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# Planning for Transition in Special Education

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*Governors State University*

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**Table of Contents**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
Table of Contents	ii
List of Tables	v
Title Page	1
Abstract	2
Chapter 1: Introduction	3
Statement of a Problem	4
Purpose of the Study	4
Questions of the Study	5
Assumptions and Limitations	5
Educational Significance	5
Definition of Terms	6
Chapter Summary	7
Chapter II: Review of Literature	8
Laws and Litigation	8
Categories of IDEA: Table 1	9
Parental Advocacy	11
Urban Environments	12

TRANSITION PLANNING	iv
Self Determination and Diversity	13
Vocation Training	14
Educator Training	15
Educator and Parental Perspective	16
Self -Advocacy	17
Research on Transition Planning for Specific Disabilities	18
Hearing Impairments	19
Visual Impairments	19
Intellectual Disabilities	19
Autism Spectrum Disorder	20
Holistic Approach to Planning	21
Chapter Summary	22
Chapter III: Methodology	23
Participants	23
Instrumentations	24
Reliability and Validity	24
Procedure	25
Data Collection	25
Data Analysis	26
Chapter Summary	26
Chapter IV: Results	27
Demographics	27

Barriers	28
Table 2: Comparison of Parental and Educator Barriers	28
Table 3: Types of Transition Planning	29
Table 4: Important Component to Transition Planning	30
Table 5: Disabilities Represented in the Survey	31
Important Component of Transition Planning: Chart	32
Table 6: Response to Types of Transition Planning	33
Limitations of the Study	33
Chapter Summary	34
Chapter IV: Discussion and Conclusion	35
Discussion	35
Recommendations for Further Research	36
Summary and Conclusion	36
References	39
Appendices	43
Appendix A: Invitation Letter to Parents	44
Appendix B: Invitation Letter to Special Educators	44
Appendix C: Survey	45
Appendix D: IRB Form	46
Appendix E: CITI Course Completion	47

**List of Tables**

Table 1: IDEA List of Disabilities	9
Table 2: Comparison of Parental and Educator Barriers	28
Table 3: Teacher Response to Types of Transition Programing	29
Table 4: Most Important Component to Transition Planning	30
Table 5: Disabilities Represented in the Parental Survey	31
Chart 1: Important Components to Transition Planning	32
Table 6: Teacher Response to Types of Transition Planning	33

Planning for Transition in Special Education

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Masters of Arts Degree in Multicategorical Special Education

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### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to investigate special educators' perceptions of transition plans for students with disabilities. The research also investigated parents' perception of transition plans for their students' with special needs. The researcher examined the barriers that can effect transition planning. Previous research indicates that parents of diverse learners feel unprepared for this time period after post-secondary education. Educators may feel ill-equipped to prepare students for this time. Additionally, previous research indicated that the severity of the disability has a direct correlation to the success or lack thereof of student transition after post-secondary education. Furthermore, research indicated the importance of parental advocacy when drafting and executing transition plans for diverse learners. To investigate perceptions, I administered a survey to special education teachers who are currently employed at a Chicago Public High Schools and high schools within the suburban Chicago public high schools. A survey was also administered to parents of students with disabilities who attend a therapeutic Chicago Park District Program. The results of my study indicated that the barriers to effective transition planning included: lack of community resources, student's self-efficacy, and school district support. **Key Words:** Special Education, Transition Plans, Self-Determination, Self-Efficacy



## Planning for Transition in Special Education

### **Introduction**

All students in high school are asked to participate in choosing a path for their future career. Adequate preparation for post-secondary life is a necessary foundation for all students. Goupil, Tasse, Garcin, and Dore (2002) explained how students with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed. To ensure a successful transition after high school, students must have obtained the appropriate knowledge and skills. This can be extremely difficult for students with disabilities (Goupil, et al., 2002).

One part of the students Individual Education Plan that is sometimes overlooked or dismissed is the Transition Plan. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990, it is mandated that transition planning must be included in a student's IEP by the age of 16 (Schloss, Schloss, & Schloss, 2007). In the re-authorization of IDEA in 2004, the age for beginning a transition plan was changed from 14 to 16 (IDEA, 2004). Nevertheless, some states, including Illinois, require that students with disabilities at age 14 and ½ have a transition plan included in the IEP (Szidon, Ruppard, & Smith, 2015). This plan is extremely important because it is the blueprint that individuals with disabilities can follow during high school to focus them on their career and post-secondary educational goals (Schloss et al., 2007).

Both parents of individuals with disabilities and special educators are vital to the success of individuals with disabilities having a successful transition, but they may not have the necessary knowledge to implement effective plans (Kohler & Field, 2003). Special education teacher's play an important role in the execution of the transition plan (Schloss et al., 2007). One issue that may arise is the effectiveness of teacher assisted implementation and execution of

transition plans for individuals with disabilities (Papay, Unger, Williams-Diehm, and Mitchell, 2015). The authors contend that self-determination plays a key role in a successful transition into life after high school (Papay, et, al. 2015). Parents of students with disabilities may also feel unprepared for transitions after high school. They may not be aware of the resources available to their children with disabilities after completion of high school (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Finally, students with disabilities may not comprehend how imperative transition planning is to their future (Kohler & Field, 2003).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Preparing students with special needs for post high school training can be a difficult task (Schloss et al. 2007). IDEA 2004 mandates that the educational supports in place must include a transition plan to assist students in preparation for this time period (IDEA 2004). Special educators play an intricate role in implementing this plan but do they understand their role (Schloss et al.2007)? In addition, parents may not understand their rights and may not have information regarding the resources available to their child with special needs (Geenen & Powers, 2006). As a result, students with disabilities may face a lack of support and training after high school. Students with disabilities may gain a diploma but they lose access to services and support (Mellard & Lancaster, 2003).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine special educators' knowledge and beliefs about transition planning for students with disabilities. The study will also attempt to examine the barriers that parents of students with disabilities may face during this time of transition.

### **Questions of the study**

There are several key questions that guide this study. How well do these plans prepare students for post-secondary education and vocational training? What are the educator's roles in preparation for this time period of transition post high school? What are the special education teachers' and special education high school students' and parents' understandings and beliefs about transition plans?

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

One assumption of this study is that special educators assume that parents understand the importance of transition plans. Another assumption includes the special educators and the IEP team's lack of knowledge of how to execute an effective transition plan. Parents may not understand the resources available for their students during this time period. The limitation of the study could include lack of honest responses to the survey. Another limitation is, a that a sample of convenience was used. This limits generalizability of findings. Still another limitation is time. There are time constraints associated with the completion of the Graduate Seminar Class.

### **Educational Significance of the Study**

IDEA mandates that special education students are entitled to a free and appropriate education, but does this entitlement extend beyond the years of high school (IDEA 2004)? The critical issue of this study is whether special educators are preparing students with disabilities for life after high school? IDEA (2004) mandates that students with identified disabilities have a transition plan to assist them with post-secondary education and vocational training (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). The Transitional Services section of IDEA (2004) stipulates that beginning at age 16, the student's IEP must contain "appropriate and measurable post-secondary goals," (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). If parents, and students with special needs, as well as special educators do not

recognize the significance of the transition plan for student's success after high school, the negative consequences could cause concern. In some cases, after completion of a high school program, students with special needs are lost; parents may not recognize what options and resources are available for their child with special needs (Kohler & Field 2003). If a transition plan is effective, the scenario mentioned above can be remedied.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)** is a set of rules that mandated that individuals with special needs be afforded a free and appropriate education (Greenan & Phelps, 1982).

**Individual Education Plan (IEP)** is a legal document as well as a guide that is put in place to assist students with disabilities and to ensure that students have supports including accommodations and modifications to the general education curriculum which can assist them with a free and appropriate education (Yell, 2012).

**Self Determination** is a theory in which students with disabilities are intrinsically motivated to participate in and become an active member of the IEP team as it relates to making decisions and selecting goals that may affect their lives without pressure from their parents or teachers (Schloss, et al., 2007).

**Transition Plans** are services required under the Individual with Disabilities Act that include: vocational training, post-secondary education, which can improve a student with disabilities academic functioning and assist in facilitating the interchange between high school and post-graduation (Schloss, et, al. 2007).

**No Child Left Behind** Originally known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The No Child Left Behind legislation is based on five core principles which include strong accountability for results, expanded flexibility and local control of schools, an emphasis on teaching methods based on scientific research, expanded options for parents, particularly those whose children attend low-performing schools, and highly qualified teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

**Section 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973** mandate that persons with disabilities be afforded the same opportunities to gain employment and preparation for post-secondary education (Schloss & Schloss, 2007).

**Person Centered Planning** is defined as procedures that can be utilized to facilitate individual perspectives with regards to transition planning (Schloss et al., 2007).

**Vocation Education** refers to a systematic educational program which guides and prepares students for employment after completion of high school (Schloss et al., 2007).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter highlighted the issues related to transition plans for individuals with disabilities. Terms and the research questions were also outlined. Additionally, assumptions and limitations of the study were identified. Transition plans play an important role for individuals with disabilities in secondary education. Students' may not be well equipped for this time if the appropriate services are not in place. Special Education teachers and parents of students with disabilities must be able to prepare the students adequately in order for them to succeed during this time period.

## Chapter II Review of Literature

### Legislation and Litigation

The first landmark case in special education was in 1971, *Mills v. Board of Education D.C.*, which expanded the right to education to all children with disabilities and ordered school systems to develop due process procedures for parents (Webber & Plotts, 2008). Soon after in 1973, saw the emergence of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Webber & Plotts, 2008). This legislation established provision of services for persons with disabilities, focused on research and training, and established affirmative action of persons with disabilities by employers of any programs receiving federal funds (Yell, 2012).

In 1975, *Public Law 94-142 Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975* was passed (Webber & Plotts, 2008). This law mandates all children with disabilities between the ages of 5 and 18 be provided a free and appropriate education and have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Yell, 2012). In 1983, *P.L. 94-142* was reauthorized (Yell, 2012). One of the new requirements included transition plans for students from school (Webber & Plotts, 2008). In 1987, Services were mandated for preschool children with disabilities (Webber & Plotts, 2008).

In June of 1997 Public Law 105-17, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted (Webber, & Plotts, 2008). Students who are protected under IDEA, must fit under one of the following disability categories: (a) autism, (b) deaf-blindness, (c) deafness, (d) hearing impairment, (e) intellectual disability, (f) multiple disabilities, (g) orthopedic impairments, (h) other health impairment, (i) emotional disturbance, (j) specific learning disability, (k) speech or language impairment, (l) traumatic brain injury, (m) visual impairment,

including blindness (Yell, 2012). In 2004, *P.L. 108-446 IDEA* was amended to include higher standards and quality education for children with disabilities (Webber & Plotts, 2008).

IDEA recognizes 13 different disability categories that would consider a student as eligible to receive special education and related services. A student must fall within at least one of these categories in order to receive any type of special education or related services. These 13 categories, along with their descriptions, are shown in table 1 below.

Federal Disability Term	Brief Description
Orthopedic impairment	A significant physical limitation that impairs the ability to move or complete motor activities.
Traumatic brain injury (TBI)	A medical condition denoting a serious brain injury that occurs as a result of accident or injury; the impact of this disability varies widely but may affect learning, behavior, social skills, and language.
Other health impairment (OHI)	A disease or health disorder so significant that it negatively affects learning; examples

include cancer, sickle-cell anemia, and diabetes.

#### Multiple disabilities

The simultaneous presence of two or more disabilities such that none can be identified as the primary disability; the most common example is the occurrence of mental retardation and physical disabilities.

#### Deafness

A hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

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Note. Adapted from *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers*, p. 22, by M. Friend & W. Bursuck, 2009 Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Some additional laws also are directly related to transition plans. Section 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112) requires that individuals with disabilities are afforded the same employment prospects as those individuals that do not have a disability (Schloss, Schloss & Schloss 2007). Section 503 of this same act mandates that employers set aside a set amount of funds to develop, execute, and instruct individuals with disabilities (Schloss et al., 2007). Section 504 also mandates that individuals with disabilities not be discriminated against due to the



disability and this is directly related to housing, employment and training programs (Schloss et al., 2007). According to Schloss et al., 2007 the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990 offered further protections for individuals with disabilities. This law directs testing to seek out interests and possible career paths, additionally, the law added career counseling to assist with post-secondary shift for transition from secondary education (Schloss et al., 2007). Finally, the Workplace Investment Act of 1998, provides support and training to low income individuals between the ages of 14 to 21 (Schloss et al., 2007).

### **Transition Planning Research**

Transition planning for individuals with disabilities can be challenging for all persons involved. The students must prepare to leave the comfortable surroundings of the high school setting and venture out into the workplace. Parents must prepare themselves for this time period and educators must expose students to trainings and prepare them as well. The following review of literature will examine some of the barriers associated with the implementation and execution of transition plans.

### **Parental Advocacy**

Geenen and Powers, (2006) argue that foster children with disabilities receive inadequate transitional services in comparison to students who are not in foster care. To support this argument, the researchers examined the transition goals, if any, as well as the quality of goals listed, the relevance of goals, diploma type, and the effectiveness of the goals that were included on the transition plan (Geenen & Powers, 2006). The overall number of the goals listed on the transition plans for the students in foster care were significantly lower than these for the other

group (Geenen & Powers, 2006). The researchers also recognized the importance of advocates being present during the IEP meetings (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Advocates can have a positive impact on the implementation and development of transition plans. Finally, the researchers concluded the bias that can be present in urban communities, and working with individuals with disabilities with inadequate economic resources (Geenen & Powers, 2006).

### **Urban Environments**

Employment disparities for urban youth with disabilities indicate the lack of successful transitions to employment after completion of high school. According to Fabian (2007), there were significant differences between job placement for individuals' in the inner cities with diverse racial ethnic backgrounds as compared to other racial ethnic groups residing in the suburbs. Individuals with special needs from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as those individual students from minority groups are at a distinct disadvantage in securing employment and training while in high school (Fabian, 2007). The researchers examined a program's effect on students who reside in the inner city (Fabian, 2007). The Bridge Program measured the success of students with disabilities and assigned them with work experience and support during their last two years of high school (Fabian, 2007). Researchers further suggests that interventions for individuals with disabilities in inner cities as it relates to job placement and vocation training should start before entering high school (Fabian, 2007). After completing this program, researchers concluded that individuals in the inner city who had a disability were able to secure employment as compared to those individuals in the suburban area and they believe that as a result of this intervention, the employment opportunities increased (Fabian, 2007).

**Self -Determination in culturally diverse families**

Recognizing the individual needs of students who are ethnically and culturally diverse in transition planning is something that must be considered in special education. According to Trainor (2005) self-determination is connected to independence, however in some cultures independent living is not suitable. The researchers examined the perceptual differences in transition planning between racial ethnic groups and across socioeconomic status (Trainor 2005). The participants included male students with a diagnosis of Specific Learning Disabilities from the following racial ethnic groups: African American, European American, and Hispanic American (Trainor, 2005). The participants' transition plans were reviewed which included the objectives and goals from the plans, additionally observations of the transition meetings were conducted (Trainor, 2005). The data analyzed also included focus group interviews and follow-up interviews (Trainor, 2005). Trainor (2005) concluded that there were only slight differences noted amongst the racial ethnic groups and which had a direct impact on respondent's behavior and perceptions related to the transition process. The researcher also argued that some of the goals listed did not align with student's intentions (Trainor, 2005). One noted difference was in regards to independent living and the Hispanic American participants (Trainor, 2005). These students intended to remain in the parent's residence after high school, but their transition goals did not align with this idea (Trainor, 2005). Trainor (2005) suggested that: students should engage in transition planning in a more proactive manner, program goals and transition goals should complement each other, transition plans must be individualized to the particular needs of the student, intensify parental involvement in the process, and establish transition teams that include counselors and general education teachers (Trainor, 2005).

Lewis (2014), also examined how individuals within cultural and linguistically diverse populations view independence within transition plans. Lewis (2014) explained that independent living may not be an aspiration for all cultures. The researcher argues that special educators must acknowledge the cultural distinctions which define independence and remain vigilant in meeting the individual as well as the cultural needs of the student (Lewis, 2014). The researcher noted that while residing in an independent living environment may be the measure of success for some students, other cultures may view independent living negatively (Lewis, 2014). The researcher reported the following may better serve the students from diverse backgrounds: focus on family supports which includes self-reliance while residing with the family, and establishing a cooperative environment between the family, the school and the diverse learner (Lewis, 2014).

### **Vocation Training and High School Completion**

The next study examined the importance of involvement in a specific organization to increase employment opportunities post high school (Luecking, R. & Wittenburg, D., 2009). This study was completed in a case study format. The Social Security Administration developed a new organization, the Youth Transition Demonstration and this group was to assist the Social Security Administration track individuals with disabilities that received funds (Luecking, R. & Wittenburg, D., 2009). The YTD focused on seven components including individual work experiences, advocating of life choices, supportive family life, relevance of academic courses, and transitional supports, health services, and counseling as it relates to benefits (Luecking, R. & Wittenburg, D., 2009). The author's examined the data collected from YTD and selected individuals who participated in the program (Luecking, R. & Wittenburg, D., 2009). The major indication of the case study is not only to examine the effectiveness of the program offered by

YTD but also to determine the association between gainful employment and previous work experience (Luecking, R. & Wittenburg, D., 2009).

The next study examined the effectiveness of vocation training in working with individuals with disabilities in Finland (Hirvonen, M., 2010). The author contends that there should be a more all-inclusive model as compared to the individualistic program (Hirvonen, M., 2010). This study focused on motivating educators with new information and encouraging them to pass the information along to their students so they can in turn achieve success in transitioning post high school (Hirvonen, M., 2010). The study contends that the infusion of inclusionary practices has changed the dynamics of special education and as a result the model and ideals should change as well (Hirvonen, M., 2010). This study although conducted in Finland has implications for special education in the United States. The holistic approach to special education should be examined by educators to determine the effectiveness for the students that they serve. Separate societies and specialized services should be well known. This could have a direct impact on the future of teacher training and subsequent services for the special education community.

### **Vocational Training in Elementary School**

Jones and Williams (2011) found that individuals with disabilities who participated in vocational training in middle school had decreased amounts of recidivism and greater success post high school. They noted that half of students with disabilities dropped out of school before they could begin vocation training (Jones & Williams, 2011). This implies that interventions and training should begin before the last two years of high school (Jones & Williams, 2011). The researchers concluded that there is a need for beginning vocational training at an early age to instill confidence in students and in parents of individuals with disabilities in order to decrease

the likelihood of dropping out of school (Jones & Williams, 2011). In essence, beginning vocational training earlier in the academic career of students with disabilities can assist the parents, staff, and the individual and have a positive impact on measures for student success (Jones & Williams, 2011). Regardless of when transition planning begins, training and professional development for special educators is necessary.

### **Educator Training**

A study conducted by Conderman, Johnston–Rodriguez, Hartman, and Kemp (2013) examined the effectiveness of training of secondary special educators enrolled in a university program. The researchers chose candidates in the special education program and requested that they complete surveys and reflections at the conclusion of the course of study (Conderman et al., 2013). The participants noted difficulties as it relates to the transition plan observation and implementation (Conderman et al., 2013). The participants were asked to observe and measure students with disabilities at the high school level, as well as enlist the support of the teacher facilitating the observation and supervision of the students with disabilities (Conderman et al., 2013). The researchers explained that the participants experienced difficulties as it related to the transition plan (Conderman et al., 2013). Some of these obstacles involve: obtaining adequate responses from the students with disabilities, and recognizing that transition plans were not viewed as significant by the supervising teacher. This indicates training and experiences can have an impact on the mindset of special educators and their opinion of transition plans.

### **Educator and Parental Prospective**

Groupil, Tasse, Garcin and Dore, (2002) found that the process of having and implementing the Individual Educational Program and the Individual Transition Plan has been successfully

implemented in the United States and the United Kingdom but not in parts of Canada (Groupil, Tasse', Garcin & Dore', 2002). The researchers initiated a transition plan for students with disabilities in a high school setting in Quebec; to collect data they surveyed parents, teachers and administrators on the effectiveness of the process of planning for and implementation of transition plans for students with disabilities (Groupil et al., 2002). The researchers noted that the majority of the parents recognized the importance of transition plans and some indicated that the planning should begin at an earlier age (Groupil et al., 2002). Most educators recognized the imperative role that transition plans have for students with disabilities, but some educators reported that the process is too time consuming (Groupil et al., 2002). Some participants stated that there should be a direct correlation with the Individual Education Plan goals and objectives and the objectives expressed in the transition plan (Groupil et al., 2002). This article recognizes the vital role that transition plans have on the future of individuals with disabilities. It further enhances the significance of parental and educator involvement in the planning and implementation of transition plans.

### **Self-Advocacy**

Lewis (2014), provided detail on the impact of student directed transition planning. The study measured the differences between the group that received intervention, self-determination training, and if the results of this training had a positive impact on the completion of the ARC Self Determination Scale (Lewis 2014). Pre-intervention and post-intervention ratings of the ARC Self Determination Scale were conducted during data collection and the study also included a control group that did not receive intervention (Lewis 2014). Transition plans are imperative part of a student's individual education plan (Lewis 2014). They are essential to the success of students with disabilities' post-secondary education (Lewis 2014). Because of the

laws set forth in IDEA, special educators are aware that students need a transition plan, but they may not be aware of how to execute an effective plan for all of the students that they serve (Lewis 2014). The students with disabilities may not realize the importance of these plans, and providing them with interventions such as those presented with the study may have a dramatic impact on their educational/vocational future (Lewis 2014).

The importance of self-determination skills of individuals for students that are emotionally disturbed and have learning disabilities were examined by the researchers. The self determination of students with the above listed disabilities were measured using the AIR Self Determination Scale (Carter, E., Lane, K., Pierson, and Glaser, B., 2006). Self-motivation can have a direct impact on the future of individuals with disabilities. These students need to be motivated in all areas including at home and in school and the community (Carter, et al., 2006). Students with disabilities can at times have issues with self-esteem so incorporating this into their daily curriculum can have a long lasting effect on the overall well-being (Carter, et al., 2006). Self-determination skills can be transferred to the work place which may lead to long term success of students with disabilities and educators must be committed in assisting students to developing self-esteem.

### **Research on Transition Plans for Specific Disabilities**

The Individual Education Act (2004) or IDEA indicates that there are thirteen recognized disabilities in determining eligibility for education and supplemental services. These disabilities are as follows: autism, and autism spectrum disorder, services for visually impaired individuals as well as hearing impaired individuals, cognitive and intellectual disabilities, specific learning disabilities, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injuries, other health impairments, emotional disabilities and multiple disabilities, speech and language impairments, deaf-blindness (IDEA



2004 sec. 226.75). Research on transition plans for the following disabilities is reviewed: intellectual disabilities and the impact of inclusion, individuals with a hearing impairment, visual impairments, autism spectrum disorder, specific learning disabilities, and emotional disturbance.

### **Hearing Impairments and Visual Impairments**

Saunders (2012), examined how individuals with hearing impairments are supported with services throughout the college community. A survey to examine services for hearing impaired individuals at the college level, as well as including interviews and campus visits, were used to examine distinctions between services offered at the high school level as compared to the university level (Saunders, 2012). A case study was completed as well. The research highlights the importance of supportive parents, and peer groups once admitted into college, and having a connection to a local disability office to assist with acquiring assistive services once admitted to a university were important factors (Saunders, 2012).

Individuals with visual impairments continue to have high unemployment rates as compared to their non-impaired peers (Connors, Curtis, Emerson, and Dormitorio, 2014). A study by these researchers examined these individuals with disabilities long after they completed high school as they tried to determine whether they are still unemployed (Connors et al. 2014). The implications of this study concluded that visually impaired students should attempt to seek out employment while in high school to increase the likelihood of future employment opportunities (Connors et al., 2014).

### **Intellectual Disabilities**

A mixed method study conducted by the researchers explored the strengths of individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder (Carter, Boehm, Biggs, Annandale,

Taylor, Loock, & Liu, 2015). The parents of the students were surveyed regarding perceptions of their child's strengths (Carter et al. 2015). Some of the areas covered include: courage, empathy, kindness, forgiveness, gratitude, humor, optimism, self-control, and self-efficacy (Carter et al. 2015). Parents were also asked open ended questions regarding their child strengths and supplemental questions were asked in interview sessions (Carter et al. 2015). The researchers found parents overall describe their child with positive attributes and they were able to describe how their child is resilient (Carter et al. 2015). The implications of this study include how parents view their child as compared to educator's interpretation of a student's strengths (Carter et al. 2015).

A second study examined functional curriculum and its impact on students with intellectual disabilities and the implications for success post high school (Bouck, 2012). Parents who had children with intellectual disabilities were also surveyed on their children's preparedness for post high school (Bouck, 2012). The findings indicated that individual students who received functional curriculum did live independently but were not employed and did not attend a college or university (Bouck, 2012). These results of this study indicate that being exposed to functional curriculum was not a predictor of success after completion of high school as compared to those students with disabilities exposed to an academic curriculum (Bouck, 2012).

### **Autism Spectrum Disorder**

Educators who seek to write transition plans for individuals with Autism face distinct challenges as they attempt to assist in the design and implementation of transition planning (Szidon, Ruppard, & Smith, 2015). The authors contend that transition planning for students with ASD must be aligned with their strengths and compensate for any deficiencies that they may

have socially and or academically (Szidon et.al, 2015). The authors highlight five recommendations that may assist educators when writing goals for students for students with ASD (Smith et, al., 2015). These recommendations include the following: identifying transition goals through utilizing assessment data gathered on the individual student, connecting the student's IEP goal with their post-secondary objectives, modifying the goal to meet the changing needs of a student, and allow for opportunity for the student to understand new skills that may require teaching (Smith et, al., 2015). Finally, the authors suggest that special educators assess and analyze if the measures that are put in place are effective or if modifications are necessary (Smith et, al., 2015).

Self-determination can also play a pivotal role in successful execution of transition planning for students with ASD (Held, Thoma, & Thomas, 2004). The researchers investigated the effects that self-determination has on a student with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Held et, al., 2004). The authors contend that utilizing an ecological approach would ensure a great measure of success for the student and could also evoke change beyond his/her individual needs which may include changes at a national level as well (Held et, al., 2004). This approach contends that behavior is influenced by many factors and across all level which may include social-emotional (Smith et, al. 2004). The researchers found that utilizing a holistic approach with the student encouraged success when transitioning (Smith et, al., 2004). They contend that incorporating person centered planning, self-determination curriculum, self-instructional model, and the use of technology ensured success with the student (Smith et, al., 2004).

### **Holistic Approach to Planning**

Kellems and Morningstar (2010) highlighted the importance of involvement from all areas where the special educators, parents, and the diverse learners cooperate to ensure a successful

transition. The researchers noted that transition plans should be student specific which should address the individual needs (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Kellems and Morningstar (2010) outlined several tools and techniques that can assist students during their time of transition. The authors proposed that transition planning should begin at age 13, additionally realistic goals should be implemented by ninth or tenth grade (Kellems & Morningstar 2010). Students should also be immersed in the planning for their future, this includes active participation in IEP meetings, linking current high school students with those who are enrolled in college, and establishing a support group which enables students to recognize strengths and weakness (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Educators are encouraged to utilize a variety of assessments to determine the most appropriate vocational opportunities for the diverse learner; furthermore, teachers should establish rapport with their student so that they can find the best placement for their student (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). The researchers also recognized the importance of family involvement in the transition process and encouraged special educators to develop a brochure that highlight transition procedures, and community resources, holding a transition fair was promoted to ensure that parents understand where to find resources (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010).

### **Chapter Summary**

The above chapter highlighted the history of special education including the laws and litigation. This chapter also reviewed literature on successful transition planning for individuals with disabilities. The chapter provided descriptions of the different disabilities and how each student with a disability must be viewed. Parental advocacy and self -determination were also discussed as necessities for a successful transition.

### **Chapter III.**

#### **Methodology**

The goal of this study is to examine special educators' knowledge and beliefs about transition planning for students with disabilities. The study will also attempt to examine the barriers which prohibit success for students with disabilities. The method used for data collection was survey questionnaire with items in Likert scale, open ended questions and opinion format (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012). The data collection method utilized was quantitative descriptive with a survey design (Gay et al. 2012).

#### **Participants**

The study's participants included 30 parents of individuals with special needs in the high school setting, as well as 30 teachers who are mandated by IDEA 2004 to complete Transition Plans for the students that they service. I surveyed special education high school teachers within the Chicago Public School District. Additionally, special education teachers from suburban school districts of Chicago were also participants. Parental participants included parents from a Therapeutic Recreation Program whose children are enrolled at a Chicago Park District on the south side of Chicago.

The participants agreed to complete the survey voluntarily, with the recognition that their information will be kept confidential. To conduct this research, teachers completed questionnaires about transition planning for students with disabilities. Parents who participated have children that attend a Therapeutic Program for individuals with disabilities. The parents also completed a survey questionnaire regarding transition planning.

### **Instrumentation**

A survey was distributed to the parents of the students who are enrolled at a therapeutic Chicago Park District program. The goal of this survey was to determine if they view their child's transition plan to be efficient and effective (Refer to Appendix A ). The responses available range from (SA) strongly agree, agree (A), undecided (U), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD). The surveys contained open ended questions as well as opinion questions and a request for demographic information. The demographic information included age of student, and diagnosed disability of their child and the parents' educational attainment. Additionally, parents were asked about trust in the educational system and their view of the special educator's role. The special education teacher's survey included open-ended questions that pertained to the programs that their school has in place to help with transition planning, the effectiveness of the subsequent programs was noted via an opinion question, additionally, the age that the teachers' believed that transition planning should begin was also asked on the survey. The most important component of transition planning as well as barriers to effective planning were listed questions as questions on the survey.

### **Reliability and Validity**

To determine the validity, the survey design used for this research study was analyzed by an expert panel (Gay et al., 2012). The panel consisted of peers of the researcher who are enrolled in a Multi-Categorical Special Education graduate program at Governors State University. These students all have diverse backgrounds and are conducting different research topics within the field of special education. Additionally, the survey design was examined by a professor within the special education department at Governors State University.

## **Procedure**

### **Data Collection**

This study was conducted during the spring semester of 2016 for the Graduate Seminar Class at Governors State University in partial fulfillment for the Masters of Arts Degree in Multicategorical Special Education. This study used a quantitative descriptive method with a survey design (Gay et al., 2012). The survey design method was used to gather numerical data to assess special educator's beliefs and the barriers that can effect transition planning (Gay et al., 2012). Additionally, parents of children with disabilities were also surveyed regarding their beliefs and the barriers that can effect transition planning (Gay et al., 2012). The process began by distributing the surveys and an introduction letter to the special education staff on an individual basis (See Appendix A) Surveys and introduction letters were also given to the parents of the students enrolled in a therapeutic park district program within the Chicago Park District (See Appendix B). The parent's and teacher surveys were distributed on paper and they had the option of completing the survey on line using googleforms.com.

### **Data Collection**

The surveys were given to each group of participants both special education teacher and parents of students with disabilities enrolled at high schools within Chicago Public School District and suburban districts. The parental participants utilized in the study were members of a parental support group for parents who had children enrolled in a therapeutic recreational program within the Chicago Park District located on the South Side of Chicago. The surveys were distributed via email using goggleforms.com or in person.

### **Data Analysis**

Quantitative descriptive research was used to analyze the numerical data collected from the received surveys. A bipolar scale design was utilized (Gay et al., 2012). Likert item responses were assigned numerical values which allowed for calculation of mean scores. Responses were recorded in an Excel Spreadsheet. The instrument utilized to create the survey Google Forms, also provided the researcher a summary of the data collected.

The information gathered from the parent/guardian surveys and the special education teacher surveys transcribed and analyzed and entered on an Excel spreadsheet to determine if differences existed between parents and special education teachers in responses regarding the beliefs about transition planning for students with disabilities (Gay et al. 2012). The data were also numerically coded and entered into the Excel spreadsheet. After it is entered into the spreadsheet, the researcher examined the data to determine if there are any differences between the parents and teacher responses as it related to perceived barriers, age that transition planning should begin.

### **Chapter Summary**

Quantitative descriptive methodology research was used to examine the opinions of parents and special education teachers on the effectiveness of Transition Plans (Gay et al. 2012). This data can be analyzed and used to gather ideas for improving transition plans for students with disabilities across disabilities within Instructional settings. The data was analyzed and discussed within the chapters of this study.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

The purpose of the study is to investigate perceptions of transition plans and to note any observed barriers to successful transition planning between special education teachers and parents of diverse learners. To collect and organize data a quantitative descriptive research method was conducted (Gay et al., 2012). A survey design method was utilized to collect demographic information from the participants with regards to his or her child's disability and parental level of education (Gay et al., 2012). A total of 60 participants were surveyed and this included 30 special education teachers and 30 parents of students with disabilities.

### **Demographics**

The surveys were distributed to special educators within the city of Chicago and surrounding suburbs. The parental surveys were distributed to parents within the Chicago area who were attendance at the parental support group that is held monthly at a Chicago Park District located on the south side of Chicago. The parents were asked to complete the following demographic questions on the survey instrument: gender of their child with disabilities, identified disability of their child, their child's age, their level of education and finally the gender of the parent who completed the survey. Of the parental participants 53% were female and 48% were male, 25% of those surveyed completed some college, 25% had a bachelor's degree and 50% were high school graduates but did not complete college. The parents who participated have children with the following disabilities: 37% had children with Autism Spectrum Disorder, 17% of those surveyed has a child diagnosed with Intellectual Disability, 17% has a child with the diagnosis of Learning Disability, 14% of those surveyed have a child with a dual diagnosis, 10% of parents surveyed has a child with a diagnosis of emotional disturbance. This diagnosis could have a profound

impact on how they view their child’s future after high school and as such could determine the perceived importance of their child’s transition plan.

**Barriers to Effective Transition Planning**

Special educators and parents of diverse learners were both asked what were the barriers to effective transition planning for students with disabilities. The following table displays the response to this question: What are some barriers to effective transition planning?

Table 2

*Comparison of Parental and Educator Barriers in Transition Planning*

Barriers	Teachers	Parents
Educator Training	5%	23%
Community Resources	27%	33%
School District Support	37%	16%
Student Efficacy	30%	16%
Parental Advocacy	5%	17%

Note: Number of participants surveyed in each category is 30.

This survey displayed distinct differences between the two groups. Parents believe that lack of community resources is the most prominent barrier to transition planning. Special educators surveyed reported that school district support was a prominent barrier to effective transition planning for special education students and this could be due to what they perceive as a lack of funding and support for new initiatives that may increase successful planning.

Parents surveyed believe that transition planning should begin earlier than age 14 and a half. Sixty-five percent of the respondents surveyed believe that transition planning should begin at age 12 or younger. 53% of teachers surveyed believed that transition planning should begin earlier as well.

The following table displays the type of programs that are in place within the schools. Some special educators were unaware of the programs in place and they relied solely on the Transition Coordinator within their school. A few special educators indicated on the open ended question that they wanted to implement vocational programs or offer more assistance to their students but they were unable to do so due to lack of school district support.

Table 3

*Teacher Response to Types of Transition Programming*


---

Programs Offered	Percent
Career Cruising	13%
Internships	7%
Vocational Training	30%
Work Program	33%
Job Shadowing	17%
College Tours	17%

---

Note: Number of participants surveyed is 30.

This data collected showed that the program that is utilized most often is a work program, with vocational training being listed as the next highest program. The question asked on the survey was what programs does your school have in place that prepare special education students for post-secondary education and or vocational training? One limitation of this question is that it is open ended and can either have teachers to answer multiple ways, or leave the item blank. It is also noted that some respondents referred to other programs in their answer such as Southwest Cooperative which guides students with disabilities through the transition process. This program listed above may have a community relationship with diverse learners but it is not a direct part of the school itself.

Other findings from the teacher survey instrument included the most important component to transition planning? The answers are listed in the following table.

Table 4

*Teacher Response to the Most Important Component to Transition Planning*

---

Components	Percent
Parental Advocacy	17%
Educator Training	10%
Vocational Training	30%
Community Resources	27%
Student Self Advocacy	54%

---

Note: Number of participants surveyed in each category is 30.

In comparison 47% of parents responded to the survey and stated that as a parent it is their responsibility to advocate for their child. 37% of parental respondents agreed with this statement. This difference could be due to the parent's beliefs or it could be a direct reflection of the diagnosed disability that his/her child possess. The following table lists the type of disabilities that is represented in the survey.

Table 5

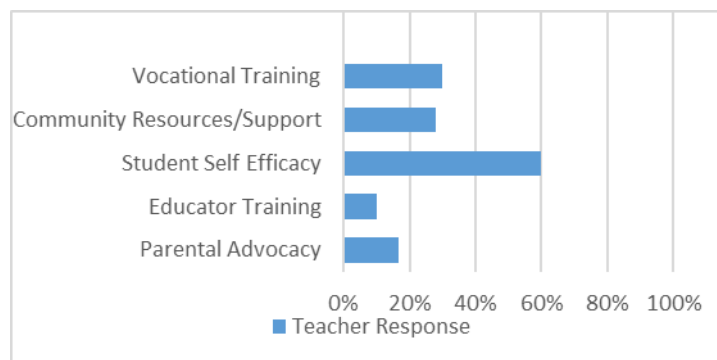
*Disabilities Represented in the Survey*


---

Disability	Percent
Autism Spectrum Disorder	37%
Intellectual Disability	17%
Multiple Diagnosis	10%
Learning Disability	17%
Emotionally Disturbed	15%
Other Health Impairment	4%

---

Note: Number of respondents is 30.



The following chart displayed above the most important components of transition planning according to the special educators' surveyed. The educator's surveyed indicated that student-self efficacy was the most important component to transition planning, and this was 60% of respondents. The special educator's surveyed also indicated that vocational training was another important component and 30% of respondents' surveyed believed that this training was most important. Community resources and support were also listed as an important component to transition planning also with a response rate of 30%. Parental Advocacy and educator training were the lowest of the five categories that special educators feel are important.

The next table indicated the teacher responses to type of transition programming. Some special educators were unaware of the programs in place and they relied solely on the Transition Coordinator within their school. A few special educators indicated on the open ended question that they wanted to implement vocational programs or offer more assistance to their students but they were unable to do so due to lack of school district support.

Table 6

*Teacher Response to Types of Transition Programming*

---

Programs Offered	Percent
Career Cruising	13%
Internships	7%
Vocational Training	30%
Work Program	33%
Job Shadowing	17%
College Tours	17%

---

These results indicated that there are a variety of programs for transitions in special education.

**Limitations of this Study**

Some of the limitations of this study include the survey instrument utilized by the researcher, additionally, the time constraints associated with the completion of this project that does not allow the researcher to gather a large sample size that is a true representation of the community. Additionally, parents who have children that are more severe and profound have a different view of their child's future and their role in their transition plan. Special educators also need to recognized the distinct academic, social emotional, and cognitive differences within each disability and customize a transition plan that meets their individual needs.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the findings of the survey that was distributed to both parents and special educators. Demographic information was gathered as well. Teachers and parents had differences when they responded to the question regarding the most important component of transition planning. Teachers who responded to the survey remarked that student self-efficacy was the most important component. Additionally, educators remarked that school district support was most important barrier to transition planning, while parents believed that community based resources was the most important barrier. Finally, I believe that in order to have effective transition planning teachers, parents, community, the school district, and the students need to work together in a cooperative manner in order to achieve success after high school.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

Transition plans are a pivotal part of the educational process for students with disabilities. Students are assessed to determine the potential career path, but what if they lack the skills necessary to function within society? Students need parental advocates, community resources, support from the school district, vocational training and self determination to complete their transition from high school to college or career. Educators can also benefit from additional training. Community and school district support and resources, parental advocacy, and student efficacy all play a key role in achievement in transition after high school. The cultural, ethnic background of the student should also be examined when determining transition goals. In essence, a holistic approach to transition planning should be completed for each student with disabilities.

### **Discussion**

Research supports that transition planning should be completed on an individual level (Lewis, 2014). Geenen and Powers (2006) explained the importance of parental advocacy in planning transition for special education students. They explained that foster children with disabilities lack effective goals as it related to transition planning as compared to individuals with disabilities who have parental advocates (Geenen & Powers, 2006). As indicated on the survey conducted by the researcher vocational training is an important component to transition planning. Jones and Williams (2011) found that individuals with disabilities who participated in vocational training in middle school had decreased amounts of recidivism and greater success post high school. Lewis (2014) noted the importance of self-determination in planning for transitions. The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center's (NSTTAC) indicated that there are several

predictors for success post high school (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). The following initiatives are highlighted by the authors: career awareness, community experiences, cooperation between community partners, occupational courses, parental advocacy, self -efficacy, self-determination, and work study programs (Kellems & Morningstar, 2010). Overall the research indicated that a more holistic individualistic approach to transition planning should be utilized.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Further research on this topic is a necessity because educators must attain the skills needed to implement effective transition plans. Students IEP goals should be aligned with transition goals this may help students to become prepared for post- secondary life. It is also noted that students may benefit from having a transition plan and vocational opportunities earlier than the mandated age implemented by IDEA. Students who have severe and profound disabilities may benefit from additional time to train in a prospective vocation, and also may benefit from additional assessment tools which allow for proper vocational placement. School Districts may also want to incorporate community resources for all student levels which may include individuals who are more severe and profound.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was examine the effectiveness of transition planning for parents and special education teachers. Parents remarked on the survey instrument that parental engagement and access to community resources were pivotal to the success of a transition plan for a student with disabilities. Educators, indicated that student self- advocacy and vocational training were the most important. Educators indicated on the survey instrument that lack of support from the school district was the most important barrier to transition planning for students with disabilities. Parents indicated that lack of community resources was the greatest barrier to transition planning

for students with disabilities. Research showed teaching self-determination skills and implementing a holistic approach where there are interactions between the community, the school, parents and the student is the most effective pathway to success for students with disabilities.

The primary educational legislation that mandates that students with disabilities have a transition plan as part of their Individual Education Plan is IDEA (2004), (Schloss et al., 2007). The state of Illinois mandated that students with disabilities begin this process at 14 and ½ as compared to the federally mandated age of 16. IDEA (2004) stipulates that beginning at age 16, students with disabilities have a plan which must contain “appropriate and measurable goals,” (Madaus & Shaw, 2006). Lewis (2014) recognized the cultural differences that may exist when establishing goals for persons with disabilities.

A quantitative descriptive research method was conducted to collect and analyze data for this research study. A survey design method was designed and administered to assess special educator’s perception of transition plans. A survey was also disseminated to parents of students with disabilities to assess their opinions regarding barriers to effective transition planning and programs that they would like to see implemented. A total of 30 teacher and 30 parent surveys were collected. When special educators were asked the most important component to transition planning they indicated that student self-efficacy was the most important at 60%. In contrast, parents who participated in the survey responded that community resources and support were the most important components to transition planning. Additionally, 37% of special educator participants indicated that school district support was the most notable barrier to transition planning as compared to parental respondents who indicated that lack of community resources was the most important barrier to transition planning. Further research is suggested to increase

parental awareness related to the goals and objectives of transition plans. Additional research should also examine special educators' evaluations of new programs related to transition plans. This includes testing and evaluations and informing parents of their rights regarding transition planning. Self-determination training should be implemented to allow students with disabilities to become an active participant in the planning for their future.

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## Appendix A Special Education Teacher Letter

Dear Special Education Teacher,

The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance. I am currently in pursuit of a Master's Degree in Multicategorical Special Education at Governor's State University. As part of the culminating project, I am investigating the effectiveness of transition planning as it relates to the diverse learners' population. I am seeking assistance with this project from special education teachers as well as parents of individuals with disabilities. It is my goal to uncover how parents feel about the effectiveness of their child's transition plan so we can as educators serve their child in the best manner possible. I plan to conduct this research during the Spring, 2016 semester.

Your participation is optional and responses to the study's survey will be kept confidential. If you are willing to participate, I will ask that you complete the enclosed survey. Your participation will assist me in gaining insight into how we can better serve our students. Your responses can also provide valuable information to current and future special educators as to how they can best serve students as it relates to transition planning. Attached you will find a link to the [googleforms.com](https://www.googleforms.com) website where you can complete the survey. I will follow-up with you in two weeks to ensure surveys are completed.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to contact me via email at [ecrockett-love@student.govst.edu](mailto:ecrockett-love@student.govst.edu). By completing and submitting this survey, you are providing your consent to be a participant in this research study.

Sincerely,

Esther Crockett-Love

## Appendix B Invitation Letter to Parents

Dear Parents and Guardians,

The purpose of this letter is to ask for your report and assistance. I am working towards the completion of a Master's Degree in Multicategorical Special Education at Governors State University. As part of my final project, I am trying to examine the effectiveness of transition planning and its impact on your child's future. I plan to focus on parents who have children with Individual Education Plans. Additionally, I will distribute surveys to special education teachers to evaluate their views on transition plans and the impact that they have on your child's future. The study will be conducted during the Spring, 2016 semester.

Your participation is optional and responses to the study's survey will be kept confidential. Your child will not be identified by name. Your participation will help me to gain insight about the parental perspective on transition planning. Your responses can also provide valuable information to current and future special educators as to how they can best serve your child as it relates to transition planning.

Your cooperation will be greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or need further information please feel free to contact me via email at [ecrockett-love@redacted.com](mailto:ecrockett-love@redacted.com). The enclosed survey is made available through googleforms.com. By completing and submitting this survey you are providing your consent to be a participant in this research study.

Sincerely,

Esther Crockett-Love

[ecrockett-love@redacted.com](mailto:ecrockett-love@redacted.com)

## Appendix A Special Education Teacher Letter

Dear Special Education Teacher,

The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance. I am currently in pursuit of a Master's Degree in Multicategorical Special Education at Governor's State University. As part of the culminating project, I am investigating the effectiveness of transition planning as it relates to the diverse learners' population. I am seeking assistance with this project from special education teachers as well as parents of individuals with disabilities. It is my goal to uncover how parents feel about the effectiveness of their child's transition plan so we can as educators serve their child in the best manner possible. I plan to conduct this research during the Spring, 2016 semester.

Your participation is optional and responses to the study's survey will be kept confidential. If you are willing to participate, I will ask that you complete the enclosed survey. Your participation will assist me in gaining insight into how we can better serve our students. Your responses can also provide valuable information to current and future special educators as to how they can best serve students as it relates to transition planning. Attached you will find a link to the googleforms.com website where you can complete the survey. I will follow-up with you in two weeks to ensure surveys are completed.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions or need further information, please feel free to contact me via email at [ecrockett-love\[REDACTED\]](mailto:ecrockett-love[REDACTED]). By completing and submitting this survey, you are providing your consent to be a participant in this research study.

Sincerely,

Esther Crockett-Love

# Transition Plans Teachers

## Appendix D

1. What programs does your school have in place that prepare students for post-secondary education and/or vocational training?

2. Do you feel that these programs are effective?

- Yes
- No
- NA

3. Do you feel that parental advocacy is important to the implementation of their child's transition plan?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

4. What is the most important component to transition planning?

	Parental Advocacy	Educator Training	Student Self-Determination School	Community Resources/Support	Vocational Training
Please fill in an appropriate response.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. What are some barriers to effective transition planning?

	Educator Training	Parental Advocacy	Student Efficacy	Community Based Resources/Education	School District Support
Fill in an answer choice.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. At what age do you feel that transition planning should be in place for your students?

14 1/2	15	16	18	12 or younger
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Do you feel student lead Individual Education Plan Meetings are effective?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

8. Do you believe that special educators should receive additional training on writing transition plans?

- Yes
- No
- Not Applicable

# Transition Plans

## Appendix C

### Parent Survey

1. What is your child's gender?

Female

Male

2. My child has been identified as having the following disability

Autism Spectrum Disorder	Speech/Language Disorder	Visual Impairment	Intellectual Disability	Hearing Impairment	Learning Disability	Other Health Impairment	Multiple Disabilities	Traumatic Brain Injury
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Please fill in an appropriate response.

3. What are the plans for your child post high school?

No Plans	Community College	Adult Day Care	Vocational Training	Trade Schools
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Please check the appropriate response as it relates to your child.

Other (Please List)

\* 4. As a parent it is my responsibility to be an advocate for my child.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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Read each statement and fill in a response.

5. I feel very unsure about my child's future after high school.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
----------------	-------	---------------------------	----------	-------------------

Read each statement and fill in a response.

6. My child's teachers have prepares our family for the future with the goals on his/her transition plan.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither disagree or  
agree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

Read each statement  
and fill in an answer.

7. I do not trust the educational system to prepare my child for the future.

Strongly Agree      Agree      Neither Agree or  
Disagree      Disagree      Strongly Disagree

Read each statement  
and fill in an answer.

8. What additional programs would you like the school to initiate for his/her transition planning?

9. Are you male or female?

Male

Female

10. What is your child's age?

14-16

16-18

18-21