognitive and other disabilities that prohibit them from being served solely in inclusive settings which is geared towards preparing these students for the workforce as opposed to postsecondary education following high school graduation), as

this program provides tremendous transitional support and has much higher graduation rates than EC students in the Future Ready Course of Study. The team also evaluated the current involvement of EC Future Ready students in Career Center programming (a district vocational and STEM center where students can apply for programs that are geared towards more specific trades such as mechanics or culinary arts). The team determined that the foundational courses required by North Carolina's Future Ready Course of Study for graduation (including math, English, science, and history requirements) were those that provided the most difficulty for EC students, especially those students who have other risk factors in addition to their disability. Frequent failure of these foundational or "core" classes put this subgroup behind on their graduation track which excluded them from participation at the Career Center (which requires a minimum GPA and other examples of student success for admission). This also meant that this subgroup spends more time repeating core classes for taking foundational level core classes in preparation for the core classes. Because of this, there is less time for these students to take CTE classes or elective classes that may align with their postsecondary interests. The team reported frustration of failure, the boredom of a schedule packed with difficult core classes, and a minimal focus on secondary transition all lead to high dropout rates and decreased postsecondary success of this subgroup.

With input from district EC directors, school-based EC staff, and concerned stakeholders, the framework from FAST was pieced together from various sources and ideas derived from a vast, collective educational experience. The coordinators and the district ACE team used the Dropout Prevention Intervention Framework (U.S. Department of Labor, 2016) as their primary source of guidance in constructing FAST.

Upon approval, Coordinator A's drafted framework began to take shape into a structured level of support that could be added into the existing structure of traditional high schools with the highest levels of need in the district. At the conclusion of the spring 2015 academic year, a second coordinator, referred to as Coordinator B, was added to the district's EC transition staff with a primary duty of coordinating and implementing the FAST program with Coordinator A, who served as a half-time FAST coordinator.

Thus, the FAST program took shape with the purpose of addressing the problem of the gap (first in graduation rate and later in postsecondary success) between EC students on the Future Ready pathway and nondisabled peers in the same pathway as well as more disabled peers in the Occupational Course of Study pathway. The framework of the FAST program was created to support this subgroup by utilizing current best practices and ideas generated by district employees and garnered from research in dropout prevention practices, leaning heavily on the Drop Out Prevention Guide published by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Evaluation and Regional Assistance (2008).

Input

The input component of this evaluation defined the planning protocol, allotment of resources, and creation of the implementation plan for the FAST program. The researcher wished to learn how program coordinators determined how to attack the defined problems of lower graduation rate and decreased postsecondary success for the defined subgroup. For this component of the evaluation, the researcher compiled information about budgets, staffing, and origin of strategies and resources from coordinator interviews, program stakeholder meeting minutes, electronic communication

with program coordinators, information gathered from oral presentations by EC staff members, and outside vendor presentations to EC staff members involved with site-based implementation of FAST programming.

Because of increasing budgetary restrictions each academic year, the FAST program was not given its own budget. Instead, the two coordinators were absorbed into the EC transition programming and staffing area of the budget. Coordinator A served as a half-time FAST coordinator in addition to her previous position, and Coordinator B was hired as a new member of the district EC team. According to coordinators, any resources that were to be developed or utilized for FAST programming had to fit within the predetermined transition budget created each academic year by the district. This district's transition funding includes the transitional needs and programming for all exceptional children in the district, including those on alternative high school pathways beyond the Future Ready Course of Study targeted for the FAST program. This meant that the primary FAST coordinator had to be both mindful and thrifty in planning resource allotment for FAST programming. This also meant that in addition to the duties involved in planning and implementing the FAST program, both coordinators perform additional transition responsibilities for the district in an effort to justify the salary allotment. Because of the restrictions, the coordinators, with the support of EC district administrators, determined that no budget would be allotted for the FAST program beyond the coordinator salaries and the purchase of Virtual Job Shadow (Strivven Media, LLC), an online software that is used only by FAST program participants. Coordinators indicated that additional funding needs must be absorbed by school budgets at each site upon the approval of that site's principal.

Likewise, personnel allotments for FAST are limited by budgetary restraints; therefore, existing staff present in each of the targeted schools must be utilized to implement and maintain FAST. As school staffing varies at each of the original five targeted schools, FAST support varies at each site. For example, coordinators reported that School 2 has a paid position called a Family Engagement Coordinator whose duty is to serve as a liaison between the school and parents/guardians. School 2 utilizes this position to provide additional support for FAST students; however, this position does not exist in School 4. Similarly, coordinators indicated that the numbers of FAST identified students vary among sites and therefore the number of designated EC resource teachers needed to facilitate instruction and provide support varies from school to school; however, regardless of site staffing, the FAST program utilizes a simple chain of command. Schools 4 and 5 are assigned to Coordinator A. Schools 1, 2, and 3 are assigned to Coordinator B. The coordinators are responsible for training site-based staff members at each of their sites. Additionally, coordinators stated that they must provide weekly transitional lessons and support to the FAST students at their assigned schools. They are responsible for the scheduling of FAST students currently enrolled in each targeted high school and scheduling rising FAST eligible students from the middle schools that feed into each of the targeted high schools. The FAST coordinators must likewise provide support to the site-based staff working with the FAST students at each of the targeted schools. The FAST coordinators indicated that they are responsible for reporting information at the monthly program stakeholder meetings which are also attended by school staff members and outside agencies working with FAST students. FAST coordinators report directly to the secondary EC director for the district who in

turn reports to the executive director of EC. Figure 3 provides an organizational chart which shows the chain of command for the FAST program.

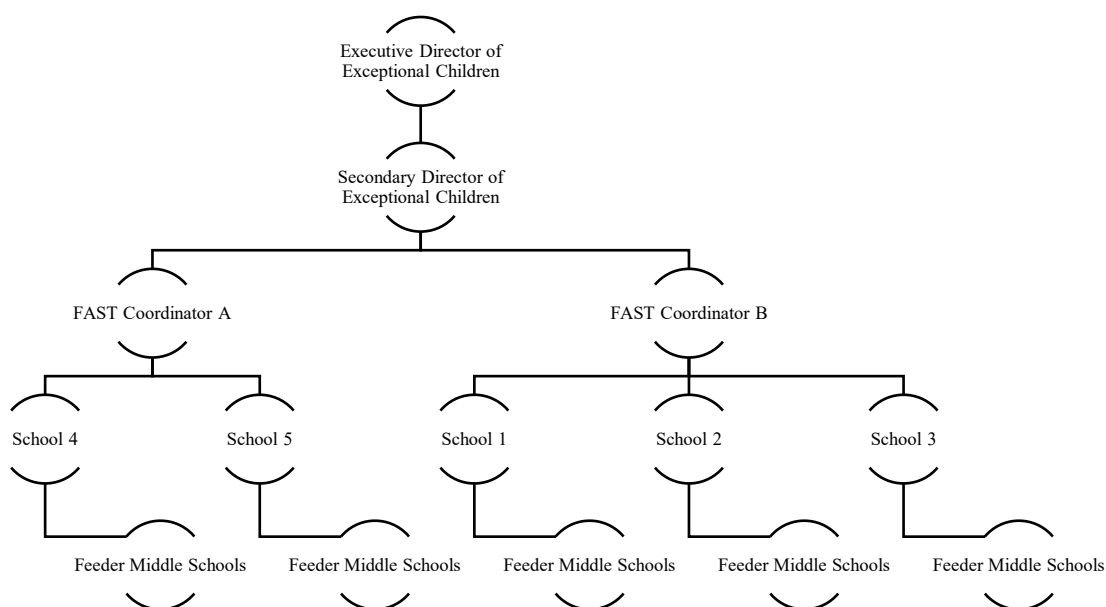


Figure 3. Chain of Command for FAST.

As addressed in the context component of this evaluation, the origin of the FAST program cannot be traced to an existing program or list of strategies. Coordinator A stated that she and the founding team that created the original FAST framework draft pieced the support system together based heavily on their collective educational knowledge and experiences with the targeted subgroup. They also utilized many of the guidelines and strategies introduced in the U.S. Department of Education's (2008) Dropout Prevention IES Practice Guide. Once the drafted framework was approved by the dropout prevention director for the district in spring 2015, the district began the hiring process to fill the positions for the two FAST coordinators. Coordinator A was hired

half-time, and Coordinator B was hired full-time for FAST. The two coordinators stated that they began work on making the drafted framework a reality and creating an implementation plan for FAST. The coordinators delegated sites and program responsibilities between themselves as well. By the time the researcher met with the two coordinators, implementation and site staff training had begun.

The FAST coordinators defined at-risk factors based on the National Dropout Prevention guidelines. The risk factors are

- EOC achievement levels of I or II;
- alternative placement or multiple suspensions;
- attendance issues; failure of multiple courses;
- LEP or ELL status; pregnancy or teen parent;
- Autism; and
- other factors approved by FAST coordinators.

The transition coordinators asked all traditional high schools, in conjunction with the high schools' feeder middle schools, to determine approximately how many rising and current freshmen would be classified as at risk in three or more categories. The coordinators reported that they decided to begin the 2016-2017 school year by providing full FAST services to the five schools with the highest population of at-risk EC freshmen/rising freshmen in the Future Ready Course of Study. Other schools were instructed to label and track progress of FAST students, and the two coordinators planned to provide a consultative layer of service to these other schools.

The coordinators, with the assistance of school personnel, scheduled each FAST student to provide the best opportunity for increased success possible within site

scheduling restraints. The coordinators indicated that while the original plan was to put all students on an alternative math track, this was not possible at all sites or for all students due to staffing and scheduling restrictions. Despite this setback, the coordinators did take special care, with the assistance of school guidance counselors, to be particularly mindful of math course selection, opting for foundational or introductory math courses as much as possible. In addition, each attempted to create a course section for a FAST Study Skills course. FAST coordinators noted that Study Skills courses in this district are courses designed for exceptional children to receive remediation and academic reinforcement from EC teachers. They can be assigned daily or on alternating days and are not required courses for EC students. Again, scheduling constraints limited the ability of scheduling only FAST freshmen to one or more isolated FAST Study Skills courses in most sites. Instead, most schools had other EC students who were not FAST freshmen enrolled in the section and some schools had FAST students spread throughout more than one section of the course. Despite scheduling setbacks and changes to proposed math scheduling, the two coordinators relayed that they did move forward with implementation in the original five target schools in the fall 2016 semester.

The primary venue for transition support was planned to be the FAST Study Skills class. Coordinators instructed EC teachers providing instruction to divide the 90-minute block courses into three components: a focus on curriculum support for current courses, a focus on IEP goals, and a focus on secondary transition. The transition component was delivered primarily through the Virtual Job Shadow software. The coordinators indicated that they agreed to follow a biweekly schedule in which they visited their assigned schools at least twice a week to provide direct instruction and

support to FAST students through the students' Study Skills courses.

In the 2017-2018 school year, rising and repeat sophomores were added to the FAST program. The coordinators reported that they repeated the identifying and scheduling process with both rising/repeating freshmen and sophomores in each of the original five targeted schools. Students who were classified as FAST students in the 2016-2017 school year remained in the program regardless of any change in risk factors or movement within the school system. Each coordinator also received one additional traditional high school to her caseload, as two schools had 15 or more rising/repeating freshman with two or more risk factors identified prior to the 2017-2018 school year. These two schools were serviced just as the original five target schools were in the 2016-2017 school year.

According to coordinators, the stated plan for growth and continued implementation for the original five targeted schools in the 2018-2019 school year is to include rising/repeating juniors in the FAST program. Juniors will receive consultative services from FAST coordinators rather than biweekly direct instruction so state government support agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Pre-Employment Transition Services can utilize Study Skills class time to provide services to FAST students who qualify for services. Coordinators indicated that they had originally planned to provide intense support to all FAST students for the duration of their high school careers, but growth in FAST student enrollment caused the plan to deviate from its original design. Without an increasing budget or staff, the coordinators had to amend the plans for the continued growth of the program and level of support, though the goals are unaltered.

Process

The process component of this evaluation attempted to determine the effectiveness and fidelity of FAST implementation among the original five targeted schools and holistically. This information was gathered through a survey delivered electronically to FAST staff members and a focus group composed of various staff members involved with FAST students across the district. It also sought to clarify how daily functioning of FAST is monitored and reported to invested stakeholders and coordinators. This information was gathered through coordinator interviews and electronic communication. The process concerns were addressed through measurement of Research Questions 1 and 3.

Research Question 1: How does FAST address the secondary transition needs of the students in the district? This question was measured first through a survey provided to all site-based staff members who work directly with FAST students or the FAST program. The FAST Transition Support Survey (Spring 2018) was deployed by the secretary of the district's EC transition department so as to protect the anonymity of the staff members; therefore, the researcher is unaware of how many staff members received the survey. However, the responses, according to demographic questions, were provided by staff members in the following positions (as seen in Table 7) and were representative of the following target schools (as seen in Table 8).

Table 7

Job Descriptions of Survey Respondents

Job Titles	Number of Participants
School-Based Student Support	1
School-Based EC Teacher	4
School-Based Administrator	1
Support Agency Representative	1
Total	7

Table 8

Site Schools of Survey Respondents

Target School Site	Number of Participants
School 1	0
School 2	1
School 3	0
School 4	1
School 5	3
Other	2
Total	7

Questions 8-23 of the survey were open-ended response items based on categories taken from the Predictor (NPSOC & NSTTAC, 2015), which was constructed from *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* (Kohler et al., 2016). The questions defined each category, then asked the respondent to provide examples or explanations of how the category is addressed at his or her school site. The categories were career awareness, community experiences, exit exams/diploma status, inclusion, interagency collaboration, career readiness courses, work experience, parent involvement, program of study, self-care/independent living skills, self-determination, social skills, student support, transition program, vocational education, and work study program.

Following the close of the survey, the researcher coded responses using the categories and subcategories of predictors of postschool success defined and titled in

Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 (Kohler et al., 2016). The first category was student-focused planning which was broken down into IEP development, planning strategies, and student participation. The second category was student development which was broken down into assessment; academic skills; life, social, and emotional skills; employment and occupational skills; student supports; and instructional context. The third category was interagency collaboration which was broken down into collaborative framework and collaborative service delivery. The fourth category was family engagement which was broken down into family involvement, family empowerment, and family preparation. The final category was program structures which was divided into program characteristics, program evaluation, strategic planning, policies and procedures, resource development and allocation, and school climate.

Tables 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 show the incidents of reporting of each subcategory from the themed questions in the survey. Each incident of a subcategory was counted so that one response may have several cited incidents from one or more subcategories. These data are also cited for Research Question 3 under the product component of the CIPP model.

Table 9

Survey Reporting Incidents of Student-Focused Planning

Survey Question Theme	IEP Development	Planning Strategies	Student Participation
Career Awareness Provisions	0	0	0
Community Experience Provisions	0	0	0
Exit Exam/Graduation Preparation	0	0	0
Inclusive Education Provisions	0	0	0
Interagency Collaboration Utilization	0	0	0
Career Readiness Course Provisions	0	2	0
Work Experience Offerings	0	0	0
Parent Involvement	0	0	0
Program of Study Design	0	0	0
Self-Care/Independent Living Skill Instruction	1	0	0
Self-Determination Instruction	2	0	1
Social Skill Instruction	0	0	0
Student Support Provisions	0	0	0
Transition Program	1	1	0
Vocational Education Offerings	0	0	0
Work Study Offerings	0	0	0
Total	4	3	1

Table 10

Survey Reporting Incidents of Student Development

Survey Question Theme	Assessment	Academic Skills	Life, Social, & Emotional Skills	Employment & Occupational Skills	Student Supports	Instructional Context
Career Awareness Provisions	0	0	0	0	0	0
Community Experience Provisions	0	0	0	4	0	1
Exit Exam/ Graduation Preparation	3	2	0	0	6	0
Inclusive Education Provisions	0	1	0	1	0	5
Interagency Collaboration Utilization	0	0	0	1	0	0
Career Readiness Course Provisions	1	0	0	7	0	0
Work Experience Offerings	0	0	0	0	0	0
Parent Involvement	0	0	0	0	0	0
Program of Study Design	0	1	0	2	0	2
Self-Care/ Independent Living Skill Instruction	0	1	0	2	0	0
Self-Determination Instruction	0	1	2	0	1	0
Social Skill Instruction	0	1	0	0	3	0

(cont.)

Survey Question Theme	Assessment	Academic Skills	Life, Social, & Emotional Skills	Employment & Occupational Skills	Student Supports	Instructional Context
Student Support Provisions	0	0	0	0	9	0
Transition Program	0	0	0	2	1	0
Vocational Education Offerings	0	0	0	3	0	0
Work Study Offerings	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	7	2	22	20	8

Table 11

Survey Reporting Incidents of Interagency Collaboration

Survey Question Theme	Collaborative Framework	Collaborative Delivery
Career Awareness Provisions	0	0
Community Experience Provisions	0	0
Exit Exam/Graduation Preparation	0	0
Inclusive Education Provisions	0	0
Interagency Collaboration Utilization	0	4
Career Readiness Course Provisions	0	2
Work Experience Offerings	0	0
Parent Involvement	0	0
Program of Study Design	0	0
Self-Care/Independent Living Skill Instruction	0	0
Self-Determination Instruction	0	0
Social Skill Instruction	0	0
Student Support Provisions	0	5
Transition Program	0	1
Vocational Education Offerings	0	2
Work Study Offerings	0	0
Total	0	11

Table 12

Survey Reporting Incidents of Family Engagement

Survey Question Theme	Family Involvement	Family Empowerment	Family Preparation
Career Awareness Provisions	3	0	0
Community Experience Provisions	0	0	0
Exit Exam/Graduation Preparation	0	0	0
Inclusive Education Provisions	0	0	0
Interagency Collaboration Utilization	0	1	0
Career Readiness Course Provisions	0	0	0
Work Experience Offerings	0	0	0
Parent Involvement	3	0	0
Program of Study Design	0	0	0
Self-Care/Independent Living Skill Instruction	0	0	0
Self-Determination Instruction	0	0	0
Social Skill Instruction	0	0	0
Student Support Provisions	1	0	0
Transition Program	0	0	0
Vocational Education Offerings	0	0	0
Work Study Offerings	0	0	0
Total	7	1	0

Survey Question Theme	Program Characteristics	Program Evaluation	Strategic Planning	Policies & Procedures	Resource Development & Allocation	School Climate
Student Support Provisions	0	0	0	0	0	8
Transition Program	0	0	0	0	0	1
Vocational Education Offerings	0	0	0	0	0	0
Work Study Offerings	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	0	0	10

To further investigate Research Question 1, the researcher held a focus group at the final 2-two FAST stakeholder meeting. Because the researcher was provided less time than originally anticipated to speak with stakeholders and because the timeline of research was altered due to district acceptance, the researcher condensed categories/subcategories and questions from those used in the survey. The categories for questions presented to stakeholders were career preparatory experiences, youth development and youth leadership, family involvement, and connecting activities. The agenda provided to stakeholders for the focus group portion of the meeting, including sample questions asked and categories, is provided in Appendix G.

Like the survey, invitations to the focus group were deployed by the secretary of the district's EC transition department to protect the anonymity of the staff members; therefore, the researcher is unaware of how many staff members received the invitation. However, the responses of participants who granted permission through the appropriate forms (included in Appendix F), according to voluntary introductions at the beginning of the focus group, were provided by staff members in the following positions (as seen in

Table 14) and were representative of the following target schools (as seen in Table 15).

Excluding the researcher, there were 12 participants in the focus group which lasted approximately 30 minutes at the conclusion of the May 2018 FAST stakeholders meeting.

Table 14

Job Descriptions of Focus Group Participants

Job Titles	Number of Participants
School-Based Student Support	3
School-Based EC Teacher	3
School-Based Administrator	1
Support Agency Representative	2
Program Coordinators	2
District EC Director	1
Total	12

Table 15

Site Schools of Focus Group Participants

Target School Site	Number of Participants
School 1	0
School 2	3
School 3	0
School 4	1
School 5	2
Other	6
Total	12

Following the conclusion of the focus group, the researcher transcribed the audio file in order to code responses. The researcher used the same categories and subcategories from *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* described in the survey coding process. Tables 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20 show the incidents of each subcategory cited for the themed questions presented in the focus group.

Table 16

Focus Group Reporting Incidents of Student-Focused Planning

Discussion Theme	IEP Development	Planning Strategies	Student Participation
Career Preparatory Experiences	1	1	0
Youth Development & Youth Leadership	1	1	0
Family Involvement	0	0	2
Connecting Activities	0	2	0
Total	2	4	2

Table 17

Focus Group Reporting Incidents of Student Development

Survey Question Theme	Assessment	Academic Skills	Life, Social, & Emotional Skills	Employment & Occupational Skills	Student Supports	Instructional Context
Career Preparatory Experiences	0	2	0	14	7	0
Youth Development & Youth Leadership	1	6	3	1	5	2
Family Involvement	0	0	0	2	3	0
Connecting Activities	0	4	3	0	22	3
Total	1	12	6	17	37	5

Table 18

Focus Group Reporting Incidents of Interagency Collaboration

Survey Question Theme	Collaborative Framework	Collaborative Delivery
Career Preparatory Experiences	0	4
Youth Development & Youth Leadership	0	0
Family Involvement	0	0
Connecting Activities	0	2
Total	0	6

Table 19

Focus Group Reporting Incidents of Family Engagement

Survey Question Theme	Family Involvement	Family Empowerment	Family Preparation
Career Preparatory Experiences	0	0	0
Youth Development & Youth Leadership	0	0	0
Family Involvement	3	10	2
Connecting Activities	1	1	1
Total	4	11	3

Table 20

Focus Group Reporting Incidents of Program Structures

Survey Question Theme	Program Characteristics	Program Evaluation	Strategic Planning	Policies & Procedures	Resource Development & Allocation	School Climate
Career Preparatory Experiences	0	0	0	0	0	0
Youth Development & Youth Leadership	0	1	0	0	0	6
Family Involvement	0	0	0	0	0	4
Connecting Activities	0	1	0	0	1	3
Total	0	2	0	0	1	13

Finally, the researcher wished to provide a third set of data to comprehensively determine how FAST addresses the secondary transition needs of students in the district. The researcher requested interviews with both FAST program coordinators. Due to scheduling conflicts, only one coordinator, cited in this study as Coordinator A, was able to complete the interview.

The questions asked in the interview, shown in Appendix H, aligned to the

Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 used for questioning and coding for both the survey and the focus group. Tables 21, 22, and 23 show coordinator responses that correlate to the subcategories used previously. Coordinator A's responses reflect knowledge of program use by herself and school site staff at Target Schools 4 and 5. Coordinator A gave no responses that corresponded with themes found in interagency collaboration or family engagement.

Table 21

Coordinator A Reporting Incidents of Student-Focused Planning

Discussion Theme	IEP Development	Planning Strategies	Student Participation
School Structure & Resource Allocation	0	0	0
School Climate and Support	0	0	0
Program Support & Resources	0	1	0
Learning Outcomes & Skill Development	0	1	2
Total	0	2	2

Table 22

Coordinator A Reporting Incidents of Student Development

Survey Question Theme	Assessment	Academic Skills	Life, Social, & Emotional Skills	Employment & Occupational Skills	Student Supports	Instructional Context
School Structure & Resource Allocation	0	0	0	0	0	0
School Climate and Support	0	0	0	0	1	0
Program Support & Resources	0	0	0	2	1	2
Learning Outcomes & Skill Development	1	2	5	5	4	3
Total	1	2	5	7	6	5

Table 23

Coordinator A Reporting Incidents of Program Structure

Survey Question Theme	Program Characteristics	Program Evaluation	Strategic Planning	Policies & Procedures	Resource Development & Allocation	School Climate
School Structure & Resource Allocation	0	0	0	1	0	1
School Climate and Support	0	0	0	1	0	1
Program Support & Resources	3	0	0	2	1	1
Learning Outcomes & Skill Development	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	3	0	0	4	1	3

To further compare and contrast findings among the three study components, the researcher compiled findings from each component to determine similarities and differences among *Taxonomy* subcategories. The researcher wished to determine if findings were similarly reported by teachers in an anonymous setting (the survey), reported by various stakeholders in a group setting (the focus group), and reported by coordinators (interview). The researcher wished to determine trends of positive and null responses within the category themes to more accurately determine areas of program strength and weakness. This information is shown in Tables 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28.

Table 24

Study Comparisons of Student-Focused Planning Results

Type of Study	IEP Development	Planning Strategies	Student Participation
Survey	4	3	1
Focus Group	2	4	2
Coordinator Interview	0	2	2
Total	6	9	5

Table 25

Study Comparisons of Student Development Results

Type of Study	Assessment	Academic Skills	Life, Social, & Emotional Skills	Employment & Occupational Skills	Student Supports	Instructional Context
Survey	4	7	2	22	20	8
Focus Group	1	12	6	17	37	5
Coordinator Interview	1	2	5	5	4	3
Total	6	21	13	44	61	16

Table 26

Study Comparisons of Interagency Collaboration Results

Type of Study	Collaborative Framework	Collaborative Delivery
Survey	0	11
Focus Group	0	6
Coordinator Interview	0	0
Total	0	17

Table 27

Study Comparisons of Family Engagement Results

Type of Study	Family Involvement	Family Empowerment	Family Preparation
Survey	7	1	0
Focus Group	4	11	3
Coordinator Interview	0	0	0
Total	11	12	3

Table 28

Study Comparisons of Program Structures Results

Type of Study	Program Characteristics	Program Evaluation	Strategic Planning	Policies & Procedures	Resource Development & Allocation	School Climate
Survey	0	0	0	0	0	10
Focus Group	0	2	0	0	1	13
Coordinator Interview	3	0	0	4	1	3
Total	3	2	0	4	2	26

Tables 24-28 show that the FAST stakeholders found the most evidence of student supports and employment/occupational skills, both under the category of student development. There was moderate evidence of support in student development in the subcategories of academic skills, instructional context, life/social/emotional skills; and in

in program structure in the subcategory of school climate. There was minimal evidence of support in all categories of student-focused planning, family engagement, and most of the categories of program structure. There was no reported evidence of transition support in interagency collaboration in the area of collaborative framework or in program structure in the area of strategic planning.

Research Question 3: How does FAST function in each priority school? This question was measured first by consulting a quantitative set of questions from the before mentioned FAST Transition Support Survey (Spring 2018), which was sent to FAST program stakeholders. These answer responses were provided as a sliding scale Likert item with low or negative responses on the left, neutral or average responses in the middle, and high or positive responses on the right side of the scale. The online survey deployment program (SurveyMonkey.com) assigned responses along the scale values of 0-100. The researcher then analyzed each question based on a 5-point statistical summary as well as frequency of responses in set categories (low/negative, neutral/average, high/positive, and nonresponses).

Survey questions 4-7 asked respondents to provide information about their interaction with program components or participants. Tables 29, 30, 31, and 32 show their responses.

Question 4 asked, “How many FAST students do you work with [total]?” This question was provided to determine the number of students from the program serviced by the site staff responding to the survey. Lower reported student interactions with staff would correlate with lower numbers of students impacted by any reported transition strategies implemented. Conversely, high numbers of student interactions correlates to a

higher number of students impacted by reported transition strategy implementation.

Table 29

Survey Responses for Question 4

Value	N	Percent
20 or Below	2	29%
21-40	0	0%
41-60	2	29%
61-80	1	14%
80 or Above	2	29%
No Response	0	0%
Total	7	
Median	50	
IQR	84	

Respondents indicate a range of numbers of students with whom they work in the FAST program. Some work with few students, some work with a moderate number of students, and some work with many FAST students.

Question 5 asked, “How frequently do you work with FAST students?” Similar to Question 4, this question was designed to determine the frequency with which FAST students are impacted by the reported transition strategies. High frequencies corresponded with more opportunities for students to receive the implemented transition services and lower frequencies meant fewer opportunities for student exposure to transition strategies reported by site staff.

Table 30

Survey Responses for Question 5

Value	N	Percent
20 or Below	0	0%
21-40	0	0%
41-60	3	43%
61-80	1	14%
80 or Above	3	43%
No Response	0	0%
Total	7	
Median	73	
IQR	51	

Respondents were fairly evenly divided on the frequency of meeting with FAST students. Some survey participants see the FAST students moderately, while others see them daily.

Question 6 asked, “Are you able to attend monthly Stakeholders meetings?” This question was asked to determine how frequently site-based staff members are receiving district-level support via monthly program meetings. This is important because it showed the effectiveness of program structure and accessibility for staff members, the commitment level or buy-in of site-based program staff members, and the extent to which site-based staff networked with other program staff in a collaborative setting.

Table 31

Survey Responses for Question 6

Value	N	Percent
20 or Below	2	29%
21-40	0	0%
41-60	2	29%
61-80	0	0%
80 or Above	2	29%
No Response	1	14%
Total	7	
Median	50	
IQR	87.5	

Respondents indicated a range of participation in FAST stakeholder meetings. Some do not attend meetings, some attend irregularly, and some attend each meeting.

Question 7 asked, “How often are you able to consult with a Transition Coordinator?” Similar to Question 6, this question was designed to determine the level of district support provided to site-based FAST program staff. Frequent meetings between site-based staff and a transition coordinator implies strong support of program facilitators, and infrequent meetings implies weaker support or gaps in program structure that result in less support for program facilitators.

Table 32

Survey Responses for Question 7

Value	N	Percent
20 or Below	0	0%
21-40	1	14%
41-60	1	14%
61-80	1	14%
80 or Above	4	57%
No Response	0	0%
Total	7	
Median	99	
IQR	49	

A small majority of respondents meet with transition coordinators quite frequently. The other respondents report a range of meeting with transition coordinators varying from low to moderate meetings.

Survey questions 24-46 were designed to determine the perceived value of the program and its functionality in the opinion of site-based staff working with students enrolled in the FAST transition support program. For analysis, the researcher combined these questions into three categories: perceived student impact included questions 24, 30, 31, 32, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, and 46; program support and structure included questions 25, 26, 27, 28, and 29; and school support and structure included questions 33, 34, 35, 36, and 37. The statistical findings have been combined from the category questions into category averages that are shown in Tables 33, 34, and 35.

Table 33 shows the survey responses to questions dealing with FAST stakeholder perceptions of program impact on participating students from target school sites (respondent jobs and schools sites shown in Table 7 and Table 8). This is important because it is the closest measure available to determine the program's effectiveness with

the targeted student population. Findings indicate site-based staff have varying levels of positive perceptions of the impact FAST has on students. Question 46, dealing with respondents' overall perception of the impact the program has on students was very high in the positive realm. Questions 43 and 45 dealing with respondents' perceived impact of FAST on independent living and employment were high. All other survey questions yielded responses that were moderately positive.

Table 33

Survey Respondent Perceptions of Impact on FAST Students

Question	Range	20 or Below	21- 40	41- 60	61- 80	80 or Above	No Response	Total	Median	IQR
24	N	2	0	1	2	0	2	7	50	69.5
	%	29	0	14	29	0	29			
30	N	0	0	2	1	2	2	7	75	43.5
	%	0	0	29	14	29	29			
31	N	0	0	2	3	1	1	7	73.5	26.8
	%	0	0	29	43	14	14			
32	N	1	1	1	2	2	1	7	62	65
	%	14	14	14	29	29	14			
38	N	0	1	2	2	1	1	7	56	28.8
	%	0	14	29	29	14	14			
39	N	1	1	2	1	0	2	7	50	40
	%	14	14	29	14	0	29			
40	N	0	1	1	2	2	1	7	69.5	45.5
	%	0	14	14	29	29	14			
41	N	0	1	0	4	1	1	7	73	26.5
	%	0	14	0	57	14	14			
42	N	1	0	1	3	1	1	7	68	39.5
	%	14	0	14	43	14	14			
43	N	1	1	0	0	4	1	7	88	81.5
	%	14	14	0	0	57	14			
44	N	1	0	2	0	3	1	7	72	49.8
	%	14	0	29	0	43	14			
45	N	2	0	0	0	4	1	7	82.5	72.3
	%	29	0	0	0	57	14			
46	N	0	1	1	0	4	1	7	92.5	53
	%	0	14	14	0	57	14			
Average	N	0.69	0.5	1.1	1.5	1.9	1.2	7	70.53	49.4
	%	9.8	7.5	16.5	22.1	27.4	17.4			

Table 34 shows the survey responses to questions dealing with FAST stakeholder perceptions of FAST program structures and supports. This was important because it highlights the effective elements of program structuring as well as areas of need when program leaders consider additions or changes needed for FAST. The data indicate that survey participants had very positive perception of FAST programming and support. All questions excluding question 29 yielded positive responses with medians of 82.5 or above. These questions dealt with resource availability, material clarity, and value of time spent. Question 29 was moderately high and dealt with appropriate resource acquisition.

Table 34

Survey Respondent Perceptions of FAST Program Support

Question	Range	20 or Below	21-40	41-60	61-80	80 or Above	No Response	Total	Median	IQR
25	N	0	1	1	1	3	1	7	82.5	48.75
	%	0	14	14	14	43	14			
26	N	0	1	0	1	5	1	7	98	31.25
	%	0	14	0	14	71	14			
27	N	1	0	1	1	3	1	7	86.5	60
	%	14	0	14	14	43	14			
28	N	0	0	0	1	6	1	7	98	8.75
	%	0	0	0	14	86	29			
29	N	1	1	0	2	2	1	7	69	76.5
	%	14	14	0	29	29	14			
Average	N	0.4	0.6	0.4	1.2	3.8	1	7	86.8	45.05
	%	4.8	8.4	4.8	17	54.4	14			

Table 35 shows the survey responses to questions dealing with FAST stakeholder perceptions of school site structures and supports in place that impact FAST programming or FAST student participants. This is key in determining what changes

need to be made at the school level to help FAST be more successful. This information can be used by program coordinators in site-based training and in future program implementation or expansion. Findings from this part of the site-based staff survey show lower levels of perceived impact on FAST students. Questions in this section of the survey dealt with participant perceptions of school support and structure. Responses in this section were inconsistent. Question 36 yielded overall negative responses with a median of 47.5. This question dealt with resource sufficiency. Other questions had responses varying in the low to moderate positive range.

Table 35

Survey Respondent Perceptions of Site-Based Support

Question	Range	20 or Below	21-40	41-60	61-80	80 or Above	No Response	Total	Median	IQR
33	N	2	0	0	3	2	1	7	72.5	68
	%	29	0	0	43	29	14			
34	n	0	1	1	3	1	1	7	75	37.25
	%	0	14	14	43	14	14			
35	n	0	0	2	3	1	1	7	68	28.25
	%	0	0	29	43	14	14			
36	n	2	1	0	3	0	1	7	47.5	58.75
	%	29	14	0	43	0	14			
37	n	1	0	2	1	2	1	7	66.5	60.25
	%	14	0	29	14	29	14			
Average	n	1	0.4	1	2.6	1.2	1	7	65.9	50.5
	%	14.4	4.8	14.4	37.2	17.2	14.4			

This question was also answered by asking FAST transition program coordinators to complete an informal survey based on the Predictor used throughout the study. The two FAST coordinators were asked to determine the degree to which each category of the instrument was being implemented in the target sites assigned to her. Coordinators could

assign subcategory (seen in the instrument in Appendix D) values ranging from zero to three. Scores of zero indicated no evidence apparent in the schools and scores of three indicated strong evidence in the schools. Examples of criteria of each level of evidence are also shown in Appendix D. The researcher averaged the scores given for each subcategory and assigned that value in Table 36 as evidence of implementation.

The coordinators were also asked to estimate the percentage of FAST students receiving the category of transition support at her school. The four categories of degree of implementation as cited in the Predictor (NPSOCS & NSTTAC, 2015) are inconsistent/not currently being implemented, intermittent, emerging, and consistent/currently being implemented. Each category has 25% of students delegated to that category. Table 36 cites the degree of implementation that each FAST coordinator estimates is being offered to FAST students at their assigned targeted high schools based on their observations and knowledge of the programs. This shows a district-level perspective of the implementation and development of the FAST program within the original five targeted schools. This highlights the district's areas of concern and viewed successes based on knowledge of sites and site-based observations. This is important because it provides a broader view of the program than the site-based staff's survey responses which may be more limited. From these data, it can be observed that coordinators report mostly inconsistent implementation from low levels of evidence throughout the five targeted high schools. The exceptions to this are inclusion in general education and transition program, which both coordinators reported as consistent.

Table 36

Coordinator Feedback on FAST Implementation at Target Schools

Predictor Category	Evidence of Implementation			Degree of Implementation	
	Coordinator A	Coordinator B	Average	Coordinator A	Coordinator B
Career Awareness	1.67	1.5	1.59	Consistent	Emerging
Community Experiences	1.08	0.67	0.88	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
Exit Exam Requirements/ High School Diploma Status	1	2	1.5	Inconsistent	Emerging
Inclusion in General Education	1	1.25	1.13	Consistent	Consistent
Interagency Collaboration	1	0.85	0.93	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
Occupational Courses	1.83	0	0.92	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
Paid Employment/Work Experience	1.5	1.08	1.29	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
Parent Involvement	0.33	1.56	0.95	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
Program of Study	1	1	1	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
Self-Care/Independent Living Skills	1.5	0.88	1.19	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
Self-Determination/Self- Advocacy	1.6	1.7	1.65	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
Social Skills	2	1.1	1.55	Inconsistent	Inconsistent
Student Support	0.14	1.29	0.72	Inconsistent	Emerging
Transition Program	0.91	1	0.96	Consistent	Consistent
Vocational Education	2	1.5	1.75	Consistent	Intermittent
Work Study Program	0	0.23	0.12	Inconsistent	Inconsistent

Product

The product component of this evaluation sought to determine whether FAST support was implemented and run in such a way that goals might be reached. This is a predictive measure since program success can only be measured upon and after successful graduation by FAST students from high school; however, the researcher did

wish to ascertain:

- the success of identifying and providing services to all at-risk students in the chosen subgroup at the original five targeted high schools;
- the steps taken to predict and prepare for future needs of FAST students;
- the ways in which transition goals are created and pursued through IEP incorporation and FAST support;
- the process of monitoring FAST student mobility and retention; and
- the provisions in place for FAST program growth and sustainability.

The product concerns were addressed through measurement of Research Question 2.

Research Question 2: How does FAST align with the best practices in the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities? This question was addressed using the same data found through the stakeholder survey, focus group, coordinator interview, and informal survey. The researcher looked at the data in comparison with best practices in the field, especially those cited in Kohler’s *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0*. The data shown in Tables 24, 25, 26, 27, and 28 detail the representation of each of the various elements of transition illustrated in the *Taxonomy* as reported by different stakeholders involved in FAST. The tables showcase the varying evidence or reported evidence in the following *Taxonomy* elements:

- Table 24 shows student-focused planning
- Table 25 shows student development
- Table 26 shows interagency collaboration
- Table 27 shows family engagement
- Table 28 shows program structures

The data found through the survey, focus group, and coordinator interviews show the areas where FAST most aligns with the established best practices in secondary transition and the areas where evidence is lacking and further program development is likely necessary.

Table 36, which presents FAST coordinator feedback on FAST implementation at their target schools, is also useful in making determinations about the alignment of best practices in the field with FAST because it shows the opinions of the program leaders from a top-down perspective. The data from this table show a more holistic view of the program in the view of coordinators who have access to all sites. This, in conjunction with data presented in Tables 24-28, paints a picture of the degree to which FAST measures in comparison with elements established as secondary transition best practices for students with disabilities.

The purpose of this study was to conduct a CIPP evaluation of the FAST secondary transition program for at-risk exceptional children during its second year of implementation in the district. The researcher utilized mixed methodology and triangulated results to obtain the most reliable and holistic results. Quantitative data were gathered using Likert scale items on a survey delivered to site-based staff at five target high schools. Qualitative data were gathered using open-response items on the same survey, responses gathered at a FAST stakeholder meeting, and interviews with program coordinators. Transcripts and open-ended response items were coded using the Predictor (NPSOC & NSTTAC, 2015) and NTACTION Evaluation Toolkit (NTACT, 2016). The data indicated there was variance among program elements. Some elements of successful transition programming and implementation are evident and yield positive responses,

while others were not represented at all. Data gathered through this study are used in Chapter 5 to determine the strengths and areas for growth for the FAST program.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

Jim Martin (2014), a national expert on student involvement in transition planning, said in an interview for the IRIS (Intelligent Resilient Infrastructure Systems) Center of Vanderbilt University,

Many students have a difficult time transitioning from high school to life after high school. Transition education doesn't mean that you will do what you end up thinking you'll do when you're in high school. But it teaches a process and a thinking process and a way to set goals and to evaluate your strengths and look at your skills and your supports to be able to figure out what you want to do. Those are skills that all students need, and many students don't have those, students with and without disabilities. (para. 2)

Secondary transition is more than goal setting; and for students with disabilities, it can include a great deal of planning, collaboration, teaching, remediation, and support. However, the rewards of successful secondary transition are great – students with the skills to live a life that is fulfilling and meets all of their needs.

This study utilized a mixed-methodology approach and triangulated data to complete a CIPP program evaluation of the FAST secondary transition program designed to support at-risk exceptional children in a large school district in North Carolina. The specific focus of the study was to utilize the knowledge and observations of stakeholders from targeted school sites, outside support agencies, program coordinators, and district EC program support staff to determine the effectiveness of the implementation of the program in five targeted high schools in the first 2 years of the program. The study also

strived to determine the following:

- How did the program address the secondary transition needs of at-risk, exceptional children in the district?
- How does the program's foundation and implementation correspond to known best practices in the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities or exceptionalities?
- How was the program functioning within each of the targeted five schools during FAST's first and second years of implementation?

Data were gathered through an electronic survey presented to site-based staff members who facilitate the program in some way, a focus group which included FAST stakeholders from various aspects of the program, and interviews of FAST program coordinators. Data collection instruments and questions were developed based on instruments developed by the NPSOC and NSTTAC. The instruments used were research based and validated. Further, they aligned with the research conducted in this study in the Literature Review, Chapter 2.

The researcher completed this study in hopes that the evaluation's results would be beneficial to program coordinators and district EC staff members who make decisions about future implementation, resource utilization, and sustainability of FAST. This is done by analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of FAST through each element of a CIPP evaluation and answering three research questions.

Research Question 1: How does FAST address the secondary transition needs of students in the district? The researcher used both qualitative and quantitative data collected through a survey, a focus group, and interviews to address Research

Question 1 in this study.

The district of focus in this study has shown a need to better support students classified as EC on the Future Ready graduation pathway. Students with this classification have been a contributing factor to lower graduation rates in comparison with schools with lower percentages of at-risk students classified as EC in the district. Further, all the target schools excluding one have school performance grades of C or lower. The graduation rate for students in the district serviced by EC programming is 70% in comparison to the 81.2% graduation rate of students not receiving EC support (NCDPI, 2016a). This shows a need for additional support systems for students with disabilities and other at-risk factors who attend these schools. Since a key element of effective secondary transition programming is building skills that help students both in high school and after graduation, the FAST program can play an important role in supporting students who have typically either been low performing or dropped out of school.

This study relies heavily on an instrument developed from Dr. Paula D Kohler's research. Kohler has been considered an expert on secondary transition practices for students with disabilities for several decades. In 1996, she published her first transition instrument which was based on a collection of research in the field. She spent the next 20 years continuing her research and published an updated transition model, *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0*, in 2016 which represented the most up-to-date practices that contribute to postsecondary success for students with disabilities (Kohler et al., 2016). The elements that comprise *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* are based on research-proven strategies that included predictors of postschool success, strategies to

improve graduation rates and decrease dropout rates, school climate factors, and outside agency services that focus on successful transition for students with disabilities. Because Kohler's Model – which focuses on student-focused planning, student development, program structure, family engagement, and interagency collaboration – is considered the definitive guide to secondary transition for students in special education, the researcher chose instruments developed based on *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* to develop survey, focus group, and interview questions. The key elements of *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* and their corresponding subcategories were also used to code qualitative data and organize quantitative data.

To determine how FAST addresses the secondary transition needs of students in the district, the researcher utilized the site-based staff survey, stakeholder focus group transcripts, and program coordinator interview transcripts to determine which elements of secondary transition are reported as being thoroughly addressed and which elements are underrepresented in the program.

Student-focused planning. Under Kohler's *Taxonomy*, student focused is the component that aligns legal compliance of a student's disability-related needs and planning for the student's future goals. Student-focused planning includes

- IEP development that is driven by the student's individual needs, strengths and weaknesses, and his or her goals for post-secondary life;
- planning strategies that help school personnel assist the student as he or she makes progress towards goals; and
- student participation in all components of IEP development, planning processes, and goal preparation activities (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 5).

Student-focused planning is an important part of secondary transition for at-risk exceptional children because it gives students a role in planning for their futures which increases their commitment to their IEP plan, develops a sense of ownership in the plan, and helps develop the self-advocacy skills needed for successful transition.

The survey sent to school-based staff at the targeted five schools had four citations of IEP development practices, three citations of planning strategies, and one citation of a student participation opportunity. The stakeholder focus group mentioned two practices involving IEP development, four planning strategies, and two elements of student participation. The coordinator interview showed six elements of IEP development, nine planning strategies, and two student participation opportunities. Therefore, the total cited incidents for each component of student-focused planning are 12 IEP development, 16 planning strategies, and five student participation.

These data indicate that in the area of student-focused planning, IEP planning and planning strategies were only beginning to be implemented as there were moderate citations. Student participation opportunities was an area of need for the program as it had minimal citations.

Student development. Student development, as outlined in the *Taxonomy*, is the component that involves connecting a student's academic needs and goals to his or her transition needs and goals. In this component, a student is assessed to determine areas of needs, skills for all elements of postschool life are addressed, and a platform for supporting those skills is constructed for the student. This is done by focusing on the following areas:

- assessment;

- academic skills;
- life, social, and emotional skills;
- employability and occupational skills;
- student supports; and
- instructional context (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 5).

Student development is vital to a student's successful transition into postschool life because it determines where the student has needs, not just in the academic realm but also in the areas of transition that are necessary for life outside the supportive setting of high school. Student development determines student needs and attempts to provide training and support of all skills within the high school setting while simultaneously addressing the educational components of the student's academic requirements necessary for graduation.

The survey yielded four citations of assessments, seven incidents of academic skill development, two incidents of life/social/emotional skill development, 22 incidents of employment/occupational skill development, 20 incidents of student supports, and eight incidents of addressing instructional context. The focus group transcript cited one assessment, 12 academic skill development opportunities, six life/social/emotional skill development opportunities, 17 employment/occupational skill development opportunities, 37 incidents of student supports, and five incidents of instructional context being addressed. In the interview, the coordinator mentioned assessment once, academic skills 21 times, life/social/emotional skills 13 times, employment/occupational skills 44 times, student support 66 times, and instructional context 16 times. Therefore, the total of student development elements reported were six assessment, 40 academic skills, 21

life/social/emotional skills, 83 employment/occupational skills, 123 student supports, and 39 instructional contexts.

These findings indicate that student supports were a definite strength for FAST, followed closely by employment/occupational skill development. Academic skill development, addressing instructional context, and life/social/emotional skill development had moderate citations indicating that these are areas that were present but still developing. Assessments were an area of weakness as indicated by very few citations in the study.

Interagency collaboration. Interagency collaboration is component of the *Taxonomy* where agencies from the community work together with school personnel to support students. There are two elements of this component: collaborative framework and collaborative delivery (Kohler et al., 2016, p. 7). Schools first work with outside agencies to build a framework that functions as a unit of support for students with disabilities and then they follow that protocol to effectively deliver layers of support that promote academic and transition success. Interagency collaboration is important because it allows students to receive more intensive and differing support. It also allows students to begin learning about and working with community agencies that can support them once they are no longer eligible for the supports provided by the public high school.

There were no citations of collaborative framework in the school-staff survey, focus group, or coordinator interview. There were 17 total mentions of collaborative delivery in the study, 11 in the survey, and six in the focus group.

The data suggest that collaborative framework was an area where growth and development was needed as there were no citations for this area of interagency

collaboration. Collaborative delivery was cited with moderate frequency in the study proving that it was present but in need of more support of attention from program coordinators and outside agencies.

Family engagement. Family engagement is the component of the *Taxonomy* that reaches out to family and other supportive adults in student lives to further broaden and strengthen student support systems. Family engagement first involves family involvement. Here, school staff provide opportunities for family participation in inclusive and accommodating ways. Second, the school provides family empowerment by providing all the necessary information for the family to participate and advocate for their children. Finally, family preparation is providing the family training and community support options that help the family provide transition and academic support while the student is in school and after he or she graduates. Family support is important because it is the backbone for students while in high school and often the only consistent support after graduation.

In the survey, there were seven citations of family involvement and one citation of family empowerment. In the focus group, there were four citations of family involvement, 11 citations of family empowerment, and 3 citations of family preparation. The coordinator did not mention any examples of family engagement in her interview; therefore, there were 11 citations of family involvement, 12 citations of family empowerment, and three citations of family preparations in the study.

The data imply that family preparation in the category of family engagement was a need for the FAST program. Family involvement and family empowerment were moderately cited as program elements but showed a need for more development and

support.

Program structure. Program structure includes “characteristics, evaluation, strategic planning, policies and procedures, resource development and allocation, and school climate” (Kohler et al., 2016, pp. 9-10). Program structure under the *Taxonomy* includes

- program characteristics;
- program evaluation;
- strategic planning;
- policies and procedures;
- resource development and allocation; and
- school climate (Kohler et al., 2016, pp. 9-10).

Program structure is important because it creates the framework for the program’s implementation, daily operation, sustainability, and future growth. While program structure is typically determined by program coordinators, it should be known and agreed upon by all stakeholders for the program to function properly.

In the survey, only school climate was mentioned as a component of the program; and it was cited 10 times. In the focus group, program evaluation was mentioned twice, resource development/allocation was mentioned once, and school climate was mentioned 13 times. In the interview, the program coordinator mentioned program characteristics three times, policies/procedures four times, resource development/allocation once, and school climate three times; therefore, there were three total citations of program characteristics, two of program evaluation, none of strategic planning, four of policies/procedures, two of resource development/allocation, and 26 of school climate.

The data insinuate that under the category of program structure, school climate was an area of strength, though not as strong as several areas of student development. It was mentioned enough to prove that it was an active component, but more growth could be fostered if this element receives more attention in the future. Program evaluation, resource development/allocation, program characteristics, policies/procedures, and strategic planning were all areas of weakness for FAST with little to no citations. This showed that program structure is a category that needed more attention from FAST coordinators and stakeholders.

FAST program component element ranking. The researcher determined that there were no substantial discrepancies among reported use of the components of the *Taxonomy* found in the survey, focus group, and interview; therefore, the researcher used the total reported incidents of each element to determine the areas of strength and need within FAST. The researcher found the following total reported incidents:

1. (Student Development) Student supports: 61 citations.
2. (Student Development) Employment and occupational skills: 44 citations.
3. (Program Structure) School climate: 26 citations.
4. (Student Development) Academic skills: 21 citations.
5. (Interagency Collaboration) Collaborative delivery: 17 citations.
6. (Student Development) Instructional context 16 citations.
7. (Student-Focused Planning) Planning strategies: 16 citations.
8. (Student Development) Life, social and emotional skills: 13 citations.
9. (Family Engagement) Family empowerment: 12 citations.
10. (Student-Focused Planning) IEP development: 12 citations.

11. (Family Engagement) Family involvement: 11 citations.
12. (Student Development) Assessment: 6 citations.
13. (Student-Focused Planning) Student participation: 5 citations.
14. (Program Structure) Policies and procedures: 4 citations.
15. (Family Engagement) Family participation: 3 citations.
16. (Program Structure) Program characteristics: 3 citations.
17. (Program Structure) Program evaluation: 2 citations.
18. (Program Structure) Resource development and allocation: 2 citations.
19. (Program Structure) Strategic planning: No citations.
20. (Interagency Collaboration) Collaborative framework: No citations.

This shows that there are some areas of FAST that are more than adequately addressing the needs of students in the district, while there are other areas of transition support that were not addressed at all by FAST at the time of the study.

Program strengths. The researcher determined that the highest scoring 10 subcategories of *Taxonomy* components were areas of strength for the FAST program. Study results showed that FAST is providing student development through student supports more than any other transition element. This was done through providing guidance and instruction to FAST students throughout the secondary transition process. This was done by school system staff members, community support agencies, or other stakeholders and includes transition or academic instruction, counseling and guidance, mentoring and coaching, help with resource obtainment, or advocacy support. The most consistent example of this shown in the study was the incorporation of site-based adult advocates, outside agency advocates, and program coordinator advocates. These adults

served as mentors and supports of FAST students as they began the transition process and progressed towards high school graduation. Frequent communication and dedicated relationships with FAST students were mentioned frequently as strong components of student development.

The study also showed that student development is being provided with frequency through the delivery of employment and occupational skills. This is done by providing career planning, occupational or technical instruction, school-based or on-site vocational training, career awareness opportunities, and other career-awareness opportunities. This was delivered to FAST students in a variety of ways such as the inclusion of a specialized computer-based career program students used in a Study Skills classroom. Job and college fairs and specially designed lessons were utilized to meet this need. Students were also enrolled in appropriate CTE courses that aligned to their postschool goals.

Another area of strength in FAST is program structure provided through school climate. School climate is a site-based component of secondary transition which involves the quality and character of the school and reflects the attitude and values shared by staff and students at a school (Peal, 2007). This is done when schools create environments where expectations are high, support is provided for student needs, positive-behavior systems are in place that embrace diversity, and adult advocates are provided to at-risk students. This was done in varying ways by schools, but all involved a holistic and shared vision of the school which embraced the FAST students as valued members of the student population.

Student development provided through academic skill development is also a strength in the FAST program. This is done by entering students into a curriculum of

study that will adequately prepare them for postsecondary options and making them aware of graduation requirements from the beginning of their freshman year of high school. It also involves developing academic study skills and appropriate behavioral skills that will lead to academic success. Of particular importance in this area was the Study Skills class provided by the FAST program which addressed this area.

A moderate strength of FAST programming and support is interagency collaboration provided through collaborative delivery. Collaborative delivery involved the inclusion of outside support agencies in student meetings, agency participation in FAST planning, and linking students and their families with appropriate service providers needed to meet current and future needs. This was accomplished primarily through the involvement of the local Vocational Rehabilitation staff members who worked directly with students through the FAST program and independently with FAST students when they enrolled as Vocational Rehabilitation clients. To a lesser degree, social workers were also utilized to deliver needed transition services to FAST students and their families.

Another moderate strength of FAST was student-focused planning promoted through effective planning strategies. This required that students begin transition planning and preparation as soon as they entered high school. Student cultural and linguistic needs were considered throughout the planning process, and stakeholders were able to fully participate in the IEP process of FAST students. All IEP and transition planning was student centered based on the individual needs of the student, and appropriate transition assessments were used to guide the process. This was achieved through the use of transition assessment tools from the state and district which were

provided by school EC staff. Academic and cognitive assessments were provided by school psychologists and school EC staff.

Student development was another moderately successful element provided through instructional context. Instructional context can involve the incorporation of extracurricular and community activities that can develop students further while also beginning to address student transitional skills; however, FAST did not have any mentions of this specific element of instructional context. The study did find several instances of celebrating student accomplishments and integrating students in general education for 80% or more of their instructional day which are also components of strong instructional context.

Yet another moderate strength of FAST was student development through the development of life, social, and emotional skills. This area of student development included self-determination skill development and the encouragement of self-advocacy skills. It addressed student needs according to the optional areas found on the transition element of the IEP which can include independent living skills, interpersonal skills, leisure skills, transportation skills, classroom behavior skills, and social skills. The most frequently cited element of FAST in this area was the development of self-determination skills taught through Study Skills lessons and interactions with guidance staff. Classroom behavior and appropriate social skills were also taught by EC staff and FAST coordinators as part of the Study Skills curriculum.

A lesser strength of FAST was family engagement as fostered through family empowerment. Family empowerment involved sharing information in a language that is accessible to families and is respectful of cultural concerns to prepare families for

participation in the student's academic and transition planning meetings or events. It also involved helping families apply for colleges or adult services that might be needed.

FAST met this need primarily by holding parent meetings with translators and hosting events where outside agencies could connect with FAST families. College and career fairs were also available for family participation.

A final strength of FAST is student-focused planning provided through IEP development. IEP development involved meeting the legal obligations tied to the creation of and maintenance of FAST student IEPs. The IEP requires that student interests, goals, strengths, and weaknesses are documented; and the plan revolves around helping the student succeed in meeting his or her appropriately set goals. Responsible EC staff members and appropriate related services (if necessary) complete paperwork according to district, state, and federal guidelines with the input of stakeholders and are driven by the student. The FAST program used the IEP process as part of servicing the needs of at-risk EC students and incorporated it as part of FAST support.

Program needs. The researcher determined that the 10 lowest ranked subcategories of *Taxonomy* components were areas of need for the FAST program. One of the two lowest cited subcategories was interagency collaboration as addressed through a collaborative framework. This area of the *Taxonomy* was not cited as addressed at all in the study. An interagency framework provides a structure and procedures for outside agencies to function within and in addition to services provided by the school system. An interagency framework is important because it provides guidelines for both the school system and agencies, and it holds everyone accountable for services that should be delivered to students in need. Without a collaborative framework, there is no established

method of communication or method for data sharing, both of which are important in secondary transition.

The second least represented subcategory of a component on the *Taxonomy* was program structure as addressed by strategic planning. The study had no cited evidence of strategic planning within FAST support. Strategic planning is an ongoing process which utilizes evidence-based practices to address the needs found through formal assessments and includes all program stakeholders. Strategic planning yields a documented plan where goals can be measured, desired outcomes are stated, and an evaluative process is detailed. Strategic planning is important because it provides a framework for the ongoing program evaluation which holds stakeholders accountable and drives decision-making for the future of the program.

Another area of need for FAST was program structure through resource development and allocation. This subcategory provides for the development and support of staff members responsible for the daily functions of the program. It helps program support staff understand the FAST students' differing needs, develop the skills needed for creating a welcoming school climate for FAST students, and gain skills needed to reach families. It also includes a measure for staff evaluation which can be used to determine appropriate allocation and placement within the program.

Program structure through program evaluation was also shown to be an area of need, as it had very few citations of evidence in the study. Program evaluation is an ongoing cycle of development and improvement that focuses on the program meeting its goals and following its system-wide vision. In addition to there being little evidence of this through cited evidence in the study, stakeholders in the survey, focus group, and

coordinator interviews all gave differing opinions as to the vision, mission, and purpose of FAST; showing a need for a more unified and clearly stated mission statement.

Program evaluation also includes data collection and use to track program progress towards goals and ultimately student success. This study showed no evidence of a systemic process for data collection and use for planning. Program evaluation is important because it gives stakeholders and participants a clear, holistic view of the program. It directs coordinators and staff in decision-making and helps guide future implementation, growth, or change.

Program structure as addressed by program characteristics is an area of need for the FAST support program. Program characteristics are the key elements of the program that are in place to assure that the program functions properly and the targeted students experience successful transition. Program characteristics should include necessary services or agencies and should cross all educational levels. They should address goals and feature high expectations for students. They should provide access to a range of educational, community, and employment-related opportunities equally to all students. They should focus on graduation requirements and choose pathways that match student goals. Program characteristics are important because they detail the elements of the program that promote success.

Family engagement through family preparation is another area of need for the FAST program. Family preparation involves providing learning opportunities for families to gain knowledge about the transition process, the necessary home supports that families can provide, and other key elements that families can assist with to assure successful transition from high school to adulthood. Family preparation is important

because family participation is important; yet without proper training and input, few families know how and what to provide for their teenager.

A lesser need for the FAST program is policies and procedures under the *Taxonomy* category of program structure. Policies and procedures involve an established protocol for how the program will function and how the program's success will be measured. This should be formal and should be made aware to all stakeholders participating in the program. Without set policies and procedures, it is difficult to assure program fidelity among all sites offering FAST support.

Another lesser need of the FAST program was student-focused planning through student participation. Student participation includes incorporating the student in his or her own IEP and transition planning as much as possible. All planning is driven by student goals, interests, strengths, and weaknesses. Student participation fosters self-determination and ownership in which the student can begin to self-assess his or her progress. While the study produced several citations of student participation in IEP meetings, the level of participation was relatively low.

A final minor need of the FAST program was student development through assessment. Assessment in this category is formative and driven by data from academic instruction. Appropriate interest and aptitude assessments are used to drive instructional decisions for the student's graduation pathway or course selection. Assessment results are shared with students regularly, and remediation opportunities are offered. While citations of transition assessment deployment arose from the study, no mentions of assessment result usage were provided to show that assessment results are used to drive decisions made for student academic planning.

Research Question 2: How does FAST align with the best practices in the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities? As mentioned before, the key research findings in secondary transition for students with disabilities was best studied and further developed by Dr. Paula D. Kohler. Her work is representative of over 30 years of studying the work of others and conducting her own research on the topic. Her instrument, *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0*, has been used to build and evaluate secondary transition programming across the United States. The two instruments (Predictor and NTACT Evaluation Toolkit) used by this researcher were constructed by Kohler and were thus considered to be valuable in measuring the alignment of FAST practices with best practices in the field.

To answer the second research question, the researcher utilized the same data yielded by the survey, focus group, and interview that were reviewed to answer Research Question 1. The researcher then totaled the category citations to determine which *Taxonomy* categories were areas of strength and which were areas of need. The categories of Kohler's *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* were ranked in the following order from greatest number of citations to lowest number of citations:

1. Student Development (161 citations)
2. Program Structure (37 citations)
3. Student-Focused Planning (33 citations)
4. Family Engagement (26 citations)
5. Interagency Collaboration (17 citations)

Within Kohler's *Taxonomy*, all areas are represented equally as areas of importance in secondary transition for students with disabilities. This means the disparity among

citations of evidence of program components does not align with best practices in the field; however, the presence of all components shows that the program was headed in the right direction by incorporating all components to some degree. The specific areas of need addressed in Research Question 1 could guide program planners to areas where more support should be delivered to further align FAST with practices in the field of secondary transition for at-risk exceptional children. If each area of need is addressed, it will strengthen the representation of *Taxonomy* categories in the FAST program. The strengthening of the basic categories within the program will help the program better correlate with best practices in the field of secondary transition for at-risk students with disabilities.

Research Question 3: How does FAST function in each priority school? The survey, focus group, and interview questions used in this study to determine the functionality of FAST in the priority schools targeted since the initial implementation of FAST were based on the NTACT Evaluation Toolkit published by NTACT (2016) at Western Michigan University. This document provides an extensive manual that details effective strategies based on Kohler's work, examples of programming in each of the *Taxonomy 2.0* categories, implementation guidelines, evaluation suggestions and much more (NTACT, 2016). Because the NTACT Evaluation Toolkit details evaluation of secondary transition programming and is endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education, the researcher included suggested questions as part of the instruments used to gather data regarding the ways in which FAST functions in the targeted high schools.

Of the site-based staff who responded to the survey, 29% of respondents worked with 20 FAST students or less, and all others worked with 40 or more FAST students (as

shown in Table 29). Of those same respondents, 43% worked with FAST students daily, and the remaining respondents worked with FAST students at least once a week (as shown in Table 30). This is positive for the FAST program because it shows that FAST students are being serviced frequently even by site-based staff members who work with many program students.

Another area measured by the researcher was the interaction of site-based staff with program coordinators, shown in Tables 31 and 32. Of the survey respondents, 29% rarely or never attended FAST stakeholder meetings, 29% attended meetings sometimes, and 29% attended meetings regularly. Consistency in site-based staff attending meetings would benefit the staff in getting feedback and resources from program coordinators. It would also help site-based staff network with staff members at other schools. Survey respondents also gave varying answers when asked how frequently they get to meet with program coordinators. While the majority (57%) of site-based staff stated that they see program coordinators each week, other responses ranged from monthly to yearly. This lack of consistency reconfirms that the program may have communication lapses between site-based staff and coordinators, which can greatly affect how the program is delivered at each site. While the survey did not probe into the reasons for lack of stakeholder meeting attendance and meetings with coordinators, this is an area of program structure that is vital and should be delved into further to determine the cause.

The researcher measured the perceived impact of the FAST program on student participants through 13 questions included in the site-based staff survey (shown in Table 33). Question 46 of the survey asked, “Overall, do you feel like FAST is having a positive impact on at-risk EC students?” The median answer to this question was 92.5

with an IQR of 53. This shows that the participants in the study tended to feel that the program was positive. Other questions in this category had less positive responses, but all median responses were at least 50, showing no negative responses in this category. Areas where responses were neutral involved student understanding of usefulness, student achievement improvement, and student participation in activities beyond the classroom. The highest areas of perceived value with median answers of 82.5 and 88 were perceived impact on independent living and on employment. Because of limitations of the study, the researcher could only measure the perceived impact of the FAST program on students through the program's second year; however, the site-based staff perceptions are important because they, as the program's primary delivery staff, are best able to gauge student response to the program and begin measuring student outcomes. Though this category's questions did not yield overwhelmingly positive and universal results, the fact that most responses were positive can begin to help program coordinators know that the program was not producing negative results and was likely beginning to impact students as desired.

A second area of impact studied by the researcher was the site-based staff's perceptions of the FAST program's structure and support (shown in Table 34). This was determined based on five questions included in the survey. This category yielded more positive results than other site-based staff perception categories in the quantitative part of the survey. The average median for the questions in this area was 86.8, showing an overall positive perception of the FAST program's support and structure. The lowest median response asked survey participants if they have the appropriate resources to support FAST students. While still in the positive realm with a median of 69, this is

lower than other responses, showing that program coordinators still had work to do to assure that site-based staff had needed resources to implement the program and promote successful transition for FAST students. However, survey respondents did find that FAST materials make sense, time utilizing the program with at-risk EC students is well spent, and transition coordinators are helpful in dealing with that population.

The final area measured by the quantitative component of the survey was site-based staff perceptions of school support and structure (shown in Table 35). While this area was out of the control of program coordinators, it was important to measure because the program had to work within the structure of the existing high schools. Knowing the relationship between the high school setting and the FAST program is important for program coordinators as they determine the future of the program as it can show areas where the program may have to compensate or areas where the program may be impacted by current site organization and structure. The researcher measured this area based on five questions included in the survey. This area had inconsistent results which may suggest that the differing structure and support available at the different schools impacts the FAST program in differing ways. One question that yielded a median (47.5) in the negative range of responses asked participants if their school provided sufficient resources, including planning time, to help FAST students. A question that had a more neutral median (66.5) asked respondents if FAST student successes were celebrated. The varying responses in this category show that schools differ greatly and that may impact FAST programming and the students involved as well.

A final component of the study that the researcher considered in determining how FAST functioned in each priority school was by consulting an informal survey completed

by the two program coordinators. The coordinators were asked to rate the schools they oversee to determine the degree to which elements of transition programming were implemented in the schools. Evidence examples for each category and level were provided, and the coordinators gave rankings from zero to three. The researcher averaged the coordinator rankings to determine which areas the coordinators saw with higher level of evidence and which areas the coordinators did not see. Below is a ranking of those categories from most evident to least evident in the five targeted high schools.

1. Vocational education (1.75)
2. Self-determination/Self-advocacy (1.65)
3. Career awareness (1.59)
4. Social skills (1.55)
5. Exit exam requirements/High school diploma status (1.5)
6. Paid employment/Work experience (1.29)
7. Self-care/Independent living skills (1.19)
8. Inclusion in general education (1.13)
9. Program of study (1)
10. Transition program (.96)
11. Parent involvement (.95)
12. Interagency collaboration (.93)
13. Occupational courses (.92)
14. Community experiences (.88)
15. Student support (.72)
16. Work study program (.12)

The informal survey also asked the transition coordinators to determine the percentage of FAST students at the schools they oversaw who were receiving the transition elements. Based on the percentage, transition categories were determined to have a degree of implementation rating of consistent (75-100% of students receive), emerging (50-75% of students receive), intermittent (25-50% of students receive), and inconsistent (less than 25% of students receive). The FAST transition coordinators stated that both transition programming and inclusion in regular education are consistently implemented in each of the five targeted schools. Career awareness also ranked with a high degree of implementation: One coordinator stated seeing this consistently among her high schools; and the other ranked its implementation as emerging. Vocational education showed moderately high degrees of implementation in the five priority schools with ratings of consistent and intermittent. Emerging degrees of implementation were shown in some of the priority schools for exit exam requirements and student support, though only by one coordinator. All other categories are seen inconsistently by both coordinators in all priority schools.

Implications of Findings for Practice

This study sheds further light on the importance of a well-designed transition program which addresses all components of current and future needs for students who are both at risk and have a disability. In their 2014 study, Hicks and Knollman found that failure to successfully transition for people with disabilities frequently led to unemployment, legal problems, poverty, increased health problems, and other traumatic circumstances. This is echoed by data from the 2009 report “US: Unemployment,” which showed a large disparity of poverty between individuals without disabilities and

those with disabilities. In fact, individuals with disabilities who do not transition successfully after high school frequently become involved in a cycle of poverty where their health and financial stability continuously impact one another to the ruin of the individual (Lustig & Strauser, 2007).

Because of the importance of secondary transition, federal, state, and district regulations have been put into place to legally obligate schools to address the unique transitional needs of students with disabilities. In 2007, the U.S. Department of Education created IDEA which, in part, requires the development of an IEP for any student identified as qualifying for the EC program in a public school. Several major components of a high school student's IEP address his or her postschool goals. In addition to federal regulations, North Carolina enacted NC 1500-2.37 (Education of Individuals with Disability Act, 2018; Transition services, 2018) which further specifies the obligation of EC staff to address instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment/ postschool adult living objectives, and appropriate daily living skills/functional vocational evaluations. NCDPI (2007) guides districts through the required process of planning how to address the transitional needs of students with disabilities. As part of the transitional plan of the district of focus in this study, EC staff are required to document all elements of the IEP, including those involving transition, in an online program called EdPlan. As a further step of addressing the complicated needs of at-risk students with disabilities on the Future Ready Course of Study, the district created the FAST program. The FAST support program was implemented into the priority five schools mentioned in this study in hopes that it would grow to eventually address the unique needs of this population within the district.

Transition programs that include all elements of Kohler's *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* can make all the difference for at-risk students with disabilities as they navigate high school and transition into postschool life. In their 2013 study, Martin and Williams-Diehm proved that student involvement in the IEP process builds leadership and fosters postschool success. This mirrors the need for student-focused planning from the *Taxonomy*. Wehmeyer and Abery (2013) found that students with intellectual disabilities have less self-determination due to a lack of educational opportunities to learn the skills they will need after high school. This failure to learn essential life skills led to a failure to achieve goals (Wehmeyer & Abery, 2013). This proves the need for the *Taxonomy*'s student development component. Test et al. (2009) found that interagency collaboration leads to more positive postschool outcomes, especially when students are linked with services prior to high school graduation, which supports the interagency collaboration component of the *Taxonomy*. In support of family engagement, Newman (2005) found that family involvement in the secondary transition process helps students find success, not only in transition but in academic areas as well. Ankeny et al. (2009) supported this finding by showing that when mothers helped students plan and work through the transition process, postschool goals were reached. Finally, Morningstar and Mazzotti (2014) discovered that teachers who are prepared fully by a program designed using evidence-based transition practices are more able to meet the transitional needs of students with disabilities.

Recommendations Based on Evaluation

Based on the triangulated results of the study, the researcher recommends the continued implementation and growth of the FAST transition program for at-risk

exceptional children on the Future Ready Course of Study. While results showed that the program has areas of weaknesses, there is evidence to support that FAST is aligned with many best practices in the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities. This alignment, along with site-based staff confidence in the program's value and impact, shows the merit of the program and predicts that its continuation is likely to produce positive outcomes for the students involved. While individual schools differ greatly and program coordinator approaches vary some, all schools represented in the study showed some level of positive impact from FAST support. Because of this, the researcher recommends that district leaders continue to support FAST transition coordinators as they build the program. Because of negative or null responses regarding resource allocation and accessibility, district leaders should also consider providing additional funding or resources to FAST coordinators to help them provide necessary support to site-based staff and FAST students.

Program coordinators should also continue their efforts to grow and adapt FAST support within high schools in the district. Many elements of the program are proving to be successful and have positive feedback from stakeholders involved with the program. In particular, student supports and employment/occupational skills provided through student development components of FAST show promise. Other areas of FAST support still need attention and further development. A collaborative framework built upon interagency collaboration should be built. Strategic planning based on program structure should be utilized, and evidence of that planning should be shared with stakeholders. Lack of resources and school support is often school based, but program coordinators should note issues and help facilitate school growth and support to embrace FAST.

Program coordinators should also formalize a program evaluation process that includes tracking student data that relate to secondary transition. Each site should be tracking student progress in the same way so the program can be more accurately evaluated for growth in the future.

Site-based staff involved in implementing FAST support to students should utilize resources provided, especially the availability and assistance of FAST program coordinators. Stakeholder meetings provide valuable assistance and insight and should be attended monthly. If site-based staff are unable to attend and the stakeholder meeting times cannot be adjusted to meet the scheduling needs of the majority of FAST site-based support staff, school staff and program coordinators must work together to fill in the gaps caused by missed meetings. Site-based staff must also begin tracking student data as directed by program coordinators.

Limitations

Limitations of the study included some gaps in research because of district policy and the potential disruption of student learning. The researcher collected no quantitative or qualitative student data. Student opinions of the program gathered through survey or interviews would have been useful to understand the impact of FAST on students. Further, data on student academic performance and attendance would have also been valuable in determining the impact of FAST on its students.

Another gap in the data is that there was no data collected for the first year of FAST implementation. The researcher was only able to collect data from FAST stakeholders and coordinators in the second year of the program's implementation. This meant that some staff members were new to the program and some staff members from

the first year of the program were no longer involved with FAST students.

Lack of participation from all priority schools was another limitation of this study. The survey had only seven participants, so data gathered from this instrument was limited to the three schools represented. School 1 and School 3 had no participants at all in the survey. School 2 had one participant, School 4 had one participant, and School 5 had three participants. The other participants were from staff members who serve multiple schools. The focus group had 12 stakeholders in attendance; but again, there were no representatives for School 1 or School 3. This meant that input from those two schools is missing from the study. School 2 had three participants in the focus group, School 4 had one, and School 5 had two. The researcher was only able to meet with one of the two FAST coordinators for an interview. Coordinator A completed both the interview and the informal survey. Coordinator B only completed the informal survey. While feedback and participation in the study were quite helpful, the lack of equal participation and missing representation skews data and may not paint a holistic picture of FAST implementation in the program's second year.

Recommendations for Future Evaluation and Research

Subsequent research and evaluation is encouraged. At the time of the study, FAST was only in its second year of implementation and growth of the program to new priority schools had begun. This program is unique in the state and may become a model of effective secondary transition practices. As such, practices and procedures should be formalized. Data tracking practices should be established and records should begin to be kept that can showcase successes of the program. True success of the program can best be measured by student outcomes after graduation. If possible, program coordinators

should begin considering ways to measure postschool outcomes for FAST students. Data tracked and compared in years five and beyond for FAST will be most helpful to stakeholders.

The researcher recommends that program coordinators track student data and family/guardian data in addition to continued collection of the data collected in this study. Student academic and transitional data collected throughout their time in the program as well as after graduation would be very valuable in determining the strengths and weaknesses of FAST support. Additionally, collecting qualitative data from FAST student families or guardians through interviews or surveys would bring in outsider perspectives of the program as well lend more insight into the *Taxonomy's* family engagement components.

Summary and Conclusions

This study was done as part of a program evaluation of the FAST support program for at-risk exceptional children on the Future Ready Course of Study. The study examined how FAST functioned within the original five priority schools during the program's second year. FAST was put into place as a support for students with disabilities who had additional risk factors that made secondary transition difficult. FAST was designed to support those students from a school-based and district level so students would have both academic and transition success. The ultimate goal of FAST was to help students graduate and then meet postschool goals following graduation.

This dissertation evaluated a new program within a large public school district in North Carolina. The researcher utilized Stufflebeam's CIPP model of program evaluation to evaluate the FAST program during its second year of implementation. The

researcher determined the context of FAST by determining how transition coordinators designed FAST and their purpose behind it. Input was determined by evaluating the components of the program that transition coordinators built into FAST in order to serve the needs of the FAST students and FAST stakeholders. The process of FAST was the primary focus of this study. The researcher utilized multiple instruments and resources to determine what was being done with FAST support at the school and district levels. The researcher also examined the effectiveness of the program's implementation from the school and district perspective. The process component of the CIPP evaluation incorporated the researcher's three research questions for this study. Finally, the researcher measured the product or effectiveness of the program by asking site-based staff to determine the impact and effectiveness of the program on FAST students at the time of survey deployment.

The researcher gathered data through the use of site-based staff surveys delivered electronically, a focus group held at the FAST stakeholder meeting, and coordinator input from an interview and informal survey. Areas of strength of the program were imbedded in components of student development. Areas where growth and development were needed in FAST support were in components of interagency collaboration.

The importance of Kohler's research in this study cannot be understated. Kohler's work spans decades and is a culmination of tirelessly evaluating transition practices and programs as well as incorporating her own research into public schools across the nation. Her *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* has been upheld in the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities as the standard for programming. Her research and *Taxonomy* were instrumental in evaluating FAST and

were used as a basis for recommendations for the future of the program.

David Test, another leading researcher in the field of secondary transition for students with disabilities, stated in an interview for the IRIS Center (2014), “On the one hand, secondary transition is deceptively simple. It’s simply preparing students to achieve their postschool goals. The problem is that, in practice, it really involves everything that goes on around a student in high school” (Test, 2014, para. 2). This summarizes secondary transition for all students, not just those with disabilities or those who are at risk; however, “everything that goes on around a student” (Test, 2014, para. 2) is much more complex and challenging for students who are at risk and have disabilities. Because of this, the implementation of a strong secondary transition program is invaluable for the success of those students. FAST, though only in its initial stages at the time of this study, is on its way to providing the support for the “everything else” in addition to the typical transitional needs of a high school student.

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Appendix A
Interview Consent Form

Consent for Participation in FAST Interview Research

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Lyndsey Herring from Gardner-Webb University. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about the implementation and practices of the FAST support system. I will be one of two people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by Lyndsey Herring. The interview will last approximately 20-35 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio file of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be recorded, I will not be able to participate in the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of recordings and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Gardner-Webb University.
6. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

My Signature

Date

My Printed Name

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact: Lyndsey Herring at XXXXXX or XXXXXXXX

Appendix B

Emails from the National Post-School Outcomes Center and the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center granting permission to use “Predictor Implementation School/District Self-Assessment” (2015) to create survey

Hello Karyn -

Thank you very much for reaching out to us and thank you for the wonderful compliments. You are very welcome to use the checklist for your purposes. The information that we have on our website is specifically there to assist anyone who is supporting our goals as a Technical Assistance Center on Transition. We only ask that you would, of course, mention where you received the information as a reference.

The best to you in your endeavors.

The NTACT Team



Hi Karen,

Was good to see you found the tool on our website of transition materials for Oregon's teachers. I am including Charlotte Alverson on this reply, as she would have more information on the current status of the Self-Assessment and information on its use. Good luck to you!

Pattie

Pattie Johnson

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Appendix C

Blank Example of North Carolina IEP Transition Component from NCDPI (2008)

SECONDARY TRANSITION COMPONENT

Students with Disabilities, age 14 and older, are required to have a transition component to their IEP.
Sections A and B of the component are required for students who are 14 and 15 years old. All sections of the component are required for students 16 years and older.

Duration of Special Education and Related Services: From: ____/____/____ To: ____/____/____
 Student: _____ DOB: ____/____/____
 School: _____ Grade: _____

IDEA requires students be informed that rights will transfer to them at age 18. This notice must be given at age 17. Checking "yes" below will meet this requirement. Check N/A if the statement does not apply.

Has the student been informed of his/her rights, if age 17 and older? ☐ Yes ☐ N/A

The following section provides information and documentation regarding who provided information and how it was collected. IEP teams are instructed to provide details, as requested.

Section A - Student Needs, Strengths, Preferences and Interests (Beginning at age 14 and updated annually)

The following people gave information about the student's needs, strengths, preferences and interests and course of study selection:

- ☐ Student
- ☐ Parent(s), Guardian(s) and Family Members
- ☐ Adult Service Agency Representatives (specify): _____

- ☐ School Staff
- ☐ Other (Explain): _____

Indicate which age appropriate transition assessments were conducted for the development of measurable postsecondary goals and transition activities and the date they were conducted:

INFORMAL ASSESSMENT(S):

- ☐ Interest and Skill Inventories

- ☐ Observations/Situational Assessments

- ☐ Rating Scales

- ☐ Interviews

- ☐ Other (Explain): _____

FORMAL ASSESSMENT(S):

- ☐

- ☐ Other
(Explain): _____

The following section is required for all students ages 14 and up. Check one of the options below.
If possible, the four-year plan for the student who is in high school should be examined and attached.

Section B – Course of Study (Beginning at age 14 and updated annually)

The student is following a course of study that leads to the high school diploma:

_____ Future Ready Core Course of Study (effective with the 9th grade class of 2009/2010)

_____ College/University Prep Course of Study*

_____ College Tech Prep Course of Study*

_____ Career Preparation Course of Study*

(*Not applicable to students entering 9th grade beginning with the freshman class of 2009-2010.)

_____ Occupational Course of Study

The student is following extensions of the standard course of study and pursuing the graduation certificate _____.

The student is in middle school and is following the North Carolina Standard Course of Study _____; or the extensions of the North Carolina Standard Course of Study _____.

IDEA requires that students with disabilities have a measurable post-secondary goal in the areas of education/training and employment. The only optional post-secondary goal is independent living. The IEP team will determine if a goal to support independent living is appropriate.

Post-secondary goals must be written for what the student will do after high school and should not reflect his/her current activities.

Annual goals, based on the student's present level of performance should clearly be linked to his/her post-secondary goals. What skills will the student need in order to accomplish his/her post-secondary goals?

Section C – Postsecondary Goals (Beginning at age 16 and updated annually.)

Indicate the student's measurable post-secondary goals in each of the following areas on an annual basis:

Education/Training:

Employment:

Independent Living (if appropriate):

Duration of Special Education and Related Services: From: ____/____/____ To: ____/____/____
Student: _____

This section is required for students who are 16 and older and can reflect activities that span multiple years.

Transition activities should be written to support the student's post-secondary goals and should answer the question, *what things are necessary for the student to achieve his/her goals?* The transition services/activities are the specific steps/strategies that focus on improving the academic/functional achievement of the child to facilitate his/her movement from school to post-school.

Transition activities may or may not be required for each transition area; however, teams are required to discuss each area and indicate in the space provided that an activity is not required.

It is important to remember that responsibilities for the activities can be assigned to individuals outside of the school (parents, student, outside agencies.)

If an outside agency(s) is assigned responsibility for a transition activity, a representative(s) of the agency(s) must be invited to the IEP meeting. Parent(s) or student(s) who are 18 years old and older, must consent to the involvement of the outside agency. Documentation of this consent is located on the "Invitation to Conference" form.

Section D – Transition Services (By age 16 and updated annually)

Transition Areas	Transition Activities	Responsible Person and/or Agency	Anticipated Completion Date
Instruction			
Related Services			
Community Experiences			
Employment			
Adult Living Skills			
Daily Living Skills (if appropriate)			
Functional Vocational Evaluation (if appropriate)			

Appendix D

Predictor Implementation School/District Self-Assessment from National Post-School Outcomes Center & National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (2015)

Predictor Implementation School/ District Self-Assessment

The checklist below is intended to provide schools, districts, or other stakeholders in secondary transition with a framework for determining the degree to which their program is implementing practices that are likely to lead to more positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. The predictor categories listed have been extracted from high quality correlational research including students with disabilities. For more information on the process used to identify these predictors see <http://www.nsttac.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdf/pdf/ebps/CorrelationalProcedures.pdf>. The operational definitions and essential program characteristics were derived from experts in the field through a Delphi study (Rowe et al., 2014). The areas of The Taxonomy for Transition Programming (Kohler, 1996) corresponding to each predictor are listed under the name of each predictor.

A team should consider the definition of the predictor and each individual program characteristic, as well as the Degree of Implementation and the Evidence of Implementation scales, to guide decisions regarding program strengths, needs, and priorities for change. Teams may find it helpful to consider the predictors in clusters.

The following clusters are suggestions for grouping the predictors by similar topics or themes to facilitate discussion. Feel free to cluster the predictors in the manner that makes the most sense to you. Below are some examples of clustering:

Career Development: Career Awareness, Occupational Courses, Paid Employment/Work Experiences, Work Study, and Vocational Education

Policy: Exit Exam Requirements/High School Diploma Status, Inclusion in General Education, Program of Study

Student Skills: Self-Care /Independent Living, Self Determination/Self- Advocacy, Social Skills, Community Experiences

Collaborative Systems: Interagency Collaboration, Parental Involvement, Transition Program, Student Support

To ask questions or contribute comments on this or other NPSO/NSTTAC tools, please contact NPSO, drowe3@uoregon.edu or NSTTAC, chfowler@uncc.edu.

	<p>7. Instruct students in use of public transportation. 8. Provide supervision during community experiences to guide and direct students in the development of appropriate behaviors and skills needed for specific environments.</p> <p>9. Involve parent and adult service providers to support student involvement in community experiences.</p> <p>10. Cooperate with community partners (e.g., employers, recreation facilities) to develop community experience sites.</p> <p>11. Provide supports for parents to arrange community experiences after school hours.</p> <p>12. Train teachers and paraprofessionals in necessary safety, health policies, and liability coverage necessary for students to participate in community experiences.</p>
<p>Exit Exam Requirements/ High School Diploma Status</p> <p>Student Development</p> <p>Program Structures</p>	<p>Exit exams are standardized state tests, assessing single content area (e.g. Algebra, English) or multiple skill areas, with specified levels of proficiency that students must pass in order to obtain a high school diploma. Diploma status is achieved by completing the requirements of the state awarding the diploma including the completion of necessary core curriculum credits.</p> <p>1. Teach test-taking strategies and study skills instruction.</p> <p>2. Assist students to plan for and use appropriate accommodations when taking the test.</p> <p>3. Administer standardized practice tests periodically to monitor progress towards benchmarks.</p> <p>4. Provide exit exams at the end of targeted courses designated by the state or at the end of a specific grade level (e.g. 11th).</p> <p>5. Offer students, meeting criteria, appropriate accommodations, alternate, or alternative assessment procedures.</p> <p>6. Provide student remediation assistance if they fail the test.</p> <p>7. Provide students with multiple opportunities to take the test as allowed by the school/district for all students.</p>
Goal Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with disabilities' participation in Individualized Education Program (IEP) prevocational and vocational goal-setting (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). • Students with disabilities who had a post-school goal focused on attending a postsecondary college or university were more likely to be engaged in post-school education (Chiang, Cheung, Hickson, Xiang, & Tsai, 2012).

2. Develop and implement formal and informal agreements between agencies responsible for the delivery of transition services.
3. Develop an agreed upon vision and mission of transition services and programs.
4. Develop an organizational structure that includes a process for identifying membership (e.g., criteria for membership), terms of services, procedures for replacing members, orientation for new members, and web-based and print membership directories.
5. Coordinate the development of policies and procedures for service delivery and sharing of resources by both school and community agencies.
6. Implement a state-wide plan that (1) addresses gaps, (2) includes strategies for blending and braiding funding of other resources, (3) streamlines the transition process, and (4) eradicates duplication of service delivery.
7. Conduct asset/resource mapping to identify all community agencies that support youth with disabilities in the area as well as gaps in service delivery.
8. Clearly define roles and responsibilities of each organization as part of the interagency agreement.
9. Schedule regular times for planning, developing, and measuring the progress and effectiveness of implementing a shared transition service delivery system at all levels (e.g., individual student, school, local, region, state, and nation).
10. Develop procedures for shared problem-solving to address needs of students with disabilities and the barriers they may face during transition process.
11. Develop procedures for school staff to have a systematic way to include students, families, community members, and agencies at different levels of the transition process (e.g., when to invite to IEP meetings, when to refer families to meet with agency, when to provide information sheet to family)
12. Establish multiple methods of communication and information sharing across agencies.
13. Provide cross-discipline professional development opportunities for all members of interagency council to ensure members are knowledgeable about services and eligibility criteria.
1. Develop wide reaching state interagency teams that include disability related and non-disability related agencies (e.g., Developmental Disabilities, Vocational Rehabilitation, Department of Labor, Social Security Administration) with a common interest in transition service delivery.

	<p>2. Develop and implement formal and informal agreements between agencies responsible for the delivery of transition services.</p> <p>3. Develop an agreed upon vision and mission of transition services and programs.</p> <p>4. Develop an organizational structure that includes a process for identifying membership (e.g., criteria for membership), terms of services, procedures for replacing members, orientation for new members, and web-based and print membership directories.</p> <p>5. Coordinate the development of policies and procedures for service delivery and sharing of resources by both school and community agencies.</p> <p>6. Implement a state-wide plan that (1) addresses gaps, (2) includes strategies for blending and braiding funding of other resources, (3) streamlines the transition process, and (4) eradicates duplication of service delivery.</p> <p>7. Conduct asset/resource mapping to identify all community agencies that support youth with disabilities in the area as well as gaps in service delivery.</p> <p>8. Clearly define roles and responsibilities of each organization as part of the interagency agreement.</p> <p>9. Schedule regular times for planning, developing, and measuring the progress and effectiveness of implementing a shared transition service delivery system at all levels (e.g., individual student, school, local, region, state, and nation).</p> <p>10. Develop procedures for shared problem-solving to address needs of students with disabilities and the barriers they may face during transition process.</p> <p>11. Develop procedures for school staff to have a systematic way to include students, families, community members, and agencies at different levels of the transition process (e.g., when to invite to IEP meetings, when to refer families to meet with agency, when to provide information sheet to family)</p> <p>12. Establish multiple methods of communication and information sharing across agencies.</p> <p>13. Provide cross-discipline professional development opportunities for all members of interagency council to ensure members are knowledgeable about services and eligibility criteria.</p>
<p>Occupational Courses</p> <p>Student Development</p>	<p>Occupational courses are individual courses that support career awareness, allow or enable students to explore various career pathways, develop occupational specific skills through instruction, and experiences focused on their desired employment goals.</p> <p>1. Embed career awareness activities, career planning, and vocational assessments in all occupational courses.</p>

Program Structures	<p>2. Design curriculum for each course to include technology, 21st century skills, and employability skills for specific career/career cluster content.</p> <p>3. Provide hands-on and community-based opportunities to learn occupational specific skills within each occupational course.</p> <p>4. Incorporate Universal Design for Learning principles in CTE programs including cooperative education programs to provide access to students with disabilities.</p> <p>5. Provide course offerings throughout the school day so scheduling conflicts do not restrict student access to occupational courses.</p> <p>6. Provide occupational courses that represent a wide variety of occupational clusters to provide students course choices that match their preferences, interests, needs, and strengths.</p>
Paid Employment/ Work Experience Student Development Program Structures	<p>Work experience is any activity that places the student in an authentic workplace, and could include: work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. Paid employment can include existing standard jobs in a company or organization or customized work assignments negotiated with the employer, but these activities always feature competitive pay (e.g., minimum wage) paid directly to the student by the employer.</p> <p>1. Provide opportunities to participate in job shadowing, work-study, apprenticeships, or internships. **Consider work study, apprenticeships, and internship environments that are culturally sensitive to students from different cultural backgrounds.</p> <p>2. Provide instruction in soft skills (e.g., problem solving, communicating with authority figures, responding to feedback, promptness) and occupational specific skills (e.g., clerical, machine operation).</p> <p>3. Provide transportation training, including the use of public transportation and job-site and community safety.</p> <p>4. Conduct job performance evaluations by student, school staff, and employer.</p> <p>5. Provide instruction in obtaining (e.g., resume development) and maintaining a job.</p> <p>6. Develop a process for community-based employment options in integrated settings with a majority of co-workers without disabilities.</p> <p>7. Conduct situational vocational assessments to determine appropriate job matches.</p> <p>8. Develop a process to enable students to earn high school credit for paid employment work experience.</p> <p>9. Link eligible students to appropriate adult services (e.g. Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Disabilities Services) services prior to exiting school that will support student in work or further education.</p>

	<p>10. Involve appropriate adult services (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation or job coach when needed) in the provision of community-based work experiences.</p> <p>11. Use age-appropriate assessments to ensure jobs are based on students' strengths, preferences, interest, and needs.</p> <p>12. Ensure employment training placements offer opportunities for (1) working 30+ hours/week, (2) making minimum wage or higher, with benefits, and (3) utilizing individualized supports and reasonable accommodations.</p>
Parent Expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with disabilities who had parents who expected their child to attend postsecondary education were more likely to be engaged in post-school education (Chiang, Cheung, Hickson, Xiang, & Tsai, 2012; Papay & Bambara, 2014; Wagner, Newman, & Javitz, 2014). • Students with disabilities who had parents who expected their child get a paid job were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment and education (Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012) • Students with disabilities who had parents who expected their child to gain employment were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment and education (Papay & Bambara, 2014). • Students with disabilities who had parents who expected their child to attend postsecondary education were more likely to have more social interactions post-school (Papay & Bambara, 2014). • Students with disabilities who had parents who expected their child would probably have a job or definitely have a job were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012). • Students with disabilities who had parents who expected their child would probably be self-supporting or definitely be self-supporting were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012).
Parent Involvement	<p>Parent Involvement means parents /families/guardian are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning (e.g., decision-making, providing support, attending meetings, and advocating for their child).</p>
Family Involvement	<p>1. Provide relevant information about transition planning to parents through a variety of means (e.g., written, face-to-face, community-based trainings such as Autism Society) at each stage of the transition planning process such as transition from middle to high school, age of majority, graduation.</p>

	<p>2. Link parents with support networks (e.g., networking opportunities with other parents, advocacy groups). 3. Provide multiple options for involvement (e.g., pre-IEP planning input, flexible IEP meeting times) and alternate ways to obtain input in the transition planning process.</p> <p>**Consider parents' perceptions in transition planning that may conflict with mainstream professional ideas. Some parents from CLD backgrounds may not be supportive of transition activities if they feel the plans are contrary to their expectations.</p> <p>4. Establish a welcoming atmosphere in the school by developing a system of ongoing communication and interaction (e.g., e-mail, notes home, home visits, regularly scheduled meetings in addition to IEP meetings).</p> <p>**Consider the language and cultural needs of parents from CLD backgrounds</p> <p>5. Provide fairs, brochures, or workshops to educate parents about adult services and post-school supports in the community (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, mental health resources, postsecondary education institutions and supports).</p> <p>**Consider developing material in languages accessible to target communities.</p> <p>6. Provide staff training on culturally competent transition planning (e.g. recognizing and honoring differences such as ethnic, socioeconomic, and values of the family).</p> <p>7. Actively engage parents in interagency transition councils.</p> <p>8. Collaborate with families to identify how the school and family/guardian can support the student in achieving their desired post-school goals.</p> <p>9. Share transition assessment results with parents so that parents can use the information to provide training for their child in the home and the community and identify natural supports.</p>
Program of Study	A program of study is an individualized set of courses, experiences, and curriculum designed to develop students' academic and functional achievement to support the attainment of students' desired post-school goals.
Student Development	1. Ensure program of study is inclusive, academically rigorous, and supported by Universal Design for Learning principles.
Program Structures	<p>2. Design multiple pathways in the general curriculum for satisfying standard diploma requirements.</p> <p>3. Provide clearly defined graduation requirements leading to a state sanctioned exit document.</p>

	<p>4. Establish planning process to assist students in developing their program of study.</p> <p>5. Provide multiple opportunities (e.g., career technical education; community-based work, independent living, and community access experiences; school-based enterprises; dual credit through a cooperative agreement) for students to acquire needed credits to achieve standard diploma and ensure a seamless transition to postsecondary education and employment settings.</p>
<p>Self-Care/ Independent Living Skills</p> <p>Student Development</p>	<p>Self-care/independent living skills are skills necessary for management of one's personal self-care and daily independent living, including the personal management skills needed to interact with others, daily living skills, financial management skills, and the self-management of healthcare/wellness needs.</p> <p>1. Provide instruction, as needed based on assessment data, in (1) financial planning, (2) self-help, (3) cooking, (4) housekeeping, (5) home maintenance, (6) using transportation, (7) clothing care, (8) accessing community services, (9) time/ organizational management, (10) self-determination, (11) social roles/ citizenship, (12) community/peer relationships, or (10) critical thinking and problem solving.</p> <p>2. Embed self-care/independent living skills instruction into academic coursework to help students connect academic skills to post-school goals.</p> <p>3. Provide instruction in self-care independent living skills in multiple settings including general education, special education, and community.</p> <p>4. Provide individual, small group, or whole class instruction in independent living and self-care skills, as appropriate.</p> <p>5. Provide students multiple opportunities to practice independent living skills throughout the school day in real-life situations using real-life materials and equipment.</p> <p>**Independent living skills may include skills for functioning in an environment that requires interaction with people from different CLD backgrounds.</p> <p>6. Provide transition services (e.g., completing housing application, obtaining Social Security Disability) for students to accomplish postsecondary independent living goals.</p> <p>7. Conduct ongoing assessment of self-care/independent living skills to identify and evaluate levels of skill attainment, maintenance, and generalized use of skills in other settings where use of skills are required.</p>

	<p>8. Teach home and community recreation skills that can be done alone or with others in both organized and informal settings.</p> <p>**and in culturally diverse settings</p>
<p>Self-Determination/ Self-Advocacy</p> <p>Student Development</p>	<p>Self-Determination is the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one's goals, and accept consequences of one's actions.</p> <p>1. Utilize a student driven IEP process to allow students to demonstrate self-awareness, goal setting, problem solving, and self-advocacy.</p> <p>2. Collaborate with general education teachers to embed choices into the general curriculum and daily lessons and provide opportunities for students to practice self-determination skills.</p> <p>3. Teach students to self-monitor self-determination skills (e.g., accommodations and modifications) and provide opportunities for students to practice the self-monitoring strategy.</p> <p>**As you work with students, take into consideration the cultural nuances involved in teaching self-determination skills and providing opportunities to develop self-determination to students from CLD backgrounds.</p> <p>4. Ensure all students, including those with significant disabilities, have a functional communication system to engage in choice making, problem-solving, goal setting, taking initiative to reach goals, and accepting consequences for one's actions.</p> <p>5. Conduct age-appropriate transition assessments in order for students to learn about themselves, set goals, solve problems, use information, make decisions, and to identify long-range goals.</p> <p>6. Provide opportunities for students to develop self-awareness by engaging in honest and respectful discussions with students about their self-determination assessment responses.</p> <p>7. Provide direct instruction in self-determination using a structured curriculum or evidence-based instructional strategy, with guided practice in natural school and community-based settings.</p> <p>8. Foster the development of students' leadership skills. 9. Expect and support students to make many routine choices for themselves through the course of a school day.</p> <p>10. Work collaboratively with students to facilitate achievement of their goals by informing them of their options and the potential consequences of their choices.</p>

Social Skills	<p>Social skills are behaviors and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation (e.g., social conventions, social problem-solving when engaged in a social interaction, body language, speaking, listening, responding, verbal and written communication).</p>
Student Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integrate social skills instruction across the curriculum (e.g., general education and community). 2. Use a direct instruction curriculum to teach communication, interpersonal, conversational, negotiation, conflict, and group skills in context. 3. Provide opportunities for students to practice communication, interpersonal, conversational, negotiation, conflict, and group skills in context. 4. Assist students to use problem-solving skills when difficult interpersonal situations arise in context. 5. Provide parent and school staff information and training in supporting age-appropriate social skill development for their child, taking into consideration the family's cultural standards. 6. Use augmentative communication (AC) and assistive technology (AT) devices to encourage communication for students who use AC/AT. 7. Use ecological assessments to identify the social skills students will be expected to perform in each context. 8. Provide opportunities for students to practice social skills that foster authentic social interactions that foster the development of friendships. 9. Teach students to self-evaluate their use of social skills in the appropriate context. 10. Teach students the social expectations for various environments (e.g., church, school, work, recreation).
Student Support	<p>Student support is a network of people (e.g., family, friends, educators and adult service providers) who provide services and resources in multiple environments to prepare students to obtain their annual transition and post-secondary goals aligned with their preferences, interests, and needs.</p>
Student-Focused Planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and implement procedures for cultivating and maintaining school and community networks to assist students in obtaining their postsecondary goals.
Family Involvement	<p>**Consider networks that are culturally, racially, and ethnically representative to accommodate the needs of CLD students.</p>
Interagency Collaboration	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Provide students access to rigorous, differentiated academic instruction.
Program Structures	<p>**As well as teachers who use culturally responsive teaching strategies</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Link students to appropriate individuals who can assist student in obtaining access to assistive technology resources and teach students to use technology to enhance their academic and functional performance.

	<p>4. Link students to appropriate individuals that can provide support for financial planning, navigating the health care system, adult services, or transportation.</p> <p>5. Link students to a community mentor and/or school based mentor/graduation coach.</p> <p>6. Provide opportunities for meaningful engagement in the community (e.g., clubs, friends, advocacy groups, sports, etc.).</p> <p>7. Ensure teachers and other service personnel provide ongoing transition assessment to assist in planning for needed supports and resources in school and beyond.</p>
Transition Program	<p>A transition program prepares students to move from secondary settings (e.g., middle school/high school) to adult-life, utilizing comprehensive transition planning and education that creates individualized opportunities, services, and supports to help students achieve their post-school goals in education/training, employment, and independent living.</p>
Student-Focused Planning	<p>1. Provide systems level infrastructure (e.g., highly qualified staff and administrators with defined roles and responsibilities, sufficient budget) to monitor and guide students to obtain post-school goals.</p>
Student Development	<p>2. Provide integrated instruction in all areas of independent living (e.g., community living, transportation, recreation leisure, self-advocacy, goal setting, decision making) for all students with disabilities.</p>
Interagency Collaboration	<p>3. Provide individualized transition focused curriculum and instruction based on students' postsecondary goals in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (e.g., self-determination and financial planning).</p>
Program Structures	<p>4. Provide instruction and training in natural environments supported by classroom instruction.</p> <p>5. Provide individualized transition services based on students' postsecondary goals in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (e.g., self-determination and financial planning).</p> <p>6. Provide opportunities for engagement with non-disabled peers in the school and community.</p> <p>7. Use interagency collaboration with clearly defined roles and responsibilities to provide coordinated transition services (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health) at multiple levels (i.e., student, school, districts, region, state) to assist students in meeting their postsecondary goals.</p> <p>8. Monitor and assess students' progress in the domains of academics, daily living, personal and social, and occupational.</p>

	<p>9. Use multiple strength-based assessments across multiple domains at different points in time to assist student and IEP teams in post-school planning.</p> <p>10. Provide training and resources to families to involve them in transition planning and connect them to adult agencies and support and information networks.</p> <p>11. Conduct program evaluation to assess effectiveness of transition program.</p>
Travel Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with disabilities who could travel independently outside the home (e.g., school, local store, neighbor's house), were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; McDonnall, 2011).
Vocational Education	<p>Vocational education is a sequence of courses that prepares students for a specific job or career at various levels from trade or craft positions to technical, business, or professional careers.</p>
Student Development	<p>1. Provide a sequence of entry level and advanced integrated academic and vocational courses designed to improve students' reasoning and problem-solving skills, academic knowledge, work attitudes, specific occupational and/or technical skills, and general skills needed for employment. *</p>
Program Structures	<p>2. Provide a combination of in-school and community-based academic, competency-based applied, and hands-on learning experiences in the career pathways based on the local labor market.</p> <p>3. Provide connection to postsecondary education and/or employment through site visits and connections with support services (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, disability support services).</p> <p>4. Provide opportunities to earn certificates in certain career areas (e.g., Certified Nursing Assistant, Welding, Food Handlers Certification).</p> <p>5. Develop business partnerships to ensure a relevant curriculum.</p> <p>6. Provide career counseling and guidance to assist students in career planning and development aligned with the students' preferences, interests, needs, and skills.</p> <p>7. Provide instruction in career development through volunteer work, job shadowing, work-study, apprenticeships, or internships.</p> <p>8. Provide accommodation and supports in Career Technical Education (CTE) courses to ensure student access and mastery of content.</p> <p>9. Provide instruction in soft skills (e.g., problem solving, communicating with authority figures, responding to feedback, promptness) and occupational specific skills (e.g., clerical, machine operation).</p>

	10. Measure achievement in soft skills (e.g., problem solving, communicating with authority figures, responding to feedback, promptness) and occupational specific skills (e.g., clerical, machine operation).
Work Study	A work study program is a specified sequence of work skills instruction and experiences designed to develop students' work attitudes and general work behaviors by providing students with mutually supportive and integrated academic and vocational instruction.
Program Structures	<p>1. Provide options for paid and nonpaid work experiences both on and off-campus with options for gaining high school credit for completing program requirements in all 16 occupational clusters.</p> <p>2. Develop a plan for earning academic credit on the job through an integrated curriculum focused on work-related skills with school personnel, the student, and his/her parents.</p> <p>3. Provide supervision and guidance during the development of work behaviors and skills to address problems, concerns, insights, and learning.</p> <p>**Consider culturally responsive behaviors and skills that address cultural concerns of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students</p> <p>4. Develop business/school partnerships, by educating employers about the resources of potential employees, to set up training sites.</p> <p>**Provide businesses with culturally responsive strategies to understand the cultural needs, behaviors, and practices of students from CLD backgrounds.</p> <p>5. Develop policies to address liability, including student insurance, and other Department of Labor issues/concerns.</p> <p>6. Develop a process to match student interests with available sites both on and off campus.</p> <p>**Increase the number of available sites by recruiting site partners that reflect the cultural backgrounds of students.</p> <p>7. Provide experiences in applied real-work settings supported by instruction.</p> <p>8. Place students in work settings that match their preferences, interests, needs, and skills.</p> <p>**Consider partnerships with businesses owned by CLD communities</p> <p>9. Provide transportation to vocational training sites.</p> <p>10. Provide, or partner with adult services to provide, qualified trained staff to job coach as needed.</p> <p>**Staff qualification should include some cultural competencies or training</p> <p>11. Provide self-evaluation and monitoring instruction to students.</p>

	<p>12. Provide students school-based opportunities to reflect, discuss, and share their work placement experiences.</p> <p>13. Have school personnel and site employees assess and monitor students' progress by using job duty forms and task analysis for various sites.</p>
Youth Autonomy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with disabilities, who exhibited more autonomy and decision making (e.g., planned weekend activities, volunteered, make own decisions, make long-range plans) were more likely to be engaged in post-school education (Berry, Ward, & Kaplan, 2012; Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012). • Students with disabilities, who exhibited more autonomy and decision making (e.g., planned school activities, make long-range plans, follow directions), were more likely to be engaged in post-school employment (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012).

Appendix E

Survey with Consent Form

FAST Transition Support Survey (Spring 2018)

Survey Participation- Informed Consent

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled "Evaluation of the Implementation of a Secondary Transition Program for At-Risk Exceptional Children in Five High Schools". This study is being done by K. Lyndsey Herring Gardner-Webb University. You were selected to participate in this study because you work with FAST transition support or participating FAST students at your school.

The purpose of this research study is to evaluate how the FAST program is working in your school and in the district as a whole. If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey. This survey will ask about how FAST works in your school and it will take you approximately 15 minutes to complete.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may help the district make informed decisions about the future of FAST support.

I believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any online related activity the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. To the best of my ability your answers in this study will remain confidential. I will minimize any risks by avoiding collecting personal data and coding your responses to avoid any personal identifiers.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose.

If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher, Lyndsey Herring at 336-580-2004 or klherring@wsfcs.k12.nc.us.

By clicking "I agree" below you are indicating that you are at least 18 years old, have read and understood this consent form and agree to participate in this research study. Please print a copy of this page for your records.

*** 1. Do you agree to voluntarily participate in this survey?**

☐ I agree.

☐ I do not agree.

School Site Information

This information is confidential and will not be used to identify you.

2. What is your current job title?

3. Where do you currently work?

FAST Support Information

FAST students are those identified as both EC and at-risk.

FAST support refers to services and resources provided by Transition Directors for use with FAST students.

FAST coordinators are Aretha Jones-Moultrie and Tara Santiago.

4. How many FAST students do you work with?

0 10 20+ ☐

5. How frequently do you work directly with FAST students?

Never Several times per semester Daily ☐

6. Are you able to attend the monthly Stakeholder meetings?

I am never able to attend I have been to a few meetings I am always able to attend ☐

7. How often are you able to consult with a Transition Coordinator?

Never Once a month Once a week or more ☐

FAST Transition Practices

Below are several transition practices. Please detail how each is addressed at your school for FAST students. If the practice is not yet addressed, list plans your school will implement in the future or state "not yet addressed".

FAST students are those identified as both EC and at-risk.

FAST support refers to services and resources provided by Transition Directors for use with FAST students.

FAST coordinators are Aretha Jones-Moultrie and Tara Santiago.

8. **Career awareness** is learning about opportunities, education, and skills needed in various occupational pathways to choose a career that matches one's strengths and interests.

What does your school do to provide **career awareness** for FAST students?

9. **Community experiences** are activities occurring outside of the school setting, supported with in-class instruction, where students apply academic, social, and/or general work behaviors and skills.

What does your school do to provide **community experiences** to FAST students?

10. **Exit exams** are standardized state tests, assessing single content area (e.g. Algebra, English) or multiple skill areas, with specified levels of proficiency that students must pass in order to obtain a high school diploma.

Diploma status is achieved by completing the requirements of the state awarding the diploma including the completion of necessary core curriculum credits.

What does your school do to prepare FAST students for **exit exams** and/or to receive a **diploma**?

11. **Inclusion** in general education requires students with disabilities to have access to general education curriculum and be engaged in regular education classes with peers without disabilities.

How does your school ensure that FAST students receive an **inclusive** education?

12. **Interagency collaboration** is a clear, purposeful, and carefully designed process that promotes cross agency, cross program, and cross disciplinary collaborative efforts leading to tangible transition outcomes for youth.

How does your school utilize **interagency collaboration** to help FAST students?

13. **Career readiness courses** are individual courses that support career awareness, allow or enable students to explore various career pathways, develop occupational specific skills through instruction, and experiences focused on their desired employment goals.

What **career readiness courses** are offered to FAST students at your school?

14. **Work experience** is any activity that places the student in an authentic workplace, and could include: work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. Paid employment can include existing standard jobs in a company or organization or customized work assignments negotiated with the employer, but these activities always feature competitive pay (e.g., minimum wage) paid directly to the student by the employer.

What **work experience** is offered to FAST students at your school?

15. **Parent involvement** means parents /families/guardian are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning (e.g., decision-making, providing support, attending meetings, and advocating for their child).

How does your school **involve parents** of FAST students?

16. A **program of study** is an individualized set of courses, experiences, and curriculum designed to develop students' academic and functional achievement to support the attainment of students' desired post-school goals.

How are **programs of study** designed for FAST students at your school?

17. **Self-care/independent living skills** are skills necessary for management of one's personal self-care and daily independent living, including the personal management skills needed to interact with others, daily living skills, financial management skills, and the self-management of healthcare/wellness needs.

How are **self-care/independent living skills** taught to FAST students at your school?

18. **Self-determination** is the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one's goals, and accept consequences of one's actions.

How are FAST students taught **self-determination** at your school?

19. **Social skills** are behaviors and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation (e.g., social conventions, social problem-solving when engaged in a social interaction, body language, speaking, listening, responding, verbal and written communication).

How does your school teach **social skills** to FAST students?

20. **Student support** is a network of people (e.g., family, friends, educators and adult service providers) who provide services and resources in multiple environments to prepare students to obtain their annual transition and post-secondary goals aligned with their preferences, interests, and needs.

What **student support** is provided to FAST students at your school?

21. A **transition program** prepares students to move from secondary settings (e.g., middle school/high school) to adult-life, utilizing comprehensive transition planning and education that creates individualized opportunities, services, and supports to help students achieve their post-school goals in education/training, employment, and independent living.

Describe the **transition program(s)** in place for FAST students at your school?

22. **Vocational education** is a sequence of courses that prepares students for a specific job or career at various levels from trade or craft positions to technical, business, or professional careers.

What **vocational education** courses are offered to FAST students at your school?

23. A **work study program** is a specified sequence of work skills instruction and experiences designed to develop students' work attitudes and general work behaviors by providing students with mutually supportive and integrated academic and vocational instruction.

What **work study program** do FAST students at your school use?

FAST Support Feedback

FAST students are those identified as both EC and at-risk.

FAST support refers to services and resources provided by Transition Directors for use with FAST students.

FAST coordinators are Aretha Jones-Moultrie and Tara Santiago.

24. In your opinion, do FAST students find the support enjoyable or useful?

No, most do not Unsure Yes, they all do

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

25. Do YOU find FAST support useful or valuable?

No, not at all Somewhat Yes, very valuable

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

26. Are Transition Coordinators helpful to you?

No, not at all Somewhat Yes, very

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

27. Is time spent on FAST program components well spent?

No, not at all Somewhat Yes, very

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

28. Do FAST support materials make sense?

No, they are confusing Somewhat Yes, they are easy to understand

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

29. Do you have the appropriate resources to support FAST students?

No, not at all Somewhat Yes, we do

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

30. Are FAST students learning transition content or strategies?

☐ No, not at all
 ☐ Somewhat
 ☐ Yes, they are
 ☐

31. Are FAST students mastering effective transition skills?

☐ No, they are not
 ☐ Somewhat
 ☐ Yes, they are
 ☐

32. Are FAST students showing improved attitudes towards school or their future?

☐ No, most are not
 ☐ Somewhat
 ☐ Yes, most are
 ☐

33. Does your school's current organizational structure allow you to fully utilize FAST support.

☐ No, not at all
 ☐ Somewhat
 ☐ Yes, it works well
 ☐

34. Do you feel like FAST students receive adequate support at your school?

☐ No, not at all
 ☐ Somewhat
 ☐ Yes, there is enough support
 ☐

35. Are problems concerning FAST students dealt with quickly and efficiently?

☐ No, not at all
 ☐ Somewhat
 ☐ Yes, they are
 ☐

36. Are sufficient resources available to help FAST students (including time to plan, reflect and improve program)?

☐ No, there are not
 ☐ Somewhat
 ☐ Yes, there are sufficient resources
 ☐

37. Are FAST student successes celebrated or shared?

☐ No, never
 ☐ Sometimes
 ☐ Yes, always
 ☐

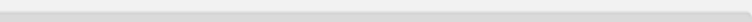
38. Has FAST support improved student learning and achievement?

No, not at all **Somewhat** **Yes, definitely** ☐

☐ 

39. Has FAST support increased student participation in non-academic activities?

No, not at all **Somewhat** **Yes, it definitely has** ☐

☐ 

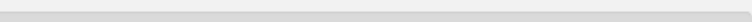
40. Has FAST student participation in post-high school planning increased?

No, not at all **Somewhat** **Yes, it has** ☐

☐ 

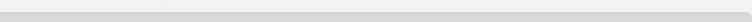
41. Has FAST student decision-making increased or improved?

No, not at all **Somewhat** **Yes, it has** ☐

☐ 

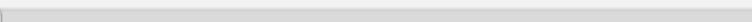
42. In your opinion, has FAST support helped prevent students from dropping out of school?

No, there are still drop-outs **Somewhat** **Yes, there are no FAST drop-outs** ☐

☐ 


43. In your opinion, do you think FAST support will improve post-school outcomes in the area of employment?

No, I don't think so **Somewhat** **Yes, I do think so** ☐

☐ 

44. In your opinion, do you think FAST support will improve post-school outcomes in the area of education?

No, I don't think so **Somewhat** **Yes, I do think so** ☐

☐ 

45. In your opinion, do you think FAST support will improve post-school outcomes in the area of independent living?

No, I don't think so **Somewhat** **Yes, I do** ☐

☐ 

46. Overall, do you feel like FAST support is making a positive impact on EC at-risk students?

No, not at all **Somewhat** **Yes, definitely** ☐

☐ 

Appendix F

Focus Group Consent Form

Informed Consent- FAST Stakeholders' Focus Group

Evaluation of the Implementation of a Secondary Transition Program for At-Risk Exceptional Children in Five High Schools

You are invited to participate in a research study evaluating the FAST support system. This study is being conducted by Lyndsey Herring for Gardner-Webb University. You are invited to participate in this study because you work directly or indirectly with FAST or FAST students.

Participation in this study is voluntary. All identifying information provided in discussions will be coded for anonymity or dismissed from use. No specific staff or student information will be used for this study.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will participate in a focus group for the Evaluation of the FAST program with other stakeholders. The focus group will be led by Lyndsey Herring. The topics that will be discussed during the focus group include program implementation, daily site functioning, resource allocation, strategies used, and areas of success/concern. The focus group will last approximately 1 hour.

The focus group will be audio-recorded in order to accurately capture what is said. If you participate in the study, you may request that the recording be paused at any time. You may choose how much or how little you want to speak during the group. You may also choose to leave the focus group at any time.

Participating in this study may not benefit you directly, but it will help us learn what are the strengths and weakness of FAST and how it may be improved in your school. I do not envision any significant risks related to participation in this study.

The information you will share with me if you participate in this study will be kept completely confidential to the full extent of the law. Participants will be asked not to use any names during the focus group discussion. Any names mentioned will not be used. Any school sites mentioned will be coded to remain anonymous for publication. Please be advised that although the researchers will take every precaution to maintain confidentiality of the data, the nature of focus groups prevents the researchers from guaranteeing confidentiality.

The researchers would like to remind participants to respect the privacy of your fellow participants and not repeat what is said in the focus group to others. Reports of study findings will not include any identifying information. Audio-recordings of the focus groups will be kept on a password-protected computer file in Lyndsey Herring's locked personal file box. After the focus group recording is typed it will be destroyed. The typed transcription will be kept on the password-protected computer and any printed copies will be kept in a locked file cabinet Lyndsey Herring's locked file box. Only Lyndsey Herring; her dissertation chair, Dr. Bruce Boyles of Gardner-Webb University, and district approved staff will be able to listen to the recording or read the typed version of the recording.

The only exception to the protection of confidentiality is if you talk about the abuse or neglect of a child by yourself or someone else, in which case the social worker for your school site is required by North Carolina law to report this to the Statewide Central Registry. This may result in an investigation to determine if the child or children you talked about are being abused or neglected.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Lyndsey Herring at XXXXXX or XXXXXX. Your signature on this consent form indicates your agreement to participate in this study.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep, whether you agree to participate or not. The second signed consent form will be kept by the researcher.

I have read the consent form and all of my questions about the study have been answered. I understand that the focus group will be recorded. I agree to participate in this study.

Print name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix G
Focus Group Agenda

FAST Stakeholder Focus Group

- ❖ **Introduction and purpose**
- ❖ **Focus group procedures/policies-** sign Participation Consent Form
- ❖ **Participant introduction**
- ❖ **Guiding Discussion Questions**
 - ❖ **Career Preparatory Experiences**
 - What activities do FAST students participate in that show them postsecondary options for work or school?
 - How do FAST students learn about supports available to them after graduation?
 - What types of classes are FAST students taking?
 - What kind goal planning activities are offered to FAST students?
 - How do FAST students learn about job trends in their community?
 - What skills are taught to FAST students and how are they taught?
 - What types of job experiences are provided to FAST students?
 - How are students' interest and skills measured and how are findings used?
 - What kinds of job or volunteer experiences are available to FAST students?
 - ❖ **Youth Development and Youth Leadership**
 - How are self-determination/self-advocacy skills taught?
 - In what ways is teambuilding/collaboration incorporated into FAST support?
 - What type of character education is offered to FAST students?
 - How is community knowledge and participation encouraged?
 - How do FAST students practice real-world decision making skills?
 - ❖ **Family Involvement**
 - Describe family involvement for FAST students at your school.
 - What types of opportunities or activities are open to families or the community?
 - How are FAST students' families provided information, updates, etc.?
 - What is communication **from** families of FAST students like at your school?
 - Describe any scenarios where families or community members take a role in FAST students' education.
 - ❖ **Connecting Activities**
 - In your opinion, what is the mission of FAST?
 - What resources does FAST support utilize at your school? Plan to use? Need?
 - Describe how FAST functions within your school? (i.e. Is it a major part of the school or EC department? Is it an outside entity? Is it too new to have a clear place?)

- What programs or organizations play a significant role in offering opportunities to FAST students? How are they incorporated or promoted?
- How do staff members and program coordinators collaborate in planning for FAST support?
- How do you feel about FAST partnerships? Are current partnerships enough? If not, what others would be helpful?
- Describe FAST student responses to FAST support. Highlight any successes or frustrations you've witnessed.

❖ **Participant Comments and Questions**

❖ **Upcoming FAST Survey**

❖ **Closure and Thank You**

Appendix H

Transition Coordinator Interview Questions

Guiding Interview Questions

- Q1** What type of support do you provide to your FAST sites?
- Q2** Describe your face to face interactions with FAST students.
- Q3** How frequently are you able to provide support to each FAST site?
- Q4** What is the most valuable service or support you provide to FAST sites or students?
- Q5** What type of materials do you provide for FAST students/teachers?
- Q6** In your opinion, are sufficient resources available to help FAST students (including time to plan, reflect and improve program) at your sites
- Q7** How do you gauge if FAST students are learning desired skills?
- Q8** In your opinion, what percent of FAST students are mastering desired transition skills at each of your sites?
- Q9** Are FAST students showing improved attitudes towards school or their future? Explain.
- Q10** How does the administration and support staff of each of your sites support FAST students/programming?
- Q11** What materials would you like to provide in the future?
- Q12** Do you feel like FAST students receive adequate support at each of your schools? Why or why not?
- Q13** How are problems concerning FAST students dealt with by you and your sites?
- Q14** How are FAST student successes celebrated or shared?
- Q15** Has FAST support improved student learning and achievement? Explain.
- Q16** How has FAST support increased student participation in non-academic activities at your
- Q17** How has FAST student participation in post-high school planning changed since the implementation of FAST at your sites?
- Q18** Has FAST student decision-making increased or improved? Explain.
- Q19** In your opinion, has FAST support helped prevent students from dropping out of school?
- Q20** In your opinion, do you think FAST support will improve post-school outcomes in the area of employment? Explain.
- Q21** In your opinion, do you think FAST support will improve post-school outcomes in the area of education? Explain.
- Q22** Describe your opinion of the overall FAST support's impact on students within our district.
- Q23** Is there anything else you'd like to share about FAST? Go for it!
- Q24** In your opinion, do you think FAST support will improve post-school outcomes in the area of independent living? Explain.