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Transition Competencies: Secondary Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Their Frequency of Performance

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TRANSITION COMPETENCIES: AN ANALYSIS OF SECONDARY SPECIAL
EDUCATION TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR FREQUENCY OF
PERFORMANCE

by

TONISHA JOHNSON

(Under the Direction of Kymberly Harris Drawdy)

ABSTRACT

Millions of high school students are receiving special education services from teachers
who may be inconsistently performing competencies during transition planning that
leads to sustainable, postsecondary success. Secondary special education teachers'
frequency of performance of transition competencies during transition service delivery
are essential to fulfilling their duties and responsibilities towards effectively
implementing the Individualized Education Program of students with disabilities. The
purpose of this descriptive study is to examine the correlation among secondary
special education teachers' perceptions of their transition competencies' frequency of
performance, during annual transition services. This study employed a quantitative
methods approach involving an adapted version of the Secondary Teachers Transition
Survey to examine the association or relationships among the variables. This study's
participants consisted of 80 purposefully selected, secondary (high school) special
education teachers of students with high incidence disabilities, receiving special
education services within an urban, north Georgia school district. The data analyses
revealed significant relationships among teachers' perceptions of their frequency of
performance across the transition domains. Additionally, the findings revealed a
difference between teachers' reported levels of self-efficacy and their frequency of
performance of transition competencies across the domains. The findings of this study
were anticipated to have a manifold impact on transition competencies acquisition,
frequency of performance and, evaluation resulting in improved quality in the
provision of transition planning services, an aspect of the provision of special
education services. This study serves as a fundamental decision-making component in

the systems-change process within the special education leadership framework and adds to the body of empirical research to inform the practice of special education teachers' preparation to positively affect teachers' perceptions of their own self-efficacy as transition planning facilitator. As well, this study serves as a reference for professional development offerings regarding transition competencies across the local, state and federal educational arenas towards improving the quality of life outcomes for students with disabilities, as they transition into postsecondary educational, competitive employment, independent living, and preferred leisure/ social settings as young adults.

INDEX WORDS: Transition competencies; High school transition specialist, Special education teacher perceptions, Transition professional development; Teacher efficacy; Self-efficacy; Transition planning and service delivery. Perceptions of Transition; Secondary Transition

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my parents, without whom, I would never have achieved the realization of this dream. To my Paw, the late Mr. John Lewis Johnson, you are the substance of who I am and all that I aspire to become. This accomplishment belongs to you! I dedicate my life's work to advancing your legacy! To my mom, Mrs. Linda Howard Johnson, I dedicate this to you, too! You have encouraged me, prayed for me, taken care of me and now it is my pleasure to do the same and more for you! Thank you for being a model of an upstanding woman. This achievement is a reflection of your support, guidance and prayers throughout my years. I love you dearly. To my siblings, John "Don" Johnson, Temeka "Meka" Johnson, Jovon "Boo" Johnson, Mekonen "Pooh" Robeye, I love each of you so deeply and I thank you for being excited, reassuring and understanding along the way….together, we did it! Aaron Bernard Hardge, my dearest you, thank you for redirecting me as I attempted to run in every direction except to my desk to write again and again. I love you and I appreciate the unwavering support have given to me during this process! To my extended family and friends, I thank you for your love, support and encouragement. To my nephew and nieces, I dedicate this to you as a persistent reminder to contribute your something meaningful to society and as proof that all things really are possible for dreams really do come true! Join me as I go confidently in the direction of my dreams as I know understand that God has perfected all things concerning me. Lastly, I thankfully and humbly pray, in the name of Jesus, that this work greatly contributes to the existing body of literature and offers guiding principles that positively impact the provision of transition services for students with disabilities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Nearly 6.5 million students with disabilities are being served by special education teachers who may be unprepared to use transition competencies to facilitate transition planning that leads to sustainable, postsecondary success (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Students with disabilities are leaving high schools without access to postsecondary education, competitive employment, functional independence, or social and community engagement prospects. Transition planning, a vital component of education for students with disabilities, bridges the gap between leaving high school and pursuing postsecondary education and employment opportunities into adulthood (Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009). Consequently, secondary special education teachers should be trained to employ transition competencies to ensure that students with disabilities receive quality transition planning that prepares them for opportunities that may lead to a reasonable quality of life. Secondary special education teachers who perceive that they are skillful in employing transition competencies may be more successful at navigating the complexities of transition planning to create equity in accessing postsecondary education or employment opportunities.

As evidence of the importance of transition services, legislation to ensure that students with disabilities have access to postsecondary options has been put in place. Laws such as Public Law 101-476, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (*IDEA*, 1997) have offered explicit directives for addressing all transition needs of students with disabilities. Likewise, Public Law 107-110, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (*NCLB*, 2002) and several other federal initiatives serve as evidence of America's

commitment to improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Accordingly, before

exiting high school, these students must have exposure to realistic opportunities for

maximizing their potential when transitioning into young adulthood. Therefore, the

implications of secondary special education teachers' perceptions and implementation of

transition competencies could mean the difference between students with disabilities

experiencing postsecondary success or failure.

Transition services have been a part of the educational landscape for students with

disabilities since 1983. Historically, Public Law 94-142, the *Education for All*

Handicapped Children Act of 1975, is the landmark legislation that assured access to

public education for all students, regardless of disability (Keogh, 2007). Besides

entitlement to equal education, this law further specified that an Individualized Education

Program (IEP) must be developed to ensure the student's needs are met. In accordance

with the regulations of reauthorized Public Law 108- 446, *Individuals with Disabilities*

Education Act (*IDEA*, 2004) and the *College and Career Readiness Performance Index*

(*CCRPI, 2012*) schools are held more accountable than in previous years for ensuring

greater likelihood of postsecondary success for students with disabilities.

Specifically regarding transition planning, the 2004 reauthorization of *IDEA*

mandates that schools make coordinated efforts to facilitate the student's access to a

range of post school activities including but not limited to integrated employment,

postsecondary education, or vocational training. School districts have drastically

overhauled their educational systems to maintain compliance with *IDEA* and *NCLB* and

to ensure that accountability measures are upheld. Since the most recent changes to

IDEA, a transition plan is included in the IEP for students with disabilities starting at age

14 and no later than age 16, and must be continuously updated annually thereafter (Sitlington, 2008). Therefore, it is essential that secondary special education teachers are qualified to provide case management by arranging IEP meetings with appropriate team members who are able to contribute to the development of transition plan goals and expectations. Subsequently, once the goals are set, secondary special education teachers must be prepared to ensure that services and instruction are provided to support mastery of the IEP goals and objectives. The delivery of specialized instruction, incorporating transition competencies to facilitate transition planning, is central in transition planning efficacy.

Background

Reports such as *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and the *Third International Math and Science Study* (1995) depicted American education as deficient in educating and preparing young people for globally competitive employment when compared with achievement score of foreign countries (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2007). After publication of these two reports, public opinion was such that the United States' public school system was considered to be doing a miserable job of educating its students, including students with disabilities (Ginsberg & Lyche, 2008; Henley, Milligan, McBride, Neal, Nichols & Singleton, 2010). The continuum of incessant efforts to positively impact the outcomes of American students includes graduation policies that are intended to consistently and substantially produce young adults who are socially responsive and globally competitive (Johnson, Stout, & Thurlow, 2009). To achieve this goal, American public school systems are making progress in working toward

implementing various reforms to prepare all students, including those with disabilities, for success after high school.

Still, students with disabilities, particularly those who receive services in the general education classrooms, continue to lack knowledge of how to overcome the obstacles of young adulthood (Worrell, 2008). When departing high school, students with disabilities need assistance in making career decisions and weighing residential options that lead to autonomy. Winn and Hay (2009) argued that participation in transition planning for employment, education, or training soon after high school greatly decreases the adverse circumstances that students with special needs encounter by improving the odds of lifelong success. In response to the various hurdles students with disabilities face, programs and policies have been put into practice to improve the education process related to transition from high school for students with disabilities.

In 1986, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, Madeline Will, proposed the merger of regular and special education classes to facilitate the successful inclusion of students with disabilities into general education settings. This merger was done as a means to better prepare students with disabilities for the transition into the general workforce. The practice of inclusive education is based on the principle that neighborhood schools should be able to accommodate all children, regardless of any perceived difference, disability, or other social, emotional, cultural or linguistic difference (Florian, 2008). Consequently, the emergence of inclusion dictates that school leaders are required to staff classrooms with highly qualified, special education teachers who are able to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities. As such, school leaders are charged with continuously

ensuring that secondary special education teachers are competent in all instructional

areas, including the area of transition. Otherwise, teachers who lack transition

competencies may be the cause of noncompliance with transition planning requirements

in fulfillment of *IDEA,* which may contribute to ineffective educational programming for

students with disabilities.

As educational institutions throughout the country adhere to national policies,

populations of students categorized as having high incidence disabilities such as a

Specific Learning Disability, Emotional Behavioral Disability, and Mild Intellectual

Disability, who are educated alongside their peers without disabilities in inclusive class

settings (Sitlington, 2008). After graduation, despite previously being able to blend into

the general population at school, students with disabilities face difficulties as they prepare

to transition from high school because merely being included in general education classes

is not enough to meet their needs. As schools implement such programs to mainstream

students for postsecondary young adulthood, teachers' compulsory implementation of

transition competencies become more necessary to empower students with disabilities to

reach their goals. Special education teachers' frequent use of transition competencies in

instructional planning and community collaboration are essential towards preparing

students with disabilities to thrive in the community after leaving high school.

In contrast to the compulsive practices of promoting meaningful inclusion within

the school environment, students with disabilities experience greater difficulty

assimilating into the mainstream workforce (Brooke, Revell & Wehman, 2009).

 According to Hensel, Kroese and Rose (2007), over 90% of adults identified as having

intellectual disabilities experience difficulty in joining the workforce and maintaining

competitive employment. There continues to be fundamental obstacles that adults with disabilities encounter when seeking employment and retaining their jobs (Wilson-Kovacs, Ryan, Haslam, & Rabinovich, 2008). Special education teachers who possess and frequently exercise skill in the provisions of transition service delivery are more aware of how to address the postsecondary challenges facing students with disabilities. Teachers who are adept at transition facilitation are better prepared to guide students who are entering adulthood and are able to direct students in surmounting common difficulties of young adulthood. Lindstrom and Benz (2002) reported that transition planning has a positive impact on the employability of young adults with disabilities. It is of utmost importance that secondary special education teachers perceive high levels of self-efficacy to facilitate the development of goals, objectives and activities towards preparing students to integrate into their communities, to find competitive employment, participate in leisure activities, and locate affordable, independent housing. Secondary, special education teachers who perceive being prepared and skilled in providing transition services often can ensure that students with disabilities are appropriately prepared to make the transition from high school into adulthood.

Gerber, Price, Mulligan, and Shessel (2004) suggest that special education teachers have the ability to prepare students to overcome some of the barriers towards gaining independence. However, without knowledge of initiating interagency collaboration, matching job skills and interests to training programs, and applying results of assessments within transition plans, special education teachers compound the strenuousness of entering the workforce for these young adults. The researchers of the *National Longitudinal Transition Study* Wave 2 (NLTS2) reported that within two years

after leaving school fewer than 50% of out-of-school youth with disabilities were

employed when compared with a more than 60% employment rate among their non-

disabled peers (United States Department of Education, 2004). As such, secondary

special education teachers who perceive that they frequently execute transition

competencies may contribute to lessening the potential dejection awaiting some students

with disabilities as they anticipate postsecondary employment and educational pursuits.

Bear, Braziel and Kortering's (2006) study revealed no significant differences in

the postsecondary accomplishments of students with disabilities who graduated and those

who did not graduate. In efforts to fortify instruction toward overcoming the

monumental challenges of closing the postsecondary achievement gap between students

with and without disabilities, it is imperative that educational leaders encourage special

education teachers to acquire and frequently use research-based, best practice

competencies to ensure that students with disabilities meet the requirements to enroll,

participate and complete postsecondary degree programs. Special education

administrators, special education teacher leaders and special education advocates

continue to seek solutions to assist students with disabilities in heightening admissions,

matriculation and graduation rates from postsecondary educational settings. This

inability to identify a solution has been a primary challenge towards improving outcomes

and closing educational and employment achievement gaps between students with

disabilities and their peers (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition,

2006). Wise (2008) noted that shortly after entering local colleges, nearly 50% of

students with disabilities withdrew from the school because they were unaware of how to

manage the demands of postsecondary schooling. Additionally, there are studies that

report private and public sectors have become more vigilant in demanding that schools

re-evaluate educational and training programs to address the career readiness gap of

students who may potentially become employees of businesses throughout the country

(Blackorby, Schiller, Malik, Hebbebler, & Javitz, 2010; Lewis, 2005).   The provision of

services of supporting and guiding students with disabilities during the transition

planning process may be impacted by special education teacher perceptions of self-

efficacy and transition competencies frequency of performance.

Constant attention has been on advancing educational outcomes for students with

disabilities through rigorous instruction in general education classes by qualified content

teachers. Students fully benefit from teachers who perceive they have been prepared to

utilize competencies that contribute to successful transitions. This focus positively

contributes to the number of students who earn general education diplomas while

receiving special education services (Walsh, 2012). On the other hand, those students of

majority age, who are unable to meet the general education diploma perquisites, have few

credential options, besides a special education diploma, which drastically reduces

postsecondary options (Johnson, Thurlow, Cosio & Bremer, 2005; Sitlington, Neubert,

Begun, Lombard, & Laconte, 2007). The lack of opportunities that result from a

Certificate of Performance, Special Education or Daily Living Skills diploma emphasizes

the necessity for teacher competencies in transition planning for postsecondary vocational

training and employment settings. Students with high incidence disabilities, especially

those students who receive special education diplomas and who leave school without

thorough and explicit transition planning are more likely to never realize their highest

potential (Lewis, 2005; Thurlow & Thompson, 2000). Special education teachers who

perceive frequently performing transition competencies can be more beneficial in leading

to improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

Transition Competencies

Landmark studies by Baker and Geiger (1988), deFur and Taymans (1995), and

Nolan (1999) revealed specific competencies that persons who serve as transition experts

should possess and perform to effectively support the transition planning process.

Transition competencies that were rated most important were family and interagency

collaboration, student consultation, and interpreting transition assessment to guide

instructional planning. Also, as special education teachers facilitate transition planning

and service delivery, transition competencies should include inviting collaboration with

families and outside agencies during annual meetings; interpreting transition interest

inventories; inviting and engaging students in discussions about transition programs and

available options within the school, as well as within the community; dialoguing with

local agencies about expectations and requirements; realistic community opportunities;

encouraging participative decision making; arranging field trips for heightened exposure

to career fields and frequently embedding transition activities throughout the curriculum

(Benitez, Morningstar & Frey, 2005; Moran, 2012; Wehmeyer & Webb, 2011).

Additionally, transition competencies include using assessments to guide transition

planning, connecting students with preferred leisure activities within their community

and matching student interests with potential employment fields, and increasing access to

supported employment opportunities. Special education teachers who possess high levels

of self-efficacy routinely practice competencies to provide students with disabilities

opportunities to experience postsecondary success.

Special Education Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation programs are graduating skillful educators each year. Many special education teachers are entering positions for which they have not been fully prepared to fulfill. Today's inclusive education landscape confounds an already multifaceted role of special education teacher and special education case manager. Fullerton, Ruben, McBride and Bert (2011) suggested that special education teachers emerge with greater versatility and compensatory strategies as a result of participation in merged teacher preparation programs. Special educators who ensure that they are exposed to the appropriate pedagogy toward meeting the unique needs of students with disabilities, prior to entering the profession, are more prepared to support secondary students with disabilities. Some researchers have suggested that teacher development programs that embed fieldwork experiences into the programs provide teachers significant exposure in meeting the diverse needs of the learners they teach (Prater & Sileo, 2004; Washburn, 2005). Novak, Murray, Scheuermann and Curren (2009) reported that teachers who participate in service learning retain higher teacher-efficacy and optimistically anticipate forming familial and community partnerships to support students. Yet, only a limited number of teacher preparation programs offer instruction on secondary transition with field service opportunities. As the secondary and postsecondary landscapes within middle and high school change, teacher preparation programs are not teaching special educators to employ strategies that meet students' needs (Anderson, Kleinhammer-Tramill, Morningstar, Lehman, Blalock, Wehmeyer 2003). Secondary special education teachers who perceive being adequately trained and

satisfied with transition training will be more likely to exercise transition competencies during transition instruction and service delivery.

Theoretical Frameworks in Transition Planning

Theoretical frameworks provide a lens of reference for examining and explaining concepts and phenomena. Theoretical frameworks present in-depth understandings of processes or experiences, contributing a scope to interpret and analyze research. A breadth of knowledge can be found within theoretical frameworks that can be useful in guiding research practices, and classifying and evaluating solutions for any given research topics. Theoretical frameworks are useful in validating or disproving assertions of other researchers while adding to the body of literature of a study's topic.

This descriptive study will explore the self-efficacy theory, a tenet of Bandura's Social Cognitive Learning theory (1977). Teachers who perceive and demonstrate greater self-efficacy, may result in improved provision of services, thus greater transition planning success. It is important that teachers perceive they possess high levels of self-efficacy when utilizing transition competencies to make certain that students with disabilities are exposed to opportunities that prepare them for adulthood. So, to a degree, students with disabilities are adversely impacted by receiving instruction in the absence of a teacher's self-efficacy. Thus, secondary special education teachers who perceive preparedness, satisfaction with training and frequency of employing transition competencies during transition planning are more capable of producing students who are ready to transition into postsecondary settings.

There exists a multiplicity of Transition Planning Frameworks that provide a guide of research-based, best practices during the facilitation of transition services as an

integral part of the IEP. Presently, most notable transition references throughout the

literature refer to the Kohler Transition Framework, the Self-Determination Model and

the Life Centered Person Model. Special education teachers who perceive they are

prepared to plan for transitioning students, are satisfied with their transition training and

frequently use transition competencies will likely refer to one of the aforementioned

transition frameworks.

Transition Planning

Transition planning is a critical avenue for special education teachers to provide

crucial information that impacts a student's future quality of life. "Transition is an

ongoing process of planning, implementing, evaluating and balancing the details of

parents' lives with the details of their children's lives to achieve an integrated quality of

life for the entire family" (Ankeny, Wilkins, & Spain, 2009, p. 28).   As families play a

significant function in multifaceted transition planning, educators who perceive being

equipped with transition competencies possess the knowledge to solicit valuable

information from a multitude of sources (Kreider, Caspe, Kennedy, & Weiss, 2007). So,

it is of utmost importance that teachers routinely use transition competencies when

facilitating transition planning and involve all parties who are familiar with the student's

interests, preferences, and future goals.

Collaborative student-centered planning based on the student's educational,

vocational, housing, and leisure interests and preferences increases the chance of personal

fulfillment (Carter, Prater, Jackson, & Marchant, 2009). During transition planning, the

IEP team is obligated to establish the best instructional routes for supporting students in

preparing to meet postsecondary goals by taking into consideration the student's

preferences and aspirations, as well as the family's input (Mazzoti, Rowe, Kelly, Test, Fowler, Kohler & Kortering, 2009). Secondary special education teachers proficient at aligning special education goals with common core standards create opportunities for students to work toward transition goals within the context of general education settings (Kochhar-Bryant & Bassett, 2006). Local education agencies have the authority to implement course offerings and staff development opportunities to ensure that special education teachers possess and use transition competencies during a collaborative process of transition planning to promote students with disabilities' attainment of postsecondary transition goals.

The transition planning process begins by considering the student's interests and then identifying supports and skills necessary for student success in postsecondary environments (Sitlington, 2008). Ideally, the plan is student-centered with the student as the primary decision-maker. This is the best scenario if the student and society are to reap the maximum benefits of transition planning. Over time, transition services have been lauded as valuable interventions that are necessary to promote postsecondary success for students with disabilities. Despite the urgency for transition services, too often other components of special education compliance, such as placement and service hours, eclipse transition servicing (Greene & Kohler, 2004). Educational leaders must ensure opportunities for transition competence and insist that secondary special education teachers provide effective transition planning for students with disabilities who are entering adulthood through the use of transition competencies.

Students with disabilities are reaching age 22 and "aging out" of receiving special education services as the legal limit for compulsory service delivery is through 21 years

of age (U.S. Department of Education, 2007; Aron & Loprest, 2012). Without exposure to transition instruction and planning through transition competencies, teachers are contributing to the unfortunate outcomes of many young people with disabilities. These students are being forced from special education programs with a meaningless plan via the Summary of Performance document, which leads them into an unguided, uncertain, potentially disastrous future. Hence, students are still departing high schools throughout the country with no marketable skills and no means of entering any training programs since many programs require a high school diploma for acceptance. Research findings indicated that approximately 70% or more of students with disabilities drop out of school or do not attend college or receive vocational training (U.S. Department of Education, 2007). Studies have shown that young adults with disabilities experienced school failure and are often restricted to low paying employment, suffering from social rejection, and often encounter trouble with the justice system (Bear et al, 2006; Levine, Marder & Wagner, 2004). Improving quality and frequency of transition services as a central component of special education provision of service ultimately may lead to improvements in the outcomes for students with disabilities (Lindstrom et al., 2007). Understanding special education teacher perceptions of transition competencies and frequency of performance can lead to enhancements in transition planning provision of services and teacher efficacy (Knott & Asselin, 1999; Lehman, Bassett & Sands, 1999; Morningstar, et al., 2009; Murray, 2003). Furthermore, special education teachers who perceive high self-efficacy during the provision of transition services initiate and perform actions or skills to support students with disabilities achieve their goals. They are

capable of planning for transition and frequently use transition competencies to enhance the postsecondary readiness of students with disabilities.

Secondary Special Education Teacher Roles

Special education teachers assume responsibility for ensuring that student input directs the transition planning process. Teachers uphold learning environments where necessary accommodations and modifications are in place to support students with disabilities in accessing the curriculum and their transition goals (Li et al., 2009). Secondary special education teachers serve as partners for students by relationship building, providing ongoing guidance and support to students and families towards quality postsecondary outcome attainment (Lubbers, Repeto, & McGorray, 2008). Hampering the quality of transition services are secondary special education teachers unfamiliarity of different transition models or programs, lack of knowledge in interpreting formal and informal transition assessments, and the nonexistence of contact with community services that are designed to promote postsecondary success (Li et al., 2009). Several reasons are to blame for teachers' transition dilemmas including personnel and monetary issues. Regardless of the budgetary constraints, lack of onsite training and access to printed resources, education agencies and school leaders still have a responsibility to provide a free, appropriate education to all students which includes ensuring that student-centered, transition planning is occurring. School systems around the country may be in jeopardy of failing to provide an appropriate education to students with disabilities when assigned case managers perceive they lack transition competencies necessary to facilitate proper transition planning. Promoting secondary special education teacher transition competencies would enable teachers to address the distinct needs of

students with disabilities. Secondary teachers, who are resolute in their satisfaction with

preparedness and frequently employ competencies, are able to combat the chances of

perilous postsecondary outcomes that many students encounter after exiting high school.

Perceptions of Transition Planning

Parent perceptions. For parents, maneuvering children through postsecondary

life stages can be daunting and exhausting. Parents of children with disabilities

frequently experience more intricate and difficult situations than parents of students

without disabilities (Soresi, Nota, & Ferrari, 2006). Davies and Beamish (2009) found

that parents are considered integral components of the transition process as they are

usually more able to provide insight about the academic, social, and financial progress of

students with disabilities.

To assist families in achieving transition success, substantial efforts have been

directed toward ensuring that transition-age youth with disabilities acquire the skills,

experiences, support, and linkages needed to attain important life outcomes after leaving

high school (Cobb, Sample, Alwell, & Johns, 2006). The *Dearing Report* (1997)

provided evidence that confirmed certain inequalities in the higher education

participation rates of women, minority groups, and students with disabilities. Further,

family involvement in goal setting is an important element of transition planning.

 Families of students with disabilities, who plan collaboratively, are more likely to realize

dreams and meet transition goals when everyone takes an active role in the creation of

post school goals (Agran, Blanchard, & Wehmeyer, 2000). Like students with

disabilities, families too are dependent on special education teacher transition

competencies to help many students make transitions into life after high school. As

students and families rely on use of transition competencies to assess, plan, and monitor

transition activities and goals, special education teacher perceptions of transition training

and implementation may impact their ability to competently facilitate transition planning.

Student perceptions. School programs for students with disabilities are required

to offer postsecondary transition services through planning and instruction based on

individual needs, taking into account the student's preferences, strengths, and interests.

Students with disabilities may encounter hardships when transition planning. Hogansen,

Powers, Geenen, Kashiwabara, and Powers (2008) revealed that most of the young

women participating in their study that examined the impact of gender on transition goals

described their transition planning experiences as being impersonal and nonconstructive.

One participant described feeling as if she was inconsequential because she was not

treated as a valued member of the IEP team (Hogansen et al. 2008). To promote lifelong

success, it is important that educational leaders ensure that students with disabilities have

access to effective transition planning as it can serve as a protective barrier, shielding

students from pessimists who potentially impede postsecondary achievement. Special

education teachers who perceive they are satisfied with training are more empowered to

utilize skills to promote student success by facilitating transition planning that

accommodates the interests and strengths of students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities need practice in advocating for themselves and

participating in discussions surrounding transition planning to increase the likelihood of

prospective postsecondary employment or educational success. When entering the

workforce, they are often reluctant to inform employers of disabilities or request

accommodations because of concerns of being discriminated against or unfairly judged as

less capable than peers without disabilities (Rocco, 2004). The National Longitudinal

Transition Survey wave 2 (NLTS2, 2010) indicated that 84% of youths with disabilities

out of secondary school for up to two years had not made their employers aware of their

disability due to fear of discrimination or retaliation.

As well, students who receive government assistance face concerns of losing

benefits because of paid employment. This dilemma serves as a deterrent to employment

(Keogh, 2007). There is a program through the Social Security Administration that helps

students with disabilities ease the transition into financial autonomy (Brooke et al., 2009).

Special education teachers who perceive they are prepared to facilitate transition

planning can help to alleviate such concerns, as there are noteworthy local, state, federal

governmental and private options available for students with disabilities to transition into

postsecondary employment and educational settings.

Teacher perceptions. Each year, educators provide special education services to

students with disabilities. The continuum of services that teachers are accountable for

providing to students with disabilities includes student-centered transition planning,

support taking state and district assessments and modifying work environments.

However, if they lack transition competencies, this scenario produces grave potential of

obstructing the transition planning process (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006), which

otherwise should lead to positive postsecondary outcomes for students. Special education

leaders must combat the beliefs that teachers are not fully competent in their own abilities

to perform all duties necessary to function in the multidimensional role of a special

education teacher (Emery & Vandanberg, 2010). Specifically, non-traditional, special

education teachers who have only completed a certification process or teacher

preparation program may lack the contextual knowledge to facilitate transition planning

if they are not continuously practicing and evaluating transition strategies including, but

not limited to, collaborating with local agencies, learning to use assessments to guide

transition instruction, arranging supported employment opportunities, soliciting familial

and community participation, or designing instruction that builds self-determination skills

for students with disabilities. This lack of exposure to special education teacher

programming and professional development may contribute to a perceived deficit in

transition competencies acquisition and utilization, which may contribute to unfavorable

educational and employment outcomes for students with disabilities.

School leaders are implementing systemic interventions to provide the highest

instructional quality for students. However, districts reportedly find it difficult to find

qualified special educators to fill teaching positions (Stephens & Fish, 2010).   Boe, Shin,

and Cook (2007) reported that although there exists an urgent need for additional

educators, still more than 10% of special education teachers leave the profession.

Further, Plash and Pirotrowski (2006) reported that 25% percent of special education

teachers reported leaving the special educator profession, with approximately 10% of

those entering general education classrooms. Special educators are encumbered with

multi-faceted obligations towards meeting the instructional demands, compliance

paperwork requirements and the diverse needs of families and students with disabilities.

 Many factors have contributed to the attrition of special education teachers over time.

 For instance, unreasonable student loads, constant on the job stress (Polychroni &

Katroni, 2009), and ineffective or nonexistent professional development (Kaufhold,

Alverez, & Arnold, 2006; Plash & Piotrowski, 2006). Due to the demands of special

education teacher duties and responsibilities, specifically regarding transition facilitation, educational leaders must mandate ongoing professional development, monitor and evaluate key competencies to retain effective teachers who feel adequately trained and remain vigilant with implementing transition skills and strategies that ultimately improve outcomes of students with disabilities.

Secondary special education teacher competencies are identified as an area that is quite worthy of research. Secondary special education teachers who perceive they are prepared to plan for transition are satisfied with transition training and frequently implement transition competencies. These teachers acquire transition competencies to bridge relationships among interagency personnel so that when the time comes to access resources, students will have seniority or priority, particularly for services where there is great demand and frequently a lengthy wait.   Overall, policies that guide transition planning have illuminated its impact on postsecondary outcomes, yet there is considerably more that should be done to assess and impact special education teacher perceptions of their transition competencies that will lead to postsecondary success of students with disabilities.

Student Outcomes. Halpern (1993) suggested that quality of life (QoL) consists of three specific domains: (a) physical and material well being, (b) performance of a variety of adult roles, and (c) a sense of personal fulfillment. Like Halpern, transition studies by Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer and Park (2003), Janssen, Schuengel, and Stolk (2005) and Curtiss, Rabren, and Reilly (2009) sought to assess the quality of life outcomes of students with high incidence disabilities. In these studies, student, parental, and caregiver perceptions revealed that, for the most part, all participant perceptions of

QoL domains were rated similarly. The studies indicated that some students with disabilities expressed they had experienced some degree of quality in each of Halpern's QoL areas.

Nevertheless, the majority of the studies' participants who were employed felt their quality of life domain of physical and material well being lacked long term security. For that reason, the students viewed this area negatively since their jobs did not offer the basic components that are crucial in maintaining health and personal fitness such as insurance benefits and sick days. Other QoL areas within the domains that were rated negatively were independent living, transportation, and community and leisure activities.

To measure and improve postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities, states are federally obligated to assemble employment and educational outcome data for the students. To remain in compliance, high school graduation data are used to help identify progress and pitfalls in transition planning and services. Transition planning has been beneficial for many, but a great number of students and families still find QoL is poor. For this reason, it is vital to understand special education teacher perceptions of transition competencies as it could lead to improved overall quality of life outcomes for students and their families.

Schools are having difficulty in preparing students to transition into postsecondary educational settings. Four of every 10 new college students, including half of those at two-year institutions, take remedial courses, and many employers comment on the inadequate preparation of high school graduates (United States Department of Education, 2010). Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Shaver and Nagle (2011) found

that less than one fifth of the students with disabilities were pursuing four year,

postsecondary education as compared to two fifths of students in the general population.

Similarly, Johnson et al. (2009) found that slightly more than one quarter of students

with disabilities continue their studies after high school in contrast to almost 70% of the

non-disabled population who pursue postsecondary studies. To offset dismal outcomes

and promote the progress of students with disabilities, mandates and programs have been

put in place to counter social dilemmas such as isolation and involvement in the criminal

system, as well as to offset academic problems which include poor grades, retention

likelihood, and potentially dropping out of school (Sinclair, Christenson, & Thurlow,

2005). For example, measures such as the Department of Labor's Workforce Investment

program spans the federal, state, and local levels to increase success in promoting self-

worth and personal growth of students with disabilities who are entering adulthood.

Statement of the Problem

Special education teachers' quality as transition specialists is a central

determinant of postsecondary achievement for students with disabilities. Federal rulings

dictate that transition planning, a results-driven process, should position students with

disabilities to experience lifelong success (Li et al., 2009). Still, students with disabilities

are leaving high schools with few postsecondary opportunities to realize their academic

and social needs or preferences. Upon completion of high school, the world is an

exciting arena offering a copious assortment of opportunities and pursuits leading into

adulthood (Carter, Lane, & Pierson, 2006). However, students with disabilities continue

to encounter barriers to education and employment opportunities. These students have

disabilities that restrict their ability to both learn and earn, which may negatively affect

their overall quality of life (Winn & Hay, 2008). Though students with disabilities may have unique challenges, secondary special education teachers who perceive high-self-efficacy and demonstrate command of transition competencies are likely to make favorable impacts in guiding students as they become young adults. While special education teachers are often identified as the key figures in the transition process, their minimal involvement in transition-related education is a distressing reality.

Educational leaders understand that teachers of students with disabilities, who perceive themselves as change agents, can effect positive changes in student outcomes; however, transition planning is complicated and difficult, thus requiring the school community to share responsibility for ensuring postsecondary success. Secondary school teachers' perceptions of transition competencies may play a central role in advancing continual progress of students moving from high school into young adult roles in postsecondary education, employment, independent housing and leisure settings.

Although teachers must constantly strive towards improvement, it is fundamentally impossible for teachers alone to carry out the massive changes for which they have been charged without opportunities for professional development and ongoing support in the area of transition (Handler, 2006). Further, underscoring the need for secondary teachers' transition competency is the potential for dire circumstances facing students with disabilities. Hence, school district leaders are accountable for ensuring that teachers of students with disabilities are trained and fully prepared to perform transition competencies.

Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions that have emerged from the problem statement:

1. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the Instructional Planning domain?

2. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the Assessment domain?

3. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the Collaboration domain?

4. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the Collaboration domain and the number of staff development sessions completed?

5. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the number of staff development sessions completed?

6. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and their years of teaching experience?

7. To what extent does a difference exist between teachers' reported levels of self-efficacy and perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain?

Significance of the Study

This study will lead to enhanced educational programming for students receiving special education services. This study will also positive postsecondary outcomes of student with disabilities by describing the frequency of secondary special education teachers' perceptions of their transition competencies performance. Educational leaders can rely on this study for recommendations for practice and policy for increasing performance frequency of transition competencies during the provision of transition service delivery. Secondary special education teachers' frequency of performance of transition competencies is a predominant determinant of students' postsecondary achievement.

As students with disabilities may possibly be receiving special education services from teachers who may be inadequately prepared to reliably facilitate transition planning, educational leaders must address teachers' self-efficacy levels to promote transition planning facilitation that leads to sustainable postsecondary success. Special education teachers' transition competencies acquisition, frequency of performance and evaluation are essential to fulfilling their duties and responsibilities towards effectively implementing the IEPs of students with disabilities. The purpose of this descriptive study is to explore the relationships between levels of frequency of performance of competencies across transition domains. This study will also examine secondary special education teachers' performance frequency of transition competencies, preparedness and

satisfaction with transition training in their roles as transition facilitators. Furthermore, the purpose of this study is to add to the body of empirical research to inform the practice of special education provision of services regarding transition competencies in teacher preparation programs and professional development course offerings towards improving the outcomes for students with disabilities as they transition into postsecondary education, competitive employment, independent living and preferred social settings as young adults.

Research Design

This study is a descriptive study that utilized a quantitative approach via survey research methods. This descriptive study involved administering a survey to a purposeful sample of certified, secondary special education teachers whose job duties include developing transition plans and delivery of transition services to determine their perceptions of their levels of performance of transition competencies. The aim of this study provided, as accurate as possible, an examination of the relationships between secondary, special education teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance of transition competencies during the provision of transition services. With this information, school leaders, special education directors, teacher preparation programs, and policymakers may be better equipped with the knowledge necessary to support secondary special education teachers in acquiring, applying and evaluating transition competencies to facilitate transition planning that encourages positive perceptions of teacher efficacy that lead to effective special education programming and successful postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

Participants

This study was conducted in 13 high schools in a large, urban school district in north Georgia. Among the faculty and staff, only special education teachers serving as case managers for students with higher incidence disabilities were invited to participate. The personnel serving in these schools are quite varied and include diverse ages, education levels, and years of experience. These schools were chosen because, in accordance with the district's mission, the Department of Special Education envisions a school system where all students, families, schools, and community members share the motivation, knowledge, and skills to work together to ensure that all children with disabilities are learning, progressing, and meeting high expectations (*IDEA* Partnerships, 2000). Moreover, the secondary special education teachers within these schools are primarily responsible for using transition competencies to facilitate transition planning and provision of services. Consequently, the special education leadership may refer to the outcomes of the study to inform the practice of ongoing professional development sessions. As well, school leaders could implement comprehensive initiatives that prepare special education teachers to perceive that they are prepared, through sufficient training to frequently utilize transition competencies such as providing case management, participating in community based planning with a extended team members for transition that leads to full participation in the community, and to facilitate transition servicing that leads to students with disabilities becoming independent, productive, and progressive young adults.

Instrumentation

The participants completed a survey based on information from previous research using frequency continuums providing levels of choice on a four point Likert-type scale. The researcher secured permission to adapt and use the Secondary Teachers Transition Survey (*STTS*) developed by Morningstar, Frey and Benitez (2005) that consists of a total of 51 questions. The original developers of the *STTS* have monitored the survey for face validity and reliability. The survey is delineated into three distinct sections. The first section contains four questions pertaining to demographic information, such as years of teaching experience, number of college- level transition courses completed, number of staff development transition courses completed and perceived levels of self-efficacy during transition planning and service delivery. The second section contains the remaining 46 questions that focus on perceptions of teacher preparedness, satisfaction with transition training, and frequency of implementation of transition practices and one open-response question pertaining to transition strengths and challenges. The third section contains a single, two-part, open-ended question.

Procedures

The researcher obtained permission from the school system's research department, superintendent, and building level school leaders of the 20 schools. Upon approval, the survey was disseminated using a paper and pencil survey format. Or, when required, a request was made for the researcher to be placed on the agenda for upcoming department meetings at each school. At the meetings, the researcher gave a brief background on transition planning, defined self-efficacy and expressed implications for participation for students with disabilities, their families, and the entire school

community. Directions to complete the survey were given. Information regarding confidentiality and approval of the Institutional Review Board of Georgia Southern University was announced. The researcher assured participants that the surveys have no identifying labels and will be stored in a secured file within a secured building.

Data Analysis

Once all surveys were returned, statistical analysis involving descriptive and inferential statistics was conducted to identify the secondary special education teachers' perceptions of their transition competencies. Descriptive statistics were used for all demographic variables. Correlation coefficients were used to examine relationships among variables. Additionally, an independent samples *t*-test was used to determine whether differences existed among the teacher groups. During survey development, Cronbach's alpha was utilized to determine item consistency. The independent variables of this study were the participants' number of years of teaching experience, number of college-level transition courses completed, the number of staff development sessions and levels of self-efficacy. The dependent variables for this study were the teacher perceptions of their frequency of performance or utilization of transition knowledge and skills across four transition competencies domains.

Definition of Key Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure uniformity and understanding of those terms throughout the study.

Child with a Disability: Refers to a child evaluated as having a speech or language impairment, a serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this part as emotional disturbance), an other health impairment, a specific learning disability, or and

who needs special education and related services (Georgia Department of

Education, 2007).

Free appropriate public education (*FAPE*) - Special education and related

services that: (a) are provided at public expense, under public supervision and

direction, and without charge; (b) meet the standards of the State, including the

requirements of this part ; (c) include an appropriate preschool, elementary

school, or secondary school education in the State involved; (d) are provided in

conformity with an individualized education program (IEP) that meets the

requirements IDEA 2004 (Georgia Department of Education, 2012),

Individualized Education Program (IEP): a legal document for a child with a disability

detailing goals, specially designed instruction, related services, and, for a child 14

years or more in age, a transition plan for postsecondary employment or education

[34 C.F.R . § 300 .22] (Georgia Department of Education, 2012)

Special Education Services: Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to

meet the unique needs of a child with a disability (Georgia Department of

Education, 2012)

Self-efficacy: A person's belief in their actions affecting outcomes (Bandura,1997).

Teacher-Efficacy: A teacher's belief in their ability to effect change (Tschannen-Moran,

Woolfolk-Hoy, Hoy, 1998).

Transition Competencies: Knowledge, dispositions and skills to support students with

disabilities movement from secondary school into young adult settings (Baker &

Geiger, 1988).

Transition Planning: A results-oriented process, focused on improving the academic and

functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's

movement from school to post-school settings (Georgia Department of Education,

2012).

Delimitations and Limitations

This study is delimited to one school district due to the convenience of the

sampling population and the urgency of the need due to the recent Department of Special

Education audit conducted by the Georgia Department of Education and the Race to the

Top grant in the school district. The study does not include special education

paraprofessionals as they have no direct accountability in transition planning for students

with disabilities.

A limitation is that some of the publication dates of some sources in the literature

review may appear earlier and the publication dates are being researched. It is imperative

that the researcher compare historical data regarding perceptions of teacher competencies

when transition planning, including advantages and disadvantages. Additional

limitations are that the researcher can only assume that the responses to the survey

represent actual perceptions of the respondents and that the results may not be

generalized widely as they represent data collected from a specific population with a

single school district.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter II presents a robust review of seminal, as well as current literature. Chapter II

provides an in-depth examination of the history of transition services, theoretical

framework and a comprehensive review of transition competencies necessary to support

students with disabilities in transitioning from high school into adulthood. Chapter III

illustrates the methodology of the study, including a detailed description of the

population and sample, research questions, instrumentation, data collection and analysis.

Chapter IV displays an account and summary of the findings obtained during analyses of

survey data that answers the research questions pertaining to secondary special education

teachers' perceptions of transition planning.   Chapter V will present conclusions,

discussion and recommendations.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In the following chapter, the researcher reviewed literature regarding secondary special education teachers' perceptions of their transition training, satisfaction with training, and frequency of utilization of learned skills to competently facilitate transition planning. Chapter II will briefly evaluate the historical aspects of transition in secondary special education programs; the emergence and importance of transition competencies; secondary special education teachers' preparation and acquisition of transition competencies; and students, parents, and teachers' perceptions of transition planning according to their outcomes, experiences, and expectations. This chapter will highlight the practice of teacher preparation, professional support, and evaluation in the area of transition competencies development as necessary for secondary special educators facilitating transition. Moreover, this chapter will examine existing literature and research related to the perceptions, roles and professional expectations of secondary special education teachers.

The preliminary search was conducted using the EBSCOhost database system and the following terms: *transition planning*, *special education teacher perceptions, at risk*, *special needs*, *and students with disabilities, postsecondary outcomes, high incidence disabilities*, and *dropouts*. After a preliminary search, additional searches using the same terms were conducted using resources including, but not limited to, the ERIC and ProQuest databases and the Cobb County Library System. During the literature exploration, a scant amount of literature focusing solely on transition competencies was found; however research on topics related to transition services was abundant.

History of Transition Services

For more than a quarter of a century, special education services have included supports to assist students with disabilities in transitioning from high school into the community as a participating young adult. Over time, school special education teachers have been identified as the primary persons accountable for transition services compliance. Teachers who lack skill in facilitating transition services are imposing injustices unto students with disabilities. Special education services provide a means for children with disabilities to be prepared to accomplish to their postsecondary goals via individualized instruction that eventually leads to productive and meaningful lives. Special education leadership has an obligation to teachers, students, families, and the community to support policies and establish programming that leads to academic, personal, and social achievement for students with disabilities.

The United States has demonstrated a commitment to improving the lives of all of its citizens and has taken additional measures to assist young people with disabilities in fulfilling their potential. Changes in special education practices, such as mandating transition services, implementing Response to Intervention (RTI), enrolling fewer students with disabilities in separate schools and extending the age limits for attending school has proven advantageous throughout the years (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Goupil, Tassé, Garcin, & Doré, 2011). Over time, advocates of students with disabilities have worked to ensure that additional necessary supports are available in schools throughout the country too. Proponents of special education services and programs have also strived to promote implementation of strategies that promote and protect the educational and employment rights of people with disabilities. In cooperation with policy influencers, a

federal special education administrator began seeking ways to support students with disabilities' movement into community and career settings. In this, Guy and Johnson (1997), the Secretary for the Office of Special Education Rehabilitation Services, led a movement that resulted in federal guidelines and successive initiatives that expanded transition services presently facilitated by secondary special education teachers.

During the annual review meeting, the recommendation was that every student with a disability should be engaged in transition planning and considering postsecondary goals by age 14 and must be involved with postsecondary goal attainment planning by age 16. Since 1997, transition service planning has continually been a vital component of the Individualized Education Program as specified by *IDEA* (1997, 2004). Transition planning consists of conscientiously and collaboratively arranging preparatory activities that reflect the interests, preferences, and needs of the students, with familial input, as it pertains to every aspect of life beyond high school, including education, employment, community participation, and independent living pursuits.

National special education guidelines reveal that there must be a supportive, intertwined relationship among all stakeholders as students with disabilities' quality of life may depend on the decision-making and transition planning competencies of secondary special education teachers who are ultimately responsible for providing transition services. Teachers attempting to maneuver the complexities of the transition process to appropriately support a student's movement into adult life should perceive that they have been satisfactorily prepared to access and implement the competencies, resources, and continual assistance to aid in mitigating the limitations of the adult services system, after the student has left high school. Secondary special education

teachers should be urged to evaluate their practice as a means of enhancing their perceptions of their transition competencies and subsequently, the impact on student outcomes. Earlier and current research (Knott & Asselin, 1999; Morningstar, Frey, & Benitez, 2005) showed that teachers understand the problems related to transition; yet, they seem to continue to demonstrate very little involvement in activities related to employment, transition program evaluation, and development of a transition curriculum.

Transition systems change to improve processes and outcomes has occurred due to statutes, government funding, and allocation of an abundance of resources (Kohler & Field, 2003). Federal mandates for transition planning provide authorization to teachers of students with disabilities to perform tasks that empower students to pursue academic, career, and independent interests. *IDEA, NCLB and CCRPI* served as evidence of the nation's commitment to increased postsecondary achievement for students with disabilities through mandatory educational services and supports. Handler (2006) argued the objective of current educational policies and heightened accountability measures is to benefit students without disabilities, comparably as much as benefitting students with disabilities. Most recently, the state of Georgia applied for and received a waiver to portions of the *NCLB Act.* Presently, the *CCRPI* is the student achievement accountability system used to disaggregate data to gauge postsecondary preparedness for all students, with and without disabilities (United States Department of Education, 2010). The *CCRPI* is expected to further monitor and support local school districts toward achieving ambitious performance standards by offering rewards to schools identified as improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps, while offering

supplemental resources through state and federal interventions to promote continuous,

progressive improvement beyond high school completion.

The success or failure of the future livelihoods of students with disabilities

depends on the governance of special education programs, personnel, and policies.

Despite such efforts to affect positive outcomes for students with disabilities, saddening

statistics remain. According to Rusch (2008), students with disabilities are no more

prepared to succeed independently in society they were over a quarter of a century ago.

It is essential that educational leaders understand how legislation impacts the processes at

the district level and most importantly, dictates the provision of services at the school

building level. School leaders must confront and eliminate challenges and problems that

result in counter-productivity and school failure in special education programs; instead,

they must implement best practices ensuring that the transition needs of students with

disabilities are met by special education teachers who feel they are competent in

transition service planning. Special education leaders must also maintain high

expectations for the teachers, students and the programs over which they preside. The

leaders should support and protect initiatives that encourage and empower special

education teachers to use research-based career assessments to guide instruction; create

real-life connections through transition-focused instruction; encourage students to make

informed postsecondary education and employment decisions; arrange interactive

learning experiences; and prepare meaningful, on-going interagency collaboration

(Casale-Giannola, 2012; Price & Nelson, 2010). Though, general and special education

policies have been developed to augment student achievement, other factors exist that

adversely compound the special education transition efforts (Turnbull et al., 2003). Still,

students whose transition process is supported by teachers who perceive that they possess

the skills to frequently facilitate transition planning may experience comparable

postsecondary outcomes to their peers without disabilities.

      Diploma options. Local education agencies are facing difficulties accounting for

students with disabilities as instructional rigor and standards-based courses have become

pillars of graduation policy reform. Georgia's students with disabilities who have

struggled to meet state requirements for earning a general high school diploma have

another option. Georgia now offers the Daily Living Skills Diploma, which allows

students to exit high school with a credential that specifies that the person has not

demonstrated minimum competency on the state standards. Instead, the Daily Living

Skills Diploma or other forms of alternative completion certificates serve as proof that all

requirements of an alternate program of study were met. Erickson and Morningstar

(2009) suggested that "personnel at postsecondary institutions viewed all substandard

completion documents as no more than dropping out of school" (p. 162). For the

unsuccessful youth with disabilities, in lieu of being forced out of school after years of

attempting to meet the requirements for a high school diploma, are appeased with a

worthless document when attempting to enter the workforce or higher education settings.

 Thus, students with disabilities who complete high school after 13 years of education by

receiving an alternative certificate face the same bleak outlook as young adults who

stopped or never attended school. These students enter young adulthood in situations

comparable to persons having dropped out of high school, with no skills and no means of

pursing independent livelihood, which has contributed to the negative outcomes of youth

with disabilities. Since 95% of students with disabilities attend traditional high schools

(Aron & Loprest, 2012), it is crucial that special education teachers use transition competencies to ensure that these students have exposure to instruction and genuine opportunities to continue blending into mainstream society.

Transition services have been put in place to provide assistance in working toward graduation, vocational training, supported employment and fairness in accessing postsecondary goals for students with disabilities (Sitlington et al, 2007). Research has shown that people with disabilities typically are underemployed in lucrative career field settings and are often only able to work in jobs that offer low wages, lack health benefits, and provide limited opportunities for promotion (Verdonschot, Witte, Reichrath, Buntinx, & Curfs, 2009; Daviso et al., 2011). Compounding the employment dilemma faced by many students with disabilities who receive an alternative diploma are rigorous entrance requirements for career training institutions or schools for which they fail to meet the admission standards, further alienating them from obtaining gainful employment after leaving high school. Secondary special education teachers who perceive transition competencies use strategies to plan for postsecondary transition goal achievement.

Disengagement. School districts throughout America are faced with countering disengagement among all school-aged youth, but for students with disabilities, the statistics are atrocious. Every school year, more than 25% of students with disabilities drop out of high school by 16 years of age (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2005). The dropout rate among all high school students is startling; yet, in comparison, the number of students with disabilities who fail to complete high school is considerably worse. The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2002) reported that students with disabilities are dropping out more than double the rate of students

without disabilities. Students identified as having learning disabilities are almost three

times as likely to fail to earn a high school diploma as their peers without disabilities

(Gregg, 2007). Students with disabilities face inherent challenges as they pursue high

school graduation (Sitlington et al, 2007). During this process, they may experience

difficulties and perils similar to their peers without disabilities. There are a multitude of

risk factors that impact the outcomes of students with disabilities (Stodden, Jones, &

Chang, 2003). Coley (1995) and Devine (1996) identified defiant behaviors, low parental

involvement, low socioeconomic status, dislike of school, and having been retained one

or more times as characteristics common among at risk students, including students with

disabilities. Secondary special education teachers who frequently utilize transition

competencies are more likely to possess the self-efficacy to combat risk factors facing

many students with disabilities preparing to enter adulthood.

     Accountability. As standards increase based on the *CCRPI* system, the burden of

educating at risk students and countering academic failure and high school dropouts

becomes more costly. According to Harr-Robins, Song, Hurlburt, Pruce, Danielson,

Garet and Taylor (2012), monumental discrepancies in the academic areas of math and

reading, totaling 30 points, were evident on state proficiency tests between students with

disabilities and their peers without disabilities. Holmes (2010) suggested that due to the

exorbitant costs associated with retaining students, schools should consider alternative

means to addressing academic deficits. A 19-year longitudinal study found that dropping

out of high school is determined by multiple factors, with early influences beginning in

childhood and involving family as well as individual factors. Students who drop out

typically demonstrate low school achievement, generalized skill deficits, or low-level

behaviors or emotional dysfunctions that obscure categorical differentiating criteria (Harr-Robins, et al., 2012; Sabornies, Gullinan, & Osbome, 2005). According to Scanlon and Mellard (2002), students with troubled dispositions often fail to graduate with their peers; instead they exit school as dropouts at alarming rates. It is unlikely that these students will have many career options, and they may exhibit poor employment records and face an increased chance of becoming involved in the criminal justice system. Such students will likely have reduced career options. Rusch and Wolfe (2008) reported the unemployment rate for students with disabilities to be approximately 80%, ultimately being the impetus for little employment likelihood, poor employment records, and an elevated possibility of becoming involved in the criminal system (Holmes, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Students with disabilities, who are at risk for failure, can remain enrolled in school and find fulfillment through individualized instructional planning and transition planning with the support of secondary teachers who perceive that they have the transition competencies or skills to increase school participation.

Christie, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) proposed that schools establish safeguards to counter the potentially negative influences of circumstances unrelated to school that impede student participation and academic growth. When retaining students in schools, it is essential to ensure that there are programs and services in place that address social and functional skills as well as academic proficiency. Administrators must allocate funding and implement research-based interventions to reduce academic disengagement and reduce retention. School programs and activities proven to re-engage at risk students provide worthwhile possibilities for reclaiming school success (Kemp, 2006; Scanlon & Mellard, 2002; Wagner, 1991). While educational leaders recognize the task of

implementing and revising programs and services to increase student success, schools are

further challenged to overcome the many factors that accompany the overwhelming

population of at risk students while forging ahead to increase student achievement.

For years now, the State Performance Plan has required schools to maintain

information on the number of students who complete high school by earning a general

education diploma within four years of entering ninth grade. To measure graduation

rates, student engagement, and participation in school or work activities of recent

graduates, schools are monitoring data on a frequent basis and employing a variety of

strategies to increase the number of students with disabilities who graduate and move into

postsecondary settings.

Education agencies are required to devise reports depicting data of the

postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities (Schmitz, 2008). During annual

evaluations, 20 indicators have been used to represent the achievement of students with

disabilities who are currently enrolled as well as those students who have previously

graduated. To date, the Georgia Department of Education reports that, collectively,

schools within the state continue to fail to meet the State Performance Plan goals. One

aspect of State Indicator 13 has been to determine the percentage of students with IEPs,

who are at least 16 years of age, and who have transition strategies and assessments that

aid them in reaching their postsecondary goals. State Indicator 14 represents the

percentage of students with disabilities who recently left the school system who have

been engaged in postsecondary employment or education programs within one year after

leaving high school. As it relates to this dissertation, the participant school district has

never met its target on Indicator 13 nor Indicator 14. Many factors may have contributed

to the failure of the school district to meet the targets for improving the outcomes of

students with disabilities. However, special education teachers' perceptions of their

competencies to facilitate transition planning may have been a major contributor to the

distressing outcomes for students with disabilities.

Transition planning prepares students to advance beyond high school graduation.

Nonetheless, many hurdles have deterred students with disabilities from graduation. For

example, high school exit exams continue to be a contentious element of educational

reform. Pressures to pass high school exit exams have been a caveat for school failure

for some students with disabilities (Popham, 2011). Numerous cases concerning the

mandatory participation of students with disabilities in exit exams have been debated in

courts over the years. Brookhart v. Illinois State Board of Education (1983) was the

landmark case where it was ruled that students with disabilities were to be held to

graduation standards comparable to those of their peers without disabilities. Thus, all

students must participate in graduation testing. Those students with disabilities, who fail

the graduation exam, have the option to test again, eventually apply for a waiver or

variance, or resolve to exiting school with a certificate of attendance, or, if eligible, they

may elect to receive the special education document of completion. Secondary special

education teachers' frequency of performance of transition competencies determines how

often students with disabilities are exposed to appropriate instructional supports such as

supplemental programs to prepare them to demonstrate mastery on state tests or identify

postsecondary vocational training opportunities.

Exit exams are commonly referred to as *high stakes tests* because failure on these

tests may lead to denial of a high school diploma. This requirement will likely adversely

affect a student's pursuit of postsecondary education and employment opportunities

(Popham, 2001). These exams have placed pressure on certain subgroups of students,

such as students with disabilities, English-Language Learners, and other minority

students (Center on Educational Policy, 2005). Special education teachers who perceive

that they are competent in facilitating transition planning can help students arrange

options after high school whether or not they have passed the exit exams. Students with

disabilities have become dependent on school systems preparing, supporting, and

evaluating the secondary educators to ensure that the teachers who are accountable for

planning their futures are experts in facilitating transition planning that will guide the

outcomes of their future lives.

Limited Access to Postsecondary Education and Career Training. For

decades, the high school diploma has been considered a compulsory prerequisite for

students who have expressed aspirations of attending college (Erickson & Morningstar,

2009). Earning a high school diploma was viewed as the procedure for students to

position themselves to access coveted roles in post high school educational, military, or

career paths (O'Neil, 2001; Dorn, 2003). Wagner, Cameto Levine, and Marder (2007)

reported that more than 80% of students with disabilities who were surveyed expressed

interest in enrolling in college or continuing education programs. Despite this

information, students with disabilities face an increased probability of not receiving a

general high school diploma.

Instead, school districts have begun to allow students to leave high school with

alternative diplomas. Erickson, Kleinhammer-Trammill, and Thurlow (2007) conducted

a study to determine the correlation between high stakes testing policies and the

percentage of students with disabilities who received alternative certificates. Erickson et al. (2007) found states that provided alternative exit certificates awarded statistically significant fewer general high school diplomas as compared to states that did not offer the option of an alternative diploma. Further, results of the study indicated that students with disabilities in southern states who receive such credentials might as well have left high school without any certificate. For students who fail to meet the high school diploma requirements, secondary special education teachers who frequently execute transition competencies provide options still, by using transition assessment results to collaborate with local and state resources to access postsecondary vocational training at community college or job placement assistance.

Criminality. Students with disabilities are uninformed and unaware of the truths of the impact of the criminal justice system (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Beyer, 2008). People with disabilities comprise a widely disproportionate number of individuals on probation, in jails, or in prisons throughout the world. Overwhelmingly, 75% of individuals with disabilities arrested are not identified as having a disability (Smith et al., 2003). It is urgent that students with disabilities understand the rules of society and the realities of the criminal justice system. While only 2% of the population has been identified as having a disability, almost 10% of the people in the penal system have been recognized as having a disability (Smith et al., 2008). Special education teachers must possess the transition competencies to prepare students with disabilities to circumvent the obstacles within the quality of life domains, particularly the social and community engagement domain, to present the reality of how criminal actions can impact their lives and the lives of everyone in their communities.

Quinn, Rutherford, Leone, Osher, and Poirier (2005) reported that the number of young people with disabilities in criminal facilities is 400% greater than the population of students attending school. Although these students are outside the traditional school system, the law requires that they be provided transition services as well. However, compounding the punitive nature of incarceration are the difficulties special education teachers face in providing enhanced transition services across different agencies to promote postsecondary education and employment success as well as community re-entry.

To understand the impact of such complex programming, Clark, Mathur, and Helding (2011) conducted a study of transition specialists' impact on recidivism of 114 students held in an Arizona facility. The findings of the study showed that the provision of transition services decreased recidivism rates by almost 70%. This empirical evidence further supports the benefit of preparing secondary special education teachers to provide transition services and facilitate transition planning that meets the needs of the students. The primary goal of transition planning has further underscored the necessity for secondary teachers to frequently employ transition competencies to promote postsecondary progress for students with disabilities.

Theoretical Framework

Self-Efficacy Theory. A construct of Bandura's Social Cognitive theory (1983), self-efficacy is a foremost indicator of a person's awareness of their ability to influence another person's circumstances. Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk-Hoy, Hoy (1998) operationally defined teacher efficacy as the educators' manifestation of beliefs in his or her own aptitudes and activities, and is evidenced as a byproduct of their student

results. Teacher efficacy also suggests that student outcomes are a direct result of a teacher's conviction that their planning and guided instruction will positively contribute to their student outcomes (Lee, Patterson & Vega, 2011). Research conducted by Gibson and Dembo (1984) revealed a link between engaging and extended instruction, student achievement, and perceived high levels of teacher self-efficacy. Teachers' unquenchable tenacity to solve problems and motivate students to realize their goals are traits of teachers with high levels of self-efficacy. This suggests that learners benefit more through encountering teachers who perceive they possess the skills and the knowledge to effectively facilitate instruction that prepares students to progress in a variety of settings and circumstances. Yet, even the most dedicated and competent teacher's sense of self-efficacy may be derailed due to a variety of impediments such as a lack of continuous training, lackluster support, and untimely feedback (Bandura & Jourgen, 1991). This means that persons with an elevated sense of self-efficacy, but limited skill, may persist to surmount incredible obstacles toward positive change (Bandura, 1998). Secondary special education teachers who possess a resilient sense of self-efficacy and who also perceive that they possess transition competencies are more likely to advance the outcomes of students with disabilities during transition planning and service delivery, as they move from secondary schools into adulthood settings.

Transition Frameworks

Kohler Transition Framework. Public opinion of the bleak outcomes for students with disabilities after graduation has caused an outcry for federal and state educational agencies to reexamine the special education programs throughout the nation's schools. Despite noteworthy investments in educational supports, special education

programs and the students they serve are not achieving success similar to the success of

students without disabilities. Seminal studies by Hazasi, Gordon, and Roe (1985),

Mithuag, Horiuchi, and Fanning (1985), and Sitlington, Frank, and Carson (1993)

revealed methods to improve outcomes for students with special needs. A recent study

by Korbel, McGuire, Banerjee and Saunders (2011) agreed that supportive transition

strategies include providing supported employment experiences, increased collaboration

among the in-school team members, families and support agencies, and by promoting

community leisure participation.

The Taxonomy for Transition Programming, an initial model of effective

transition practices, was developed after synthesizing previous transition research. In this

model, Rusch, Kohler, and Hughes (1992) and Kohler, DeStefano, Wermuth, Grayson,

and McGinty (1994) through a multi-phase research process organized transition related

best practices into five categories. The categories are: (a) student focused planning, (b)

student development, (c) interagency and interdisciplinary collaboration, (d) family

involvement, and (e) program structure and attributes. Shortly thereafter, the Kohler

Framework for Transition emerged, Kohler (1998) developed Transition Focused

Education, a results oriented concept to improve the adult outcomes of students with

disabilities. This transition framework sets parameters for the special education teachers

to reflect on transition awareness and advocate the teachings of transition concepts to

students preparing for exiting high school. Secondary special education teachers'

frequent inclusion of transition competencies during instructional planning would result

in increased exposure to postsecondary options and resources for students with

disabilities who are preparing to exit high school

The Life-Centered Career Education Model. One of the most prevalent resources for preparing students for postsecondary life is the Life Centered Career Education framework. Unlike Kohler's Framework for Transition (1994) which focuses on tasks to be completed by special education teacher solely, Brolin developed a curriculum and assessments for students to participate and take ownership of their own transition preparation by completing diverse tasks. Brolin (1997) identified 22 transition competencies that special education teachers should incorporate into daily instruction. These transition competencies are categorized into three distinct areas of adulthood which are (a) daily living, (b) personal-social, and (c) occupational guidance and preparation skills (Brolin & Loyd, 2004). This model provides a platform for teachers to use, which exposes students to real life scenarios to cope with life demands as a prelude to the actuality of life beyond high school. This model reinforces that secondary special education teachers ought maximize postsecondary preparation through an intentional fusion of instructional and transition planning strategies.

The Self-Determination Model of Instruction. Dissimilar to the Kohler Framework for Transition (1994) and the Life-Centered Career Education (1997) models, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) developed the Self-Determination Model of Instruction, which encourages teachers and students to work mutually to reach transition goals and increase postsecondary outcomes of students with disabilities. In their research, they found that students who completed special education programs and who demonstrated higher self-determination were more likely to earn more money and attain employment within one year of graduation as compared to special education program participants who lack self-determination skills. In a focus group of 10 young adults through research

conducted by Andrews and Rose (2010), three themes materialized as motivating factors

for acquiring employment: (a) monetary gain, (b) social aspects, and (c) perceived

determination. Yet, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1998) later revealed in a study of 136 high

school students that instruction for increasing self-determination was entirely

undetectable. Despite having special education policies and expansive research of the

best practices for transition, educational leaders and teachers are experiencing difficulties

ensuring that what works is in place to maximize provision of transition services and

supports that students with disabilities are entitled.   These models each justify the

importance of secondary special education programs using transition competencies across

the Instructional Planning, Assessment, Transition Planning and Collaboration domains

to prepare students with disabilities to appropriately evolve from dependent, high school

student to independent, young adult.

The Kohler Transition Framework (1994), the Life-Centered Career Model (1997)

and the Self-Determination Model (1997) provide road maps for teachers of students with

disabilities to increase knowledge and skills to improve the odds of postsecondary

success utilizing varying methods. These models encompass strategies that extend

learning beyond classroom instruction by integrating instruction with opportunities for

students to participate in transition planning as part of a team. Moreover, there are viable

transition models which already exist and the law regarding transition is distinct, yet there

is little in place that mandates how school systems and educational leaders implement

practices that lead to special education teachers who perceive that they competently

facilitate transition planning which leads to improved post high school outcomes (Aron &

Loprest, 2012; Sitlington & Clark, 2006). Special education teachers who perceive they

competently facilitate transition planning may use valuable guides such as transition frameworks to support student achievement before and after high school completion.

Transition Programs

Over the years, transition programs have evolved to meet the needs of students with disabilities as they prepare to move from secondary school settings to postsecondary employment, educational, and community environments. As updates to special education accountability laws occur, transition or vocational programs are still viable avenues for educating students with disabilities, are being overshadowed by rigorous academic standards. There is an assortment of transition preparation programs that range from federally funded, school directed programs to privately owned and operated services. Community-based and school-based transition programs co-exist to offer a comprehensive support network that leads to the development of independent, socially responsible contributors to society.

Community-Based Transition Programs. Community-based transition programs throughout the country are symbolic indicators of society's support for integrating students with disabilities into the general public. Local colleges and neighborhood centers have made available accommodations for programs to instruct or coach students with disabilities.

The Start on Success (SOS) initiative is an urban, collaborative effort of the National Organization of Disability that provides on the job training and real world experience to students with disabilities.   This effort has supported partnerships among secondary schools and a state university. One major goal of community-based programs was to foster learning appropriate social skills necessary to maintain relationships on the

job. The students who participated in the SOS program showed gains in performance

while working toward employment (Sabbatino & Macrine, 2007). While the SOS

students experienced employment success, they also strengthened their commitment to

working as young adults, productively contributing to society. Special education teachers

who perceive that they possess transition competencies are more likely to perform tasks

to connect students and families with community based programs that help develop and

stimulate students' self-esteem and self-determination skills, which may lead to improved

postsecondary outcomes.

      School-Based Transition Programs. Students with disabilities who participate

in school-based transition programs have exposure to career pathways scheduled into

their daily activities. Licensed technical education or special education teachers often

facilitate school-based programs. It is essential for educators who coordinate career and

social exploration programming to possess skills necessary for aiding in transition. For

example, career and technical education programs in the vein of the Special Education

Vocational Education Programs (SEVEP) are school-based transition programs built into

the daily schedule, providing access to work related standards while on the school

campus. The principal aim of vocational programs is to empower students with

disabilities to perform comparably with their peers in an inclusive setting (Ofoegbu &

Azarmsa, 2010). In the Ofoegbu and Azarmsa (2010) study, 67 % of the SEVEP

participants found and maintained employment after completing high school while many

of the others were enrolled into postsecondary education programs or participated in

other community intervention programs. Special education teacher transition

competencies can be used to connect students to school supports such as vocational,

social and leisure initiatives. Such programs have been advantageous in promoting

career and social experiences that lead to improved outcomes for young adults with

disabilities.

Special Education Teacher Preparation and Professional Development

Special education teacher training programs have evolved over the last 150 years

since special education teachers were first trained in residential settings. Judicial

mandates, civil rights groups, and progressive educational initiatives have prompted

changes in the preparation of special education teachers and the delivery of services

throughout the country. Specifically, Brown v. Board of Education and, subsequently,

the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children were groundbreaking cases that

allowed a diverse multitude of students, including students with disabilities, into public

schools (Aron & Loprest, 2012; Brownell, Sindelar, Kiely, & Davidson, 2010). As

students with disabilities enrolled in schools, many school districts lacked trained

personnel who could adequately provide the necessary services. In response to

mandatory attendance laws and the mounting demand for schools to provide quality

education to students with disabilities, teacher colleges began offering special education

teacher preparation programs (Brownell et al., 2010). Initial federal funding of special

education teacher preparation programs was released in 1958 to increase the number of

teachers who could provide instruction to students with disabilities (Kleinhammer-

Tramill & Fiore, 2003).

Teacher preparation programs' lack of a transition service delivery focus has

consequently resulted in a disservice to teachers and students with disabilities.

 Professionals who enter the teaching field inadequately equipped with transition

competencies may have been culpable for the disproportionate and decreased

achievement of students with disabilities as compared to their peers without disabilities.

Teacher education programs have continued to signify the apparent unimportance of

transition competencies as evidenced by scant transition service instruction (Razeghi,

1996). More than 20% of teachers have reported that they do not feel capable of meeting

the needs of their students with disabilities (President's Commission of Excellence in

Special Education, 2002). Guskey (1999) concluded in his seminal study that courses

should be developed that focus on imparting transition competencies to improve teacher

abilities and commitment to providing sound transition planning, which may result in

improved transition outcomes and overall better lives for students with disabilities.

Special education teachers who perceive being prepared to execute transition

competencies through training can positively impact outcomes of students with

disabilities.

The future of students with disabilities is reliant upon special education teacher

training through teacher preparation programs and continual professional development

where transition competencies and other necessary skills are taught and evaluated.

According to a 2003 national survey of 527 higher education instructors and department

chairpersons, it was revealed that of their course offerings, few special education teacher

preparation programs focused on secondary transition benchmarks with approximately

only 45% having offered a stand-alone course devoted to transition (Bassett &

Wehmeyer, 2003). Similarly, the Reder et al. (1996) and Morningstar, Kim, and Clark

(2008) research found that transition courses are scarce throughout the nation. When

college level transition courses are available, they seem to be unsatisfactory at educating

learners about all the multiple facets of transition planning. Special education teacher trainees who receive meager exposure to essential work related tasks, such as transition planning facilitation, have contributed to creating school environments in which students with disabilities do not experience worthwhile transition planning which impacts their postsecondary level of attainment.

Since special education administrators at the district level and building level principals share responsibility for special education practices, it imperative that support is provided through professional development because teacher support contributes to increased student achievement. Rosenberg (1999) asserted that special education teachers' practice of quality instruction is overshadowed by survival tactics when pre-service and on the job training and coaching is not embedded in the school's agenda. As teachers strive to meet the needs of young people with disabilities, the necessity of employing transition competencies becomes paramount. The effect of insufficient teacher training leads toward a path of ineffective instruction and work overload. School leaders should provide an atmosphere that cultivates professional skills that are important for student achievement (Billingsley, 2004; Crockett, 2004). Ongoing, effective, and vital professional development motivates and better enables all teachers, and particularly teachers of students with disabilities, to increase their declarative and procedural knowledge, acquire innovative skills, and renew commitment to their practice (Gerston, Keating, Yovanoff, & Harniss, 2001; Price & Nelson, 2010). Secondary special education teacher of students with high incidence disabilities who are trained and possess positive perceptions of their transition skills and knowledge will feel more capable of facilitating transition planning and service delivery.

Complex Role of Special Education Teacher as Transition Specialist

Students with disabilities are entitled to transition services that have been designed to protect their rights, meet their needs, and support them in benefitting from public education. IDEA (2004) prescribes that all students receive transition planning as part of the Individualized Education Program. Although all students are entitled to a free and appropriate education through age 21, as guaranteed by IDEA, some students are not receiving appropriate services because special education teachers lack transition competencies. This leads to faulty transition planning and, "while several factors contribute to difficult transitions from school, poorly trained professionals may help to explain some of these unsuccessful experiences" (Li et al., 2009, p. 164). Secondary special education teachers who perceive being satisfied with their transition training are more suitable than special education who do not perceive receive satisfactory transition training.

For students with disabilities, transition competencies create equity in attaining realistic opportunities to help them realize their dreams. Although transition planning has received widespread attention over the years, the United States Department of Education (2007) acknowledged that a significant number of graduates with disabilities still have trouble making the transition into self-sufficient adulthood. Despite federal funding, substantial attention and policy interventions, and an incline in the enrollments, students with disabilities still lag far behind students without disabilities.

According to *NCLB*, students who receive special education require services including modifications and accommodations to access the standards-based curriculum taught by highly qualified teachers who have demonstrated proficiency through

competency testing whereas *IDEA* (2004) dictated a platform for teachers to assume a variety of positions to provide a plethora of services beyond classroom instruction (Li, et al., 2009). Besides planning classroom lessons and teaching content material, special education teachers perform duties such as advocating for students, coordinating meetings, completing re-evaluation documentation, conducting behavior consultations, interagency collaboration, and transition service planning (Knott & Asselin, 1999; Li et al., 2009; Zhang, Ivester, Chen, & Katsiyannis, 2005). Conversely, students who do not receive access to a rigorous secondary curriculum may experience failure very early on the postsecondary platform (Center for Education Statistics, 2005). An excess of duties constrains, stifles and prevents teachers from feeling a sense of autonomy to use the skills and knowledge necessary to empower students to achieve in postsecondary settings (Billingsley, 2004). Educational leaders must provide supportive schools that nurture special education teachers by acknowledging their concerns and supporting their efforts in meeting legal, administrative and instructional tasks.

Special education policymakers considered and developed a variety of interventions to support students with disabilities as they enter adulthood (Barry & Moore, 2004). To implement many of these activities, the roles of secondary special education teachers have become more complex and burdensome. Today, there is a national movement for special education teachers to also become highly qualified content instructors as well as assume the role of transition specialist (Nance & Calabrese, 2009). Special education teachers are urged to focus mainly on providing students with disabilities access to core subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, and language arts in preparation to meet state targets on high stakes tests. Notwithstanding

employing strategies to help students as specified by special education reform measures, teachers of students with disabilities are constantly experiencing hardships in performing their job duties as expected (McKnab, 2006; Crockett, 2004). With recent requests and additional responsibilities, secondary special education teachers have struggled to adequately perform collaborative planning with community agencies, employers, educational institutions, and leisure providers (Billingsley 2004; Nance & Calabrese, 2009; Sitlington & Clark, 2006). Meanwhile, schools have seemingly continued to fail to provide services that readily address students' transition into full-time work, postsecondary schooling, independent living, and community engagement. Special education teachers who are unable to provide instrumental transition support may be compounding a dire situation within our schools and communities.

Emergence of Transition Competencies

In recent times, the need to provide beneficial transition services has resulted in a focus on special education initiatives (Razeghi, 1996; Nance & Calabrese 2009). There have been many efforts to identify specific actions that have contributed to improved outcomes for youth with disabilities over the years. According to the NLTS2 (2009), 72% of students with disabilities have experienced employment with 58% being full-time positions. The NLTS2 (2009) also reported that 32% percent of students with disabilities enrolled in a junior college. The increases in these numbers are promising from previous reports. In efforts to sustain improvement, definitive competencies are necessary to enhance the transition process for secondary special education teachers and the students with disabilities they serve.

Early studies by Baker and Geiger (1988) identified 600 transition competencies that were presented as essential for facilitating transition planning. Subsequently, deFur and Taymans' (1995) study asked teachers and transition specialists to rank the most indispensable skills. They discovered that of the aforementioned competencies, the most significant should be categorized into domains and used to develop a core set of standards for which teacher preparation and professional development could be tailored. Transition competencies such as interagency collaboration with families, employers as well as with public and private agencies, job matching techniques, use of transition assessments to guide instruction, and instructional planning toward goals mastery were some of the practices that were specified as necessary for secondary special education teachers to employ to promote positive postsecondary school success (Baker & Geiger, 1988; deFur & Taymans, 1995; Morningstar, Benitez, & Frey, 2005). School districts throughout the country should promote utilization of transition competencies to improve provision the of services for students with disabilities as they prepare to leave high school and enter educational, employment, living, and social settings of their choice.

Knott and Asselin (1999) surveyed 236 teachers, of which 214 responses were returned. Responses indicated that special education teachers do not possess the necessary knowledge, which limits their participation in transition activities as a result. In this study, teachers reported not having an in-depth understanding of the services provided through adult services agencies. Further, teachers gave low ratings on their access to transition training, level of knowledge of transition planning and service delivery, and level of involvement in transition planning and service delivery. On the contrary, Morningstar, Kyeong-Hwa, and Clark (2008), through the use of focus groups

and interviews, found positive feedback as teachers who received explicit transition instruction, continuous support, and timely evaluations expressed greater competence in facilitating transition services.

Postsecondary Outcomes of Students

Over the past 20 years, students with disabilities have experienced post high school educational and employment outcomes that were worse than the outcomes of their non-disabled peers (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009). This decline creates the impetus for educational leaders to ensure that highly qualified, secondary special education teachers are competent in transition planning. Possessing and employing transition competencies ensures that special education teachers make a positive impact when facilitating student success into postsecondary settings. As students with disabilities enter postsecondary education, employment, and social arenas, they rely on transition planning to prepare them for awaiting possibilities. Students with disabilities expect to enter college or find competitive employment immediately after high school; yet, they struggle to maintain longevity in either field*.*

P.L. 94-142 and more recently, *IDEA* 2004, ensure that all students, regardless of disability, receive a free, appropriate public education. Transition planning, a component of the IEP, is a crucial facet of an appropriate public education for students with disabilities. During transition planning, an array of options should be provided for students with disabilities to achieve a reasonable quality of life. Students with disabilities have attained various levels of success as a result of supports offering practical opportunities to overcome barriers to realize interests and preferences. Substandard

outcomes were recorded when the National Longitudinal Transition Survey explored the postsecondary status of students with disabilities (2009).

Williams-Diehm and Benz (2008) conducted a study using quantitative methods to examine the postsecondary outcomes of students with and without disabilities in the four major areas of postsecondary education, employment, independent living, and recreation and leisure. The target population included students graduating from one mid-sized school district in a southern state. A stratified random sample of 228 students was selected consisting of 76 special education students and 172 general education students. Comprehensive exit and follow up surveys were conducted. The major finding of this study was that high school graduates with disabilities were experiencing poorer postsecondary outcomes than their non-disabled peers.

Studies conducted by Applequist et al. (2009), Williams-Diehm et al. (2008), and Lindstrom et al. (2007) also identified that student directed planning and building connections with post school resources were key elements that contributed to the postsecondary success of disabled students. However, only the Applequist et al. study noted the impact of cultural differences and familial participation on transition planning. During the interview portion of the study, the researchers also shed light on how self-determination in Native American culture is a byproduct of interdependence, not independence. For this reason, Applequist et al. (2009) and Benz, Lindstrom, and Yavanoff (2000) further illuminate why the interagency planning aspect of transition planning is crucial to the potential future success of students with disabilities, and even more critical to the culturally and linguistically disabled student.

Benitez et al. (2005), Carter, Lang, Pierson, and Stang (2008), and Corbett, Clark, and Blank (2009) conducted studies of students with Emotional/Behavior Disabilities (EBD) revealing the complexities of tasks involved in transition services. Approximately 470,000 American youths are receiving special education and related services under the category of emotional disturbance and that number is growing (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The literature among these studies converges as the major findings focused on the importance and significance of the development of self-determination of EBD students who are provided career exploration through a vocational curriculum based on student centered planning.

The literature diverges as Benitez et al. (2005) were the only ones who employed a Self- Determined Career Development Model (SDCDM) to help students identify and reach goals. All students participating in the study reached their goals and expressed that the SDCDM student centered approach to self-management in career exploration resulted in behavior improvements and better self-determination among the participants. Li, Bassett and Hutchinson (2009) support that more of such intervention strategies could prove equally successful in deterring students with disabilities from dropping out of high school. Unfortunately, transition services, which are initiated just prior to high school graduation, are bound to be ineffective because the skills that students need to be successful in college and other post-high school settings take years to nurture and develop (Webb, Patterson, Syverud, & Blackmore, 2008). Secondary special education teachers have students with disabilities as captive audiences, often over the course of a few years, at which time they can use transition competencies such as interagency collaboration, interest inventories, accommodations, and modifications to conduct a

comprehensive preparation of the students and their families for postsecondary education and employment accomplishments.

Postsecondary Educational Outcomes

Completing education on the college level is practically a necessity for today's youth.   While these students may want to attend college or other postsecondary education options, their numbers in attendance remain behind those of their college-bound peers without disabilities (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Horn & Nevill, 2006; Murray, Goldstein, Nourse, & Edgar, 2000). Snyder, Tan, and Hoffman (2004) stated that students with disabilities comprise approximately 10% of the 19 million students enrolled in postsecondary education settings in the United States. Secondary special education teachers who perceive that they are properly trained are more prone to implement strategies and supports to provide effective transition planning that positively impacts the futures of millions of young adults.

In a 2004 study, Sitlington and Payne (2004) proposed that postsecondary education is a necessary and achievable goal for students to compete in a global society. Attaining a college degree is an important accomplishment for many students. Yet, the effect has been more profound for students with disabilities because of the positive impact a degree has on adult outcomes (Madaus & Shaw, 2006; Sitlington & Payne, 2004). In light of the importance of postsecondary education, secondary special education teachers must exercise transition competencies so well that students with disabilities complete high school, earn postsecondary credentials and obtain competitive employment.

Students with disabilities have increasingly expressed interest in attending college and have put forth efforts to make attendance a reality. In a report of the key finding from the NLTS2, Sanford et al. (2011) reported that 61% of students with learning disabilities, 57% of students with other health impairments have expressed a desire to attend college. Despite the introduction of academic accommodations at the postsecondary level, schools have continued to experience difficulty in addressing the needs of students with disabilities to promote postsecondary educational progress (Gregg, 2007; Rojewski, 1999; Stodden, 2000). Secondary special education teachers should possess transition competencies to educate and empower students to pursue postsecondary education as preferred.

Undeterred by a lack of sufficient support, the number of students with disabilities in postsecondary educational settings has increased over time. Still, of the students with disabilities who enroll in college, many have limited success despite availability of a great number of disability support programs (Izzo, Hertfield & Aaron 2001; Stodden, 2000). The findings of a study of 11,317 students with disabilities by Wessel, Jones, Markle, and Westfall (2009) and Mull, Sitlington, and Alpern (2001) indicated that students with disabilities were displeased with the provision of information regarding postsecondary schooling. They were disappointed with being exposed to the college admissions process; they felt unprepared to meet expectations at the postsecondary level; and they believed they were uninformed of options available to them according to the law. These students also indicated that their secondary special education teachers were not helpful in disclosing their responsibilities for providing documentation of disability

and necessary accommodations and modifications; nor were they routinely provided

personal copies of their IEPs with the accompanying transition plans after meetings.

Beyond secondary schools, statutes such as Section 504, the *Rehabilitation Act* of

1973 and the *Americans with Disabilities Act* (1990) have extended protection to students

with disabilities from discriminatory practices and ensured equal access to the curriculum

in higher education settings (Gregg & Scott, 2000). To receive institutional cooperation,

students must provide documentation that a disability has been confirmed as an initial

appeal for assistance (Claniga & Costenbader, 2002; Vogel & Adelman, 2001; Wessel et

al., 2009). This insightful documentation should consist of the IEP and transition

assessments to provide an in-depth perspective to the school officials who are responsible

for admissions, advising, instructing, and mentoring the students.

Postsecondary schools receiving federal funds must ensure the availability of

requested supports such as extended time on assessments, alternative testing locations as

well as other setting, presentation, response and scheduling accommodations. To

maximize benefits from supports at the postsecondary level, students with disabilities

should be instructed as to how their disability has impacted them academically and

socially. Upon exiting high school, these students are responsible for verbally expressing

their disability and advocating for necessary supports. They must be prepared to work

with school personnel to ensure that reasonable accommodations, which do not result in

unfair advantages, are in place (Hatzes, Reiff, & Bramel, 2004). Special education

teachers' transition competencies can used to provide instruction to students regarding

most appropriate supports and the process for provision of services within the

postsecondary settings.

Also, special education teachers must inform students and their families of the plethora of supports that are available to students with disabilities to promote their achievement. Modifications for students with disabilities include assistive technology, recorded books, and large print text (Mull & Sitlington, 2003; Sitlington & Payne, 2004). Further, students who have transitioned into college and university settings should be encouraged to join study groups. As such, secondary special education teachers who possess transition competencies will be more competent in locating the various supports through accommodations and modifications as students with disabilities prepare for life post high school.

With regards to deFur, Getzel, and Trossi's (1996) assertion that having a disability increases the likelihood of failure when attempting to earn a college degree, secondary special education teachers of students with disabilities should be offered numerous opportunities to enhance and cultivate transition competencies. The teachers should be trained to educate others of information pertaining to students with disabilities, ensuring paperwork compliance, and teaching self- determination skills. Special education teachers who possess transition competencies should also be proficient in providing opportunities for students to practice independence and self-advocacy skills prior to exiting high school and enrolling in postsecondary schooling.

Postsecondary Employment Outcomes

Students with disabilities experienced a discrepancy in employment aspirations and realities they encounter after exiting high school. Transition competencies empower special education teachers to help students pursue pragmatic and attainable postsecondary employment goals. Yet, students with disabilities are leaving colleges and universities

unsatisfied, unaccomplished, without skills to find and maintain gainful employment, or the ability to live independently. Wesson et al. (2009) reported that within 5 years of graduation from high school, more than 80% of students with disabilities had not graduated, and of those remaining, only 16% graduated from training/vocational programs; not quite 4% graduated from a community college or four-year college program. The utilization of transition competencies and services that promote positive post school outcomes is critical, and it is fundamental for special education teachers to perceive that they possess the competencies to facilitate transition planning and achieve positive results in mature, independent young adults with disabilities.

Despite almost two decades of mandated transition services, youth with disabilities continue to experience post high school outcomes that are less desirable than individuals without disabilities (Mellard & Lancaster, 2003). Similar to educational institutions, employers require job seekers to self-disclose disabilities to receive accommodations. Yet, the stigma of a disability often outweighs the potential support that can be offered leaving employers unable to afford assistance to an employee with a disability. Secondary special education teachers endeavor to facilitate planning using competencies that are proven effective in transitioning students beyond high school into quality employment scenarios. Graduates with learning disabilities were significantly more dissatisfied in the areas of pay, promotion, and total job satisfaction than were graduates without disabilities (Witte, Philips, & Kakela, 1998). Secondary special education teachers should be competent in planning transition activities and services that result in higher numbers of students with disabilities who experience postsecondary school success in employment, educational, social, and living situations.

Perceptions of Transition Planning

Transition planning has become a fundamental aspect of the IEP process as students with disabilities encounter processes and services to alleviate the disadvantages of having a disability. Transition related laws are clear but indispensable to the transition planning process are the perceptions of parents, students, agencies, and secondary special education teachers who are ultimately responsible for guiding the transition planning process.   Scarce research exists solely on perceptions of transition planning competencies; nonetheless, data were reviewed to obtain pertinent information that has provided insight into the transition planning course of action.

Parents' Perceptions

The families of students with disabilities rely on the professional expertise of secondary special education teachers to facilitate transition planning, creating linkages to opportunities and agencies that will prepare their children to be able to achieve personal and professional goals. After years of schooling, families have anticipated that their students with disabilities will display certain indicators that signify the evolution from childhood into adulthood. Accomplishments such as graduating from high school, continuing interpersonal relationships with family and friends, entering job training programs and securing employment, and maintaining independent housing are displays of maturation from adolescence into adulthood. In studies of parental perceptions of transition planning, Goupil et al. (2002) and Hogansen et al. (2008) revealed parents' overall approval of the transition planning process because it provided platforms where parents and students collaborated on tasks that prepared students to meet job requirements and allowed families to anticipate future plans beyond secondary schools.

Parents also expressed that they appreciated opportunities to gain understanding of the effects of their children's disabilities on postsecondary goals. Further, transition planning gave parents the prospect of investing in and encouraging their children's future autonomy though it differed from their own.

These studies substantiated the concerns of parents as perceived during transition planning. Specifically, during transition planning, parents reported that their students were unprepared for reality, communication about available community resources was non-existent, and they remained unknowledgeable of probable expectations and work demands of future employers (Davies & Beamish 2009). Transition competencies should be utilized to expand the involvement and knowledge of resources that help students and their parents benefit from the transition planning.

Postsecondary success of students with disabilities has been determined to be more likely if parental participation is secured during the transition planning processes. Yet, the NLTS2 (2007) detailed the majority of the participants involved indicated the training to be helpful in addressing their children's postsecondary goals. Ankeny et al. (2009) wrote, "although families piece together support networks, invest personal resources, and juggle multiple roles and responsibilities to help their children achieve fulfilling futures, teachers must ensure that they equip parents with needed information and resources" (p. 45). Secondary special education teachers who perceive they possess transition competencies may be more prone to extending invitations to parents to participate in transition planning that leads to progressively improved outcomes for students with disabilities.

Students' Perceptions. The transition from high school student to independent young adult can be enjoyable and harrowing simultaneously. Numerous dynamics contributed to the disparities facing students preparing to transition from school. Wagner and Blackorby (1996) reported that of high school seniors with disabilities 60% anticipated immediately entering the workforce while almost 30% expected to enroll in postsecondary school settings. Students' perceptions of their experiences in the transition planning processes have shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of current transition related practices, and understanding these practices is critical to improving transition outcomes. In a study conducted by Williams-Diehm and Lynch (2007), students disclosed their perceptions of student centered transition activities aided by secondary special education teachers. The results of this study corroborated a key discrepancy in the provision of services and transference of knowledge within the transition programs. Astoundingly, 97% of 130 students were unable to speak of pertinent agencies in their community nor the services available to students with disabilities. Additionally, students reported that transition planning could be improved if teachers listened more and made authentic attempts to guide students into careers through exposure and opportunities to understand different job types.

It has continued to be of utmost importance that students preparing to exit high school be appropriately prepared for postsecondary livelihood because students anticipate that high school programs position them for success after graduation (Daviso et al., 2011; Williams-Diehm & Lynch, 2007). However, within the Williams-Diehm and Lynch study (2007), despite some shortfalls with transition programming, almost 80% of the students felt they were on track and making gains toward realizing their postsecondary

goals. Likewise, all 115 participants in a job-interest match study found employment (Estrada-Hernandez, Wadsworth, Nieptupski, Warth, & Winslow, 2008). Students who have participated in activities that engage self-determination skills are generally more apt to locate and partake in services and programs to maximize their postsecondary transition outcomes (Wehmeyer, Palmer, Soukup, Garner & Lawrence, 2007). Special education teachers should perceive that they possess transition competencies, such as instructional planning that includes transition activities, interpretation and dissemination of career assessment results, and job matching skills to proactively empower students with disabilities to overcome obstacles during transition planning and prepare them to achieve their postsecondary goals.

Agency Personnel Perceptions. To provide students with disabilities with the appropriate support as they transition from high school into the adult world, rehabilitation professionals' participation in interagency collaboration is critical. Reauthorized in 2006, Public Law 109-270, the *Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act,* further holds schools accountable for graduation, postsecondary education, and employment outcomes of students enrolled in career and technical education including coordination among federally funded programs and agencies as well as secondary and postsecondary education entities (Oertle & Trach, 2007). Transition planning requires a shared interest in supporting students with disabilities as they evolve from dependent child to independent adult. Too frequently, interagency collaboration does not occur since time constraints make it difficult for the in-school team members, including outside agency representatives, to meet and discuss academic and vocational programming for students

with disabilities. Yet, special education teachers who are competent in transition

planning can use strategies to overcome the hurdles that can derail transition services.

     Teacher Perceptions. Special education teachers' perceptions of their transition

planning efficacy might have a direct bearing on the extent of their efforts exerted during

transition services planning with students and families (Knott & Asselin, 1995; Benitez,

Morningstar, & Frey, 2005; Li, Bassett, & Hutchinson, 2009).   For secondary teachers of

students with disabilities, the realities of a lack of collegial support and understanding,

inadequate resources, insufficient training, the need to shift the focus from exclusively

academics and overwhelming workloads continue to jeopardize the scope of planning

that leads to valuable transition experiences (Lee, Patterson, & Vega, 2011). Poor

perceptions of transition competencies can cause even the most determined teachers to

devalue transition strategies and undermine practices when planning for postsecondary

choices. It is possible that secondary teachers who view transition planning tasks as

meaningless and futile may have contributed to the meager numbers of students who

have benefited from transition planning for postsecondary livelihood.

     Knott and Asselin (1999) portrayed teachers who facilitated transition services as

reporting an underwhelming perception of their knowledge as it pertains to eligibility

requirements necessary for students to participate in programs and how outside agencies

should participate in transition planning. Moreover, they indicated that teachers feel they

lack the knowledge of community linkages that offer additional support services to

students with disabilities who are preparing to leave high school (Blanchett, 2001; Prater,

Sileo, & Black, 2000). Special education teachers perceived that they merely connected

students with a limited assortment of supported employment opportunities, which may

never provide wages to support independence (Zhang, Katsiyannis, & Ivester, 2005).

Special education teachers who perceive they frequently perform transition competencies such as educating others about different models of transition programs, matching a student's skills with jobs or vocational training or who works with families and outside agencies to plan for community integration will be better prepared to facilitate transition planning for students with disabilities.

Data have suggested that teachers feel inadequate at using student feedback to guide instruction that can be developed into career path activities, creating early and continuous opportunities for exposure to future employment possibilities and postsecondary school options (Lindstrom et al., 2007). Ultimately, teachers do not adequately prepare students to exit high school with vital skills for competitive employment (Zhang et al., 2005). Secondary special education teachers are charged with ensuring they possess the transition competencies to support students transitioning from high school into adulthood. Improving the perceptions of transition competencies acquisition should improve the focus of provision of services to students with disabilities, leading to more successful outcomes after graduation.

Benitez, et al. (2005) conducted research throughout 31 states to investigate the extent to which special education teachers feel they exhibit transition competencies that lead to positive outcomes for students with disabilities. The data revealed that special education teachers perceived they were dissatisfied with transition competencies training, and that they were not fully prepared to fulfill the obligatory tasks required for the positions they hold (Blanchett, 2001; Nance & Calabrese, 2009). Additionally, teachers reported they had not been involved frequently in transition activities for students

preparing for postsecondary settings to the extent necessary to contribute to optimal

outcomes for students with disabilities (Hogensen et al., 2008; Knott & Asselin, 1999).

 Consequently, special education teachers who perceive themselves as inadequate

transition facilitators are more probable to have an unremarkable impact on positive

outcomes for students who graduate from high school and transition to postsecondary

school programs and employment.

Students with disabilities who have been prepared to exit high school require

exposure to a comprehensive transition planning process that provides a blueprint for

attaining postsecondary goals in the areas of education, employment, independent living,

and leisure activities. Secondary special education teachers' perceptions of transition

competencies may impact the provision of services that prepare students to achieve their

goals. Consequently, it is most critical that secondary, special education teachers

perceive they have been adequately prepared and are satisfied with their transition

training before attempting to facilitate a continuum of transition planning and instruction

towards preparing students to reach lifelong goals.

Summary

Educational leaders have been held accountable for safeguarding the

educational experiences of all students. While there is no sole panacea to resolve each of

the challenges of special education, it has been of utmost consequence that educational

leadership continues to implement school reforms through training and evaluation of

activities and programs that encourage development of special education transition

competencies. Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) investigation of the relationship

between teacher knowledge and the impact on their practices revealed three models of

teacher practice. Those models were knowledge for practice, knowledge in practice, and knowledge of practice. The greatest impact on student success occurs during the third conceptual level, knowledge of practice, where teachers use a dynamic, constructivist approach to meet the needs of learners. Special education administrators have long been advocates for promoting inclusive practices within school settings. Still, educational leaders must continue to ensure that teachers of students with disabilities have been routinely exposed to the team building activities, professional development, continuous evaluation of practices, and opportunities to network with outside agencies in order to offer endless possibilities for students to attain their postsecondary goals.

Throughout recent decades, the expectation has been that teachers who plan for their students' future through a collaborative process have safeguarded outcomes of students with disabilities. Special education teachers who deliver transition services require continuous professional development and opportunities to cultivate relationships with families, local, state and federal agencies and potential employers that provide linkages to students with disabilities as they become independent adults. Special education teachers are vital advocates for students with disabilities, aiding in arranging activities that lead to a quality adulthood. Though students and their families' may eventually become aware of how to access services outside of school, teachers bear the primary responsibility of effective service delivery that includes engaging transition competencies. Therefore it is prerequisite towards improving transition service delivery to examine teachers' perceptions of transition preparedness, satisfaction with training and implementation frequency during service delivery.

Special education administrators have grave responsibilities towards promoting student achievement by supporting teachers' development, competence and efficacy, yet school districts are perceived to offer little support to special education teachers (Lee et al., 2011). The implications for supporting and ensuring secondary special education teacher transition competencies are vast and multifaceted (Morningstar & Clark, 2003).

 Interagency collaboration during planning, career and interest inventories, activities to increase self-determination and self-advocacy skills, and real world job matching and exposure are some competencies that teachers should possess as they work to create meaningful experiences that will lead to realistic opportunities to realize postsecondary educational, employment, social and independent living goals for students with disabilities, thereby leading to a productive, worthwhile life. Federal, state and local school leaders must enforce systemic, continuous collaboration and professional development of transition competencies among special education teachers to deliver comprehensive, individualized transition planning that produces students with disabilities who are well capable of attaining their professional and personal goals into adulthood.

 Transition planning and provision of transition services is a cooperative effort in which educational leaders must join with special education teachers, students with disabilities, and their families to promote postsecondary student achievement and meet the value-added criteria as set forth by the state of Georgia and the United States Department of Education.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This chapter thoroughly delineates the research methodology section of the study. This chapter provides an explanation of the research processes that were used to answer the research questions. This study was designed to use frequencies, percentages, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficients and an independent *t*- test to examine relationships among secondary special education teachers' perceptions of their transition competencies performance frequency throughout the provision of special education services as stipulated by *IDEA* in fulfillment of the student's IEP. This chapter presents a detailed overview of the subjects, materials, data collection, and the methods of analysis. This study was designed using quantitative research methods. Statistical analysis was involved to determine perceptions of transition planning competencies of secondary special education teachers using a four-point, Likert-type survey to investigate secondary special education teacher perceptions of their frequency of performance of transition competencies related to four transition competencies domains which were (a) Transition Planning, (b) Assessment, (c) Instructional Planning, and (d) Collaboration.

Research Questions

This study investigated a North Georgia school system's secondary special education teachers' perceptions of their own transition competencies regarding their preparedness to plan and deliver transition services, satisfaction with transition training and frequency of implementation during the provision of services when delivering transition instruction and planning as an aspect of the Individual Education Program. Seven questions were used to guide this research:

1. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the Instructional Planning domain?

2. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the Assessment domain?

3. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the Collaboration domain?

4. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the Collaboration domain and the number of staff development sessions completed?

5. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the number of staff development sessions completed?

6. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and their years of teaching experience?

7. To what extent does a difference exist between teachers' reported levels of self-efficacy and perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain?

Research Design

Educational research is a core element in reflective scholarship. The researcher has presented comprehensive perspectives of the topic while simultaneously making obvious any limitations that may have affected the study's findings. At present, a limited body of empirical research of special educator perceptions of their own transition competencies currently exists. This research contributed a more current study of teachers' perceptions of transition competencies to recognize the probable impact on the provision of special education services in the secondary school context. A broad scope of information was captured during this study to be disseminated to the study's school district and to school districts throughout the state to promote reflective scholarship and research-based best practice implementation toward service delivery improvement.

This study employed a quantitative approach to produce a comprehensive view of special education teachers' perceptions of their transition competencies. Few studies of quantitative nature have been conducted regarding teacher perceptions of transition competencies (Knott & Asselin, 1999; Morningstar, et al. 2009). It is necessary for researchers to continue to conduct studies that provide a substantive review of data that has contributed to the existing body of literature and expanded knowledge regarding particular subjects (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007; Crewsell & Plano-Clark, 2010; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). The study explored perceptions of special education teachers' frequency of performance of transition competencies to support high school students' transition into adult settings. The study involved distribution and completion of a survey and use of quantitative statistical analyses to evaluate perceptions of secondary, special education teachers' transition competencies according to their levels of

implementation of transition skills and activities. Further discussion of the details of the

methodology of the research is discussed within this chapter.

Population

The population that most appropriately provided answers to the research questions

were secondary, special education teachers whose caseload consisted of students with

high incidence disabilities categorized as having: (a) Specific Learning disabilities, (b)

Emotional Behavior Disabilities, (c) Other Health Impairments, or (d) Speech Language

Impairments, within an urban, northern Georgia school system. This population of

teachers was identified based on the eligibility codes of students on their caseloads, as

well as appointed job duties and responsibilities of educating and providing transition

services for students with disabilities on the secondary level within general education or

resource settings. For other participant populations, like teachers of students with low

incidence disabilities- students receiving special education services under the category

labeled as having Moderate, Profound or Significant Intellectual Disabilities, the

transition planning process and service delivery expectation may be quite different as

supports and connections to outside agencies usually have been in place for these youths

and their families (Cronin, 1996; Sitlington, 1996). Thus, the most ideal population for

this study was secondary school teachers with students with the most common, or high

incidence disabilities. As such, participation of this particular group of teachers most

effectively supplied data to answer the research questions of this study.

Participants

The researcher worked collaboratively with doctoral committee members to

submit to the study's school district and Georgia Southern University's Institutional

Review Board applications for approval to request permission to conduct research within

the north Georgia school system. Sample participants in this study were certificated

teachers from a school system that is located in urban, northern Georgia. In this district,

a total of 150 teachers from 13 high schools provide specialized instruction to students

with disabilities. Of these 150 teachers, 80 teachers provided services for students

labeled as having high-incidence disabilities. These teachers often provide specialized

instruction within general education class settings. Due to their specific knowledge of

young adult transition, professional responsibilities, and eligibility codes on district

assigned caseloads, purposeful sampling was used to target secondary special education

teachers who facilitate transition planning for students with higher incidence disabilities.

 These teachers were responsible for inviting attendees and facilitating IEP meetings,

communicating with families, maintaining interagency collaboration, as well as a variety

of additional transition planning services for students with disabilities (Brooke, et al.

2009). The results of this study were generalizable to this population.

Instrumentation

Over time, surveys have been used to provide information in many capacities

(Fowler, 2008). Couper, Fowler, Groves, Lepkowski, Singer and Tourangeau (2009)

asserted "surveys are used to produce a numerical descriptor to explain some aspect of

the population" (p. 7). The Secondary Transition Survey used numerical descriptors to

explain teachers' reported perceptions of transition competencies. For the purpose of this

study, an adaptation of the Secondary Teachers Transition Survey (STTS) was the best

instrument to answer the study's questions. The STTS was a quantitative survey

instrument developed by Benitez, Morningstar and Frey (2005) to obtain data about

special education teachers' perceptions regarding a multitude of transition competencies

beliefs, practices and professional skills. The adapted survey consisted of three sections,

which provided data regarding demographic information and ratings of teacher

perceptions and one open-response question. Section one of the survey requested

participants to provide information regarding their years of teaching experience, number

of college level transition courses completed, number of transition development

professional development courses, and their perceived level of self-efficacy during

transition training. The second section of the survey is organized into six transition

competencies related-domains as identified by the Council for Exceptional Children

(2009). Those transition domains include (a) Transition Planning, (b) Curriculum and

Instruction, (c) Instructional Planning, (d) Collaboration, (e) Assessment, and (f)

Additional Competencies. However for the purposes of this study, only four of the

domains were utilized to answer the study's research question. The survey revealed

secondary special education teachers' reported perceptions of 46 transition competencies

regarding their preparedness to facilitate transition planning, satisfaction with transition

training and their frequency of implementation of transition activities. By delineating the

survey using these domains, the researcher obtained data pertaining to the participants'

perceived levels of preparation, satisfaction with training and frequency with which they

performed the forty-six transition related activities. For every listed item statement, the

participants were required to make judgments regarding perceptions of their frequency of

performance of competencies across the domains by assigning a four-point Likert scale

rating choice. The frequency of performance was measured where 1 = never to 4 =

frequently for all domains. Likert scales are accepted as dependable methods of

recording a range of responses that assign a value to concepts (Croasmun & Ostrom, 2011).

Cronbach's alpha coefficients were utilized during previous studies to determine item consistency of the survey across the three rating subscales (Benitez, Morningstar & Frey, 2005). Cronbach's alpha measures internal consistency by approximating the relationships among each of the scale's items (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). As noted by Benitez, Morningstar, and Frey (2005), The Preparation, Satisfaction, and Frequency subscales demonstrated alphas of .96, 97 and .94, respectively, denoting high reliability. In addition, internal consistency estimates were computed indicating very good to high reliability (Benitez, Morningstar, & Frey, 2005). As such, the STTS was deemed the most suitable instrument at soliciting the targeted population's responses to answer the study's research questions regarding perceptions of their frequency of performance.

Validation

The survey protocol in this study consisted of 51 items. All participants were administered the same quantitative survey that Morningstar, Benitez, and Frey (2005) originally created and delivered to teachers in 31 states throughout the United States. Approval was requested and the researcher was granted permission to use and amend the survey by the first author. Morningstar, et al. (2005) completed the original validity and reliability tests on this instrument. Additionally, the developer reports that the instrument has face validity and has the semblance of measuring what is the intended construct. Further, as a means to ensure construct validity, the researcher and a methodologist thoroughly reviewed the survey to evaluate its appropriateness for soliciting perceptions

of transition competencies of special education teachers in this northern Georgia school

system.

Data Collection

The data collection procedures of this study were dependent on data from subjects

who are secondary, special education teachers who serve on the secondary, middle and

high school level within a north Georgia city. Data collection included collecting the

Secondary Teacher Transition Survey following special education department meetings.

 Packets of surveys were delivered with cover letters to each secondary school, addressed

to the special education lead teacher. During one of the weekly meetings, the researcher

read a brief statement soliciting participation by explaining the purpose and significance

of the study. Once the brief statement from the researcher had been read, the surveys

were distributed. One week later, a follow-up visit, thanking and prompting them to

complete and return the instrument was made during weekly departmental meetings.

 Subsequently, each week, the researcher attended departmental meetings, read a small

letter soliciting participation, and requested survey completion.

Response Rate

The survey response rate has been defined as the percentage of surveys returned

as compared to the number of surveys disseminated (Babbie, 2008). The probability of a

100% response rate is impractical (Baruch, 1999; Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007).

 Researchers have not reached a consensus regarding a specified benchmark for return

rates (Babbie, 2008; Fowler, 2002). Notwithstanding this, return rates below 50% are

considered to be unremarkable (Baruch, 1999; Church & Waclawski, 1998; Thompson,

Surface, Martin & Sanders, 2003). The acceptable response rate for this study is 60% of

delivered surveys returned to the researcher. According to Babbie (2008), researchers whose survey response rates that meet or exceed 70% are considered to have received a "very good" return rate (p. 289). The researcher allowed ample time to maximize the response rate.

Data Analysis

As surveys were returned, descriptive statistics were employed for all demographic variables. Descriptive statistics were used for all competency ratings for both, dependent and independent variables. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient, also referred to as Pearson's *r*, is a popular method for determining relationships or significance of association among variables (Healey, 2011; Schumacker, 2014; Thomas, 2003). Correlation coefficients were used to determine the relationship between years of teaching experience, number of transition courses, number of professional development sessions and frequency of performance across the four relevant transition domains. The criterion for statistical significance of relationships or association between variables was $p < .05$, a standard measure to determine significance (Stangor, 2014). An independent samples *t*- test is a fundamental, and regularly used statistical test for determining differences between two group means (O'Dwyer & Bernauer, 2013). The researcher conducted a *t*- test to determine whether significant differences existed between teachers' levels of self-efficacy and their frequency of performance of competencies within the Transition Planning Domain. All statistical analysis of the survey results, including the computation of means and standard deviations, correlations and differences among means testing, were conducted with the help of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences software (SPSS), a reliable statistical processing program (Li & Lomax, 2011).

Reporting the Data

Once the data had been analyzed, the researcher employed tables to display the

demographics data and survey responses. The findings were presented using descriptive

statistics within tabular formats. The researcher ensured that the research questions were

comprehensively answered using responses from the items on the survey.

Summary

This descriptive study's design provided answers to the research questions

regarding secondary, special education teachers' perceptions of their frequency of

performance of transition knowledge and skills. This study utilized quantitative research

methods via a survey to solicit data from participants. The population chosen to best

answer the research questions were secondary school teachers of students with high

incidence disabilities within a north Georgia school district. The quantitative data

collection instrument used for this study was an adapted version of the Secondary

Teacher Transition Survey that consisted of 51 items pertaining to demographics and

perceptions of transition preparedness, transition training satisfaction and frequency of

practice. Previous pilot testing had been conducted by the developer of the survey to

eliminate discrepancies towards refining the instrument by making revisions as

necessary. The researcher, with committee members, continually ensured instrument

validity and reliability in regards to the survey data collected. The data collection

occurred through the survey instrument responses as reported by secondary special

education teachers. For the purpose of this study, a survey response rate of at least 60%

was considered as acceptable, though at least 70% or more was preferable.   A variety of

statistical analysis procedures including an independent samples t-test, correlation of

relationships and calculations of frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to analyze the data in this study.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the results of the data analyses for the study. The purpose of this descriptive study was to offer insight into secondary special education teachers' perceptions of their transition competencies during the transition component of the delivery of special education services. This study explored several aspects of transition service provision as a vital element of the individualized education program of students with disabilities. This study sought to examine perceptions of teachers' frequency of performance of transition competencies towards supporting students' movement from high school into postsecondary educational, employment, independent living, and leisure settings. The survey instrument used was an adapted version of the Secondary Teachers' Transition Survey created by Morningstar, Benitez, and Frey (2005). The survey originally had six domains, however for the study, the researcher thought that four were most important. Using domains pertaining to Transition Planning, Instructional Planning, Collaboration, and Assessment, teachers reported their perceptions using a four point Likert-type scale. The items were averaged during the data analysis to create the scale value. The results of the research are presented using descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviations, correlation coefficients, as well as inferential statistics involving a test of differences among group means.

Restatement of the Significance of the Study

The provision of transition planning and service delivery may be impeded by secondary special education teachers' lack of transition competencies training,

implementation and evaluation. Special education administration's negation of appropriate and ongoing supports for secondary special education teachers may result in dismal postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. Countless students with disabilities are receiving transition services from secondary special education teachers who may not perceive that they possess the efficacy or competencies to facilitate student movement from high school into independent adulthood settings. Secondary special education teachers who perceive that they are prepared to facilitate transition, satisfied with transition training and frequently implement transition activities are likely to be more effective during the provision of transition service delivery. It is of the greatest urgency that special education leadership institutes transition competencies training and evaluates special education teachers' transition efficacy towards ensuring IDEA compliance, enhancing service delivery, meeting accountability targets, and improving the outcomes of students with disabilities.

Restatement of the Methodology

The study employed a quantitative method using a quasi-experimental, correlational design involving a Likert-type survey instrument. The Secondary Teachers' Transition Survey was distributed to high school, special education teachers throughout the study's school district. Data were collected using a survey that consisted of 51 items including a demographic section, one open-response question and required participants to make 46 individual judgments regarding transition competencies preparation, satisfaction and implementation. For each of the study's four domains, respondents rated their perceptions of their frequency of performance. Respondents rated their perceptions of performance frequency across all domains, on a four- point scale (1- Never, 2- Rarely, 3-

Occasionally, 4- Frequently). The data analysis consisted of descriptive statistics including means and standard deviations, frequencies, correlation coefficients and an inferential statistics test of differences.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed throughout the study.

1. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the Instructional Planning domain?

2. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the Assessment domain?

3. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the Collaboration domain?

4. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Collaboration domain and the number of staff development sessions completed?

5. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the number of staff development sessions completed?

6. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and their years of teaching experience?

7. To what extent does a difference exist between teachers' reported levels of self-

efficacy and perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition

Planning domain?

Response Rate

Eighty secondary special education teachers were solicited to participate in the

study. Of this number, only 43 individuals elected to participate in the study, which

results in an initial response rate of 46%. Timely follow up requests for survey

completion resulted in more submissions. Careful analysis of the responses resulted in

the rejection of six surveys due to respondents' failure to answer questions beyond the

demographics section of the instrument. Of the total surveys distributed, 52 surveys were

returned, resulting in the study's overall response rate of 65% participation from solicited

respondents.

Demographic Data

The population of the study consisted of secondary special education teachers of

students with disabilities within 13 high schools throughout an urban school district in

north Georgia. The respondents in the study were responsible for teaching students with

high incidence disabilities within self-contained class settings, resource class settings and

general education class settings. The teachers were also responsible for serving as special

education case managers who ensure Individualized Education Program compliance,

including facilitating transition planning and service delivery. The years of teaching

experience reported responses were ($M= 12$, $SD= 7.3$). The mean number of college

level transition courses was ($M=1$), while the mean number of professional development

sessions were ($M= 2$). When asked to evaluate their perceived level of self-efficacy,

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teachers reported an overall low to average level of self-efficacy (*M*= 1.50, *SD* .50) during transition service delivery.

Respondent Characteristics

Years of experience. Respondents were asked to report the total number of years of teaching experience. The years of teaching ranged from one to thirty years of teaching experience. Using survey data, three groups were created: (a) 1-10 years, (b) 11-20 years and (c) 21 or more years of teaching. Forty-eight percent of respondents reported between 1 and 10 years of classroom teaching experience, while 39% reported between 11 and 20 years of teaching experience. In addition, another 13% of teachers indicated more than 21 years of teaching experience (See Table 1).

Table 1

Frequency Counts and Percentages of Reported Years of Teaching Experience

	Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	5	9.6	9.6	9.6
	2.00	2	3.8	3.8	13.5
	3.00	2	3.8	3.8	17.3
	4.00	2	3.8	3.8	21.2
	5.00	1	1.9	1.9	23.1
	6.00	1	1.9	1.9	25.0
	7.00	2	3.8	3.8	28.8
	8.00	2	3.8	3.8	32.7
	9.00	4	7.7	7.7	40.4
	10.00	4	7.7	7.7	48.1
	11.00	5	9.6	9.6	57.7
	12.00	2	3.8	3.8	61.5
	13.00	2	3.8	3.8	65.4
	14.00	2	3.8	3.8	69.2

15.00	2	3.8	3.8	73.1
16.00	2	3.8	3.8	76.9
17.00	2	3.8	3.8	80.8
18.00	1	1.9	1.9	82.7
20.00	2	3.8	3.8	86.5
21.00	1	1.9	1.9	88.5
23.00	3	5.8	5.8	94.2
25.00	1	1.9	1.9	96.2
27.00	1	1.9	1.9	98.1
30.00	1	1.9	1.9	100.0
Total	52	100.0	100.0	

Number of College Level Transition Courses. When asked to report the number of college level transition courses completed, a total of 46% of respondents reported they had never completed any college level transition courses. Majority of the respondents reported having participated in a transition course at the college level. Twenty percent of respondents indicated that they had completed one college level transition course. Thirty- four percent of respondents indicated that they completed at least three college level transition courses. None of the respondents reported completing more than 6 college level transition courses (See Table 2).

Table 2

Frequency Count and Percentages Analysis of Number of College Level Courses Completed

Table 2

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	23	44.2	46.0	46.0
	1.00	10	19.2	20.0	66.0

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	2.00	7	13.5	14.0	80.0
	3.00	8	15.4	16.0	96.0
	4.00	1	1.9	2.0	98.0
	6.00	1	1.9	2.0	100.0
	Total	50	96.2	100.0	
Missing	System	2	3.8		
Total		52	100.0		

Number of Completed Staff Development Sessions. A little more than one quarter, 28%, of all the secondary special education teachers who responded to the survey reported never completing any professional development or staff development sessions were transition service delivery was the topic. However, 50% of participants reported having participated in one transition staff development session. Respondents who reported completing three or more staff development sessions totaled 22% (See Table 3).

Table 3

Frequency Counts and Percentages of Number of Staff Development Sessions Completed

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	.00	14	26.9	27.5	27.5
	1.00	11	21.2	21.6	49.0
	2.00	14	26.9	27.5	76.5
	3.00	3	5.8	5.9	82.4
	4.00	1	1.9	2.0	84.3
	5.00	5	9.6	9.8	94.1
	6.00	1	1.9	2.0	96.1
	8.00	1	1.9	2.0	98.0

15.00	1	1.9	2.0	100.0
Total	51	98.1	100.0	
Missing System	1	1.9		
Total	52	100.0		

Perceived Self-Efficacy Levels. Data regarding secondary special education

teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy during transition planning and service delivery are

summarized in Table 4. The researcher measured self-efficacy using a scale where 1 =

low self-efficacy and 2 = high self-efficacy. A diminutive majority of the respondents

reported low levels of self-efficacy during transition service delivery. Fifty-two percent

of teachers reported perceptions of low self-efficacy, while 48% of teachers reported

perceived levels of self-efficacy as high (See Table 4). The survey data revealed an

overall ($M = 1.48$) for perceived levels of self-efficacy ($SD = .50$), which suggested that

most teachers reported a low to average level of self-efficacy.

Table 4

Frequency Count Analysis and Percentages of Perceived Levels of Self-efficacy

	Self-Efficacy	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative
Valid	Low Efficacy	27	51.9	51.9	51.9
	High Efficacy	25	48.1	48.1	100.0
	Total	52	100.0	100.0	

The *STTS* included 46 items delineated across six transition competencies

domains, which required participants to rank each item using a Likert-type scale. For the

purpose of the study, the four relevant domains, Transition Planning, Collaboration,

Assessment and Instructional Planning were analyzed. Using the frequency of

performance variable, the means, with the standard deviations, for each of the study's

domains ranked in descending order were (a) Transition Planning (*M*= 2.99, SD= .79),

(b) Assessment (*M*= 2.41, SD= .79), (c) Collaboration (*M*= 2.40, SD= .71), (d)

Instructional Practices (*M*= 2.39, SD= .55). Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics of

the teachers' reported perceptions of frequency of performance across the study's four

relevant domains.

Table 5

Domain Rankings by Reported Perceptions of Frequency of Performance

Ranking	Domain	*M*	*SD*
1	Transition Planning	2.99	.79
2	Assessment	2.41	.79
3	Collaboration	2.40	.71
4	Instructional Planning	2.39	.55

Analysis of Research Questions

The purpose of the research was to explore secondary special education teachers'

perceptions of transition competencies regarding frequency of implementation of

transition competencies during transition planning. Following are the analyses for the

research questions for the study examining secondary special education teachers'

perceptions of their own transition competencies. The frequency of performance was

measured by a one through four Likert scale, where 1 = never through 4 = frequently for

all domains.

RQ1. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' perceptions of their

frequency of performance within the transition planning domain and the instructional

planning domain?

A Pearson Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if a statistically significant relationship existed between perceptions of their frequency of performance within the transition planning domain and the instructional planning domain. The survey data revealed teachers' reported perceptions of their frequency of performance of transition planning competencies (M= 2.99, SD= .79) and perceptions of frequency of performance of instructional planning competencies (M= 2.39, SD= .55).   The criterion for statistical significance is $p < .05$. The Pearson r analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.38 with a two-tail significance of .03. Therefore, as a result of the Pearson r data analysis, there was evidence that a statistically significant relationship exists between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance for the transition planning domain and the instructional planning domain. This means that teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance of competencies within the transition planning domain was associated with their frequency of performance of competencies within the instructional planning domain. There was a moderate and positive extent to which teachers' perceptions of performance frequency within the transition planning domain and the instructional planning domain were connected. As a result of the Pearson r data analysis, the extent of the relationship suggested the likelihood that as teachers' perceptions of transition planning frequency of performance increased, teachers' perceptions of instructional planning frequency of performance also increased. The descriptive statistics and the Pearson r Product Moment Coefficient results for research question 1 are presented in Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for the Frequency of Performance for the Instructional Planning Domain and the Transition Planning Domain

	M	*SD*	N
Transition Planning	2.99	.79	48
Instructional Planning	2.39	.55	50

Table 7

Testing for Significance of Correlation Between the Frequency of Performance for the Instructional Planning Domain and the Transition Planning Domain

		Instructional Planning	Transition Planning
Instructional Planning	*r*	1	.38*
	p		.03
	N	50	48
Transition Planning	*r*	.38*	1
	p	.025	
	N	48	50

Note * Correlation is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

RQ2. To what extent does a relationship exist between teachers' reported perceptions of frequency of implementation for the Transition Planning Domain and the Assessment Domain?

A Pearson *r* Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between teacher perceptions of their frequency of performance within the transition planning domain and the assessment domain. The survey data revealed teachers' reported perceptions of their frequency of performance of competencies within transition planning domain (*M*= 2.99, *SD*= 0.79) and within the assessment domain (*M*= 2.38, *SD* =.71). The criterion for statistical significance is *p* <

.05. The Pearson *r* analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.67 with a two-tail

significance of .00. Therefore, as a result of the Pearson *r* analysis, there was evidence

that a statistically significant relationship exists between teachers' perceptions of their

frequency of performance within the transition planning domain and the assessment

domain. This means that teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance of

competencies within the transition planning domain was associated with their frequency

of performance of competencies within the assessment domain. There was a strong and

positive extent to which teachers' perceptions of performance frequency within the

transition planning domain and the assessment domain were connected. The extent of the

relationship suggested the likelihood that as teachers' perceptions of transition planning

frequency of performance increased, teachers' perceptions of assessment frequency of

performance also increased. The Pearson *r* Product Moment Coefficient results for

research question 2 is presented below (See Tables 8 and 9).

Table 8

*Descriptive Statistics of Means and Standard Deviations of the Frequency of
Performance for the Transition Planning Domain and Assessment Domains*

	M	*SD*	N
Transition Planning	2.99	.79	48
Assessment	2.41	.79	52

Table 9

*Testing for Significance of Correlation between Teachers' Perceptions of Frequency of
Performance within the Transition Planning Domain and the Assessment Domain*

		Transition Planning	Assessment
Transition Planning	*r*	1	.67*
	p		.00

		48	52
	N		
Assessment	r	.67*	1
	p	.00	
	N	52	48

Note* Correlation is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

RQ. 3 What is the extent of the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their

frequency of performance within the transition planning domain and the collaboration

domain?

A Pearson *r* Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was a

significant relationship between teacher perceptions of their frequency of performance

within the transition planning domain and the collaboration domain. The survey data

revealed teachers' reported perceptions of their frequency of performance of

competencies within the transition planning domain (*M*= 2.99, *SD*= .79) and within the

collaboration domain (*M*= 2.40, *SD*= 0.71). The criterion for statistical significance is *p*

< .05. The Pearson *r* analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of 0.36 with a two-tail

significance of .01. Therefore, as a result of the Pearson *r* analysis, there was evidence

that a statistically significant relationship exists between teachers' perceptions of their

frequency of performance within the transition planning domain and the collaboration

domain. This means that teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance of

competencies within the transition planning domain were associated with teachers'

perceptions of frequency of performance of competencies within the collaboration

domain. There was a moderate, positive extent to which teachers' perceptions of

performance frequency within the transition planning domain and the collaboration

domain were associated. The extent of the relationship suggested the likelihood that as

teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the transition planning domain

increased, teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the collaboration

domain also increased. The descriptive statistics and the Pearson *r* Product Moment

Coefficient results for research question 3 are presented in Tables 10 and 11.

Table 10

Descriptive Statistics of the Means and Standard Deviations of Perceptions of Frequency of Performance within the Transition Planning Domain and the Collaboration Domain

	M	*SD*	N
Transition Planning	2.99	.79	48
Collaboration	2.40	.71	51

Table 11

Testing of Significance between Teachers' Reported perceptions of the Transition Planning Domain and Perceptions of the Collaboration Domain

		Transition Planning	Collaboration
Transition Planning	*r*	1	.36*
	p		.01
	N	51	48
Collaboration	*r*	.36*	1
	p	.01	
	N	48	51

Note *Correlation is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

RQ4. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of

performance within the *Collaboration domain and the number of staff development*

sessions completed?

A Pearson *r* Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if a significant

relationship existed between teacher perceptions of their frequency of performance within

the collaboration domain and number of staff development sessions completed. The

survey data revealed teachers' reported perceptions of their frequency of performance of

competencies within the collaboration domain (*M*= 2.40, *SD*= .71) and the number staff

development sessions completed (*M*= 2.08, *SD*= 2.61). The criterion for statistical

significance is *p* < .05. The Pearson *r* data analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of

.13 with a two-tail significance of 0.38. As a result of the Pearson *r* analysis, a

relationship of statistical significance does not exist between teachers' perceptions of

their frequency of performance within the collaboration domain and the number of staff

development sessions completed. This means that teachers' perceptions of their

frequency of performance within the collaboration domain were not associated with the

number of staff development sessions completed. There was a weak, but positive extent

to which the number of staff development sessions and teachers' perceptions of their

frequency of performance within the collaboration domain were associated. The

descriptive statistics and the Pearson *r* Product Moment Coefficient results for the

research question 4 are presented in Tables 12 and 13.

Table 12

Descriptive Statistics of Means and Standard Deviations of Teacher Perceptions of Frequency of Performance within the Collaboration Domain and Number of Staff Development Sessions Completed

	M	*SD*	N
Collaboration	2.40	.71	51
Staff Development Sessions	2.08	2.61	51

Table 13

Testing for Significance of Correlation Between Teachers' Reported Perceptions of their Frequency of Performance within the Collaboration Domain and Number of Staff Development Sessions Completed

		Collaboration	Staff Development Sessions
Collaboration	r	1	.13
	p		.38
	N	51	51
Staff Development Sessions	r	.13	1
	p	.38	
	N	51	51

RQ5. What is the relationship between teacher perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the number of staff development sessions completed?

A Pearson *r* Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of transition planning and number of staff development sessions completed. The survey data revealed teachers' reported perceptions of their frequency of performance of competencies within the transition planning domain (*M*= 2.99, *SD*=.79) and the number of staff development sessions completed (*M*= 2.10, *SD*= 2.61). The criterion for statistical significance is $p < .05$. The Pearson *r* analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .29, with a two-tail significance of 0.05. Therefore, as a result of the Pearson *r* analysis, a statistically significant relationship does exist between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the transition planning domain and the number of staff development sessions completed. This means that the number of staff development sessions completed were associated

with teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance of competencies within the

transition planning domain. This also means that the number of staff development

sessions had negligible connection to teachers' perceptions of transition planning

competencies. There was a very weak, but positive extent to which the number of staff

development sessions completed were associated with teachers' perceptions of transition

planning. The descriptive statistics and the Pearson *r* Product Moment Coefficient results

for the research question 5 are presented in Table 14 and Table 15.

Table 14

Descriptive Statistics of the Mean and Standard Deviation Perceptions of Frequency of Performance within the Transition Planning Domain and the Number of Staff Development Sessions Completed

	M	*SD*	N
Transition Planning	2.99	.79	48
Staff Dev. Sessions	2.08	2.61	51

Table 15

Testing for Significance of the Correlation Between Teachers' Reported Perceptions of Their Frequency of Performance within the Transition Planning Domain and Number of Staff Development Sessions Completed

		Transition Planning	Staff Development Sessions
Transition Planning	*r*	1	.29
	p		.05
	N	51	48
Staff Development Sessions	*r*	.29	1
	p	.05	
	N	48	51

Note * Correlation is significant at the $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

RQ6. What is the relationship between teachers' perceptions of transition planning and years of teaching experience?

A Pearson *r* Product Moment Coefficient was used to determine if there was a significant relationship between teacher perceptions of the transition planning domain and years of experience. The survey data revealed teachers' reported perceptions of teachers' frequency of performance of competencies within the transition planning domain (*M*= 2.99, *SD*= .79) and years of teaching experience (*M*=11.5, *SD* =7.33). The criterion for statistical significance is p < .05. The Pearson *r* analysis yielded a correlation coefficient of .03 with a two-tail significance of 0.86. Therefore, as a result of the Pearson *r* analysis, there is no statistically significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within the transition planning domain and years of teaching experience. This means that the number of years of teaching experience was not associated with teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance of transition planning competencies. This also means that regardless of the number of years of teaching experience, there was minimal or no connection with teachers' perceptions of transition planning competencies. There was a weak, positive extent to which teachers' perceptions of performance frequency within the transition planning domain and number of years of teaching experience. The descriptive statistics and the Pearson *r* Product Moment Coefficient results for research question 6 are presented in Table 16 and 17.

Table 16
Descriptive Statistics of the Means and Standard Deviation of the Frequency of Performance within the Transition Planning Domain and the Number of Years of Teaching Experience

	M	*SD*	N
Transition Planning	2.99	.79	48

Years Teaching	11.51	7.33	52

Table 17

Testing for Significance of Correlation Between Teachers' Reported Perceptions of Their Frequency of Performance within the Transition Planning Domain and Number of Years of Teaching Experience

		Transition Planning	Years Teaching
Transition Planning	r	1	.03
	p		.86
	N	48	52
Years Teaching	r	.03	1
	p	.86	
	N	48	52

RQ7. *To what extent does difference exist between teachers reported levels of self-efficacy and perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition Planning Domain?*

An independent samples *t*-test was used to compare means and determine whether no statistically significant difference existed between teachers' level of Self-Efficacy and their perceptions of frequency of performance of competencies within the Transition Planning domain. The teachers with low self-efficacy (*M*= 2.67, *SD*=.79), while the teachers with high self-efficacy (*M*= 3.28, *SD* =.69). At the level of significance (alpha value of 0.05), the independent samples *t*-test yielded an "equal variance assumed" *t*(46) = -2.73, *p* = 0.01. Since the two-tailed significance of 0.01 was less than the alpha value of 0.05, the data analysis revealed that a statistically significant difference exists. Therefore, there is a statistically significant difference between teachers' levels of self-efficacy and their perceptions of their frequency of performance within the Transition

Planning domain. This means that the group of secondary special education teachers who

perceived having high self-efficacy had a higher frequency of performance of

competencies within the transition domain as compared to the group of teachers who

perceived a low level of self-efficacy. Presented in Table 18 are the group statistics of

the means and standard deviations of the secondary teachers who reported low self-

efficacy and those secondary teachers who reported perceiving a high level of self-

efficacy. The independent samples *t*-test results for the research are presented in

Appendix G.

Table 18

Descriptive Group Statistics of Frequency of Performance within the Transition Planning
Domain and Self-efficacy Data

	Self-Efficacy Level	N	*M*	*SD*	*Std. Error Mean*
Frequency	Low Self-Efficacy	24	2.70	.79	.16
	High Self-Efficacy	24	3.28	.69	.14

Respondents Comments

One adaptation to the *STTS* was the addition of an open-response question. The

question was added to allow respondents the opportunity to provide personal insight

regarding transition perceptions. By adding this question, the researcher sought to gain

further awareness regarding perceptions of strengths and challenges during service

delivery.

The open-response item solicited respondents to reflect and share transition

competencies. They were asked to note specific skills or activities that they perceived

themselves as doing well when facilitating transition. In addition, respondents were also

asked to report transition skills and activities in which they perceived needing the most

support during transition service delivery. The respondents conveyed that they perceived

doing well in motivating students to locate employment, facilitating IEP meetings, collaborating with families regarding diploma choices and supporting students in taking district and state tests. The respondents also conveyed the need for vocational training opportunities that allow students to gain marketable skills, connecting with the community to build partnerships for postsecondary education and employment options for students with disabilities, ongoing training for parents, students and teacher pertaining to availability and access to community resources.

Summary

The results of the data analysis provided a discerning view of secondary special education teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance or utilization of transition competencies, during special education service delivery. The results of the data indicated higher frequency of performance of competencies within the transition planning domain was significantly and positively associated with higher frequency of performance of competencies in the Collaboration, Assessment, Instructional Planning and Transition Planning domains. Meaningful inferences regarding the existence of differences between teachers' perceptions of their levels of self-efficacy and their frequency of performance of transition competencies during postsecondary planning with students with disabilities, their families and community resources were also apparent.

To determine significance, the 0.05 level was carefully selected as the criterion for determining statistical significance. Testing of correlational significance revealed a moderate, positive correlation and a relationship of statistical significance between teachers' perceptions of frequency of performance within Transition Planning and the Instructional Planning domain. As well, there was a moderate, positive correlation of

coefficients that indicated a relationship of statistical significance between teachers'

perceptions of frequency of performance of competencies within the Transition Planning

and Collaboration domains. The data revealed a weak, positive correlation of coefficients

and a statistically significant relationship between teachers' perceptions of their

frequency of performance within the Transition Planning domain and the number of staff

development courses completed. On the contrary, a weak, positive correlation, not of

statistical significance, was revealed between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of

performance of skills within the Collaboration domain and the number of staff

development sessions completed. The analysis of the data also revealed a weak, positive

correlation between perceptions of frequency of performance of competencies within the

Transition Planning domain and years of teaching experience. The independent samples

t- test revealed a significant difference exists among the teachers who reported

perceptions of high self-efficacy and teachers who reported perceptions of low self-

efficacy and their frequency of performance of competencies within the Transition

Planning domain. Teachers who perceive having high self-efficacy also reported greater

performance frequency of transition competencies within the Transition Planning

domain. In response to the open-ended question regarding transition strengths, teachers

perceived being knowledgeable and skillful in working with students to prepare for test

taking, developing IEPs that align with district standards, aiding in employment searches,

and when collaborating with families regarding diploma-type decision making. The

open-ended question also revealed that teachers perceive transition challenges to include

being uninformed of transition services and post school options, increasing community

participation to foster collaboration towards establishing partnerships, creating

opportunities for students with disabilities to be involved in authentic work experiences

and ongoing training for parents, students and teachers regarding community resources

and requirements to access those resources.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will provide an overview of the entire study, including a summary, conclusions, a discussion and a recommendations section. Specifically, the summary section will contain broad information from previous chapters. Also, included in this chapter are the conclusions derived from the analysis of the results presented earlier. Further, the researcher will expound upon the results of the study within the discussion section. Lastly, the researcher will reveal recommendations for practice and further study.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to gain insight into secondary special education teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance of competencies during transition planning and services. *IDEA* (2004) stipulates that students with disabilities receive special education services from highly qualified teachers who possess competencies for planning and delivering specialized instruction. Secondary special educators who frequently execute transition competencies are more apt to effectively support students during transition planning and service delivery. Despite national and state accountability measures, secondary special education teachers remain inexpert and unacquainted with transition competencies necessary to apprise students of advantageous information and resources towards postsecondary success. While no specific student outcomes of the study's participants were explored, the local, state and national data is alarming. Students with disabilities' preparation to participate in an internationally competitive society depend on the proficiency and frequency of performance of transition competencies of

their teachers. Secondary, special education teachers' perceptions of their frequency of performance factor into the consistency and quality of the provision of special education transition services. Despite attempts to support teacher efficiency, the complexity of the role of special educator contributes to the presence of low teacher efficacy and systematic teacher dysfunction.

A thorough review of the literature revealed that transition competencies were documented in Baker and Geiger's (1988) seminal study of aptitudes and skills that were necessary to serve as a vocational specialist. Subsequent studies contributed to the recognition of transition competencies categories and domains (Exceptional Children, 2009; DeFur & Taymans, 1995). Several other studies have also sought to investigate teachers' perceptions of transition competencies. Blanchett (2001), Knott and Asselin (1999), and Morningstar, Benitez and Frey (2009) surveyed teachers to examine their perceptions of transition competencies importance, knowledge and involvement, and preparation and satisfaction with training. For years now, transition planning continues to be a nascent area of focus within special education. Still, teachers have reported a lack transition knowledge, feelings of being somewhat prepared to facilitate transition planning and a failure to see all transition competencies as equally important (Blanchett, 2001; Knott & Asselin, 1999; Morningstar, Benitez & Frey, 2009). The current study sought to expand the literature and investigated the relationships among frequency of performance of transition competencies across four transition domains.

This descriptive study used quantitative methods and purposeful sampling to examine secondary special education teachers' reported perceptions of their frequency of performance of transition competencies during transition service delivery. This study

utilized an adaptation of the Secondary Teachers Transition Survey, originally developed

by Morningstar, Benitez and Frey (2005) to solicit secondary special education teachers'

perceptions frequency of performance of transition competencies. The researcher

employed frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, Pearson Product Moment

Correlations, and an independent samples t-test to answer the study's research questions

regarding teachers' frequency of performance of competencies.

Secondary special education teachers' perceptions of their transition competencies

revealed underlying beliefs that influenced the provision of transition service planning

and delivery. Of the 80 secondary special education teachers invited to participate in the

study, 52 completed and returned the survey resulting in a 65% response rate. The

Secondary Teachers Transition Survey was distributed toward the end of the school year

when teachers were most likely to be reflective of their service delivery over the current

school year. Additionally, numerous tasks associated with record keeping and

compliance may have contributed in some teachers' reluctance to participate. Other

factors considered when analyzing the response rate were the number of personnel

changes. All special education lead teachers were asked to reapply for their teaching

positions and seven of thirteen high school principals were released from their positions.

Moreover, teachers may have experienced survey fatigue as an insurgence of survey

completion requests, from various sources, were extended at that time.

Of the seven research questions that guided this study, the analysis of the data

revealed four statistically significant associations. The significant correlations discovered

during the data analysis were between teachers' perceptions of their frequency of

performance of competencies within the Transition Planning and Instructional Planning

domains; Transition Planning and Assessment domains; Transition Planning and Collaboration domains; and between Transition Planning domain and the number of staff development sessions completed. As well, the data analysis revealed a statistically significant difference exists among teachers according to their levels of self-efficacy and their frequency of performance. The data analysis revealed that no statistically significant relationships existed between reported perceptions of competencies within the Collaboration domain and the number of staff development hours, nor between perceptions of the frequency of performance of competencies within the Transition Planning Domain and the number of years teaching.

Conclusions

A study of secondary special educators' frequency of performance of transition competencies yielded the following findings:

1. More than 50% of teachers reported having participated in one or fewer staff development sessions on transition, while 46% of secondary special education teachers reported they had taken a college level course in transition.

2. Forty-eight percent of teachers reported perceptions of low self-efficacy. There is a statistically significant difference in frequency of performance of transition competencies between teachers who perceive a high self-efficacy compared to teachers who reported perceiving a low self-efficacy.

3. Special education teachers' inconsistent and infrequent execution of competencies within the Transition Planning domain were significantly associated with the low number staff development sessions completed.

From these findings the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Insufficient opportunities for transition staff development offerings remain and contribute to perceptions of low self-efficacy by almost half of the secondary special education teachers.

2. Special education administrators' negligible attention to transition training and evaluation impacts secondary teachers' performance frequency of transition competencies during the provision of transition service delivery for students with disabilities.

3. Secondary, special education teachers remain inexpert in utilizing the transition knowledge, dispositions and skills to provide an appropriate education to young adults with disabilities preparing to leave high school and enter postsecondary educational, employment, independent living and leisure settings. This finding may contribute to the widening achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities.

Discussion

National policies regarding the education of students with disabilities guide the provision of special education services towards providing a free, appropriate public education. Special education teacher leaders, administrators, and stakeholders possess the influence to ensure that teachers are routinely implementing best practices in preparing students with disabilities to enter postsecondary, young adulthood. Yet, secondary special education teachers have reported infrequently performing transition related competencies for high school students. Though the researcher has no outcome data on the students who were served by the teachers who participated in this study, it is worthwhile to consider a connection with the bleak outcomes of students with

disabilities, particularly since the state has never met its postsecondary accountability

targets.

Special education teachers serve students with disabilities in many capacities.

Accordingly, it is of paramount importance that educational leaders and administrators,

principals, coordinators, department leads and other community stakeholders provide

essential supports for teachers to fully perform their job duties and responsibilities.

Educational leadership standards and special education teacher preparation standards

provide benchmarks for school personnel to support teachers and maintain quality

programs and services. The Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC)

standards characterize expectations of today's strong instructional leadership parameters.

The Council for Exceptional Children (2012) also provides a framework of special

education teacher standards that are useful in scaffolding the provision of services.

Special education administrators and school principals may find it beneficial to model the

ISLLC standards to sustain continuously improving educational programs. Each of the

ISLLC standards may serve as a reference to endow special education teacher leaders and

administrators in providing quality transition services as a component of the student's

individualized education program. The ISLLC standards, which serve as an evaluative

measure for educational leadership, will guide the discussion section of the study.

Teachers occasionally performing transition planning competencies were

statistically significantly associated with teachers rarely performing competencies in the

instructional planning domain. The findings indicate that teachers' performance of

transition planning competencies is moderately indicative of teachers' performance

frequency of instructional planning competencies when supporting students with

disabilities. ISLLC standard one focuses on a shared vision of learning and provides

guidance in maintaining transition service quality. Special education teachers, in

cooperation with general education teachers, counselors, parents, community agencies

and potential employers may achieve the shared vision through synchronized execution

of transition planning and instructional planning competencies that enables the

educational experiences to extend beyond the school building. Secondary special

education teachers skilled in differentiating instruction and modifying work environments

to support students with disabilities, use competencies to involve students in working

toward the shared vision for learning. Special education teachers' intentional use of

transition planning knowledge and dispositions during instructional planning is ideal for

creating teachable moments where students can practice and learn necessary skills that

are essential when entering postsecondary educational, employment and social settings,

including self-disclosure and self-regulation techniques (Billingsley, Fall & Williams,

2006; Lindstrom & Benz, 2002; McWhorter, 2007; Weymeyer, 2003). Special education

teachers' frequent performance of transition planning and instructional planning

competencies are instrumental in supporting students in demonstrating mastery on

assessments and IEP goals that are aligned with curriculum standards, as a facet of the

shared vision for learning and student success.

Teachers occasionally performing transition planning competencies were

statistically significantly associated with teachers' rarely performing assessment

competencies. The findings indicate a very strong association between teachers'

performance frequency of transition planning competencies and performance frequency

of assessment competencies. ISLLC standard three proposes efficient and effective

learning is a key to a strong instructional program. Secondary special education teachers

and leaders increase efficiency as utilization of transition assessments allow for data

informed, decision-making during instructional planning. A fundamental element of

special education services is the provision of specialized, individualized instruction.

Transition assessments are useful in revealing information regarding a student's deficits,

needs, interests, and preferences. Habitually administering assessments with an emphasis

on transition enhances the educational experiences of students with disabilities (Mazzotti

et al., 2009). Transition assessment results provide meaningful decision-making evidence

that informs the transition planning process. Secondary special education teachers'

interpretations of transition assessments to guide transition planning, result in student-

centered instructional activities, which leads to appropriate transition service delivery for

students with disabilities. Effective instructional programs include special education

teachers who proficiently rely on multiple probes to develop transition plans based on a

universal view of the student. Special education teachers who use assessments during

transition planning are more likely to better expose students to significant school and

community experiences. Without transition assessments, secondary special education

teachers limit the scope of personalized transition planning, instruction and services for

students. Special education teachers' frequent performance of competencies within the

assessment and transition planning domains contribute to effective and efficient

educational programming and academic experiences for young adults with disabilities.

Teachers occasionally performing transition planning competencies were

statistically significantly associated with rarely performing collaboration competencies.

The findings reveal that teachers performance frequency of transition planning

competencies is moderately associated their performance frequency of collaboration

competencies. Special secondary education teachers who are exposed to ongoing

professional development sessions possess skills to intertwine competencies to enhance

academic experiences of students with disabilities. ISLLC standard four provides insight

into promoting student achievement through school and community collaboration efforts.

Failure to collaborate to provide postsecondary links to students with disabilities and their

families, leave students and unapprised of services, resources and opportunities available

to them (Li et al., 2009). Special education leaders and educators' attention to

cooperative partnerships among school, home and community personnel make students'

access to community resources, services and opportunities attainable (Davies & Beamish,

2009). Special education teachers who use transition competencies to collaborate with an

extended IEP team, develop partnerships that broaden the capacity of postsecondary

supports that are available to students and their families, increasing the possibilities of

success beyond high school. As such, schools provide a more comprehensive educational

program, increasing students' achievement and decreasing academic disengagement

(Carter et al., 2009, Dresner & Worley, 2006). Secondary special education teachers use

transition competencies for collaboratively planning to connect students with resources

that can support them as they transition from high school into young adulthood. Special

education teachers who frequently perform transition planning and collaboration

competencies contribute to a school culture where scaffolds of support are available to

address the diverse needs of students with disabilities via partnerships with responsive

community resources.

Teachers' minimal participation in transition related staff development sessions was not statistically significantly associated with teachers rarely performing collaboration competencies. The findings reveal that teachers' performance frequency of collaboration competencies is not related to the number of staff development sessions completed. Though the data analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship exists, it is noteworthy to discuss the importance of this result. Secondary special education teachers' marginal involvement in transition staff development and rare collaboration with families, local and state agencies undermine the instructional programming for students with disabilities. Research indicates that teachers who participate in professional development hold higher expectations for students and entrench real life experiences into the classroom (Knott & Asselin, 1999; Silverstein, Dubner, Miller, Glied & Lioke, 2009). The study's school district has an annual operating budget of approximately $850 million. With a budget of this magnitude, it is unconscionable that an alarming number of teachers reported little participation in transition professional development course offerings. ISLLC standards two and four highlight relevant principles for safeguarding student achievement through professional growth and community resources. Special education policy makers and administrators routine scheduling of transition staff development sessions with embedded networking opportunities promotes an educational forum for teachers to frequently collaborate with community resources to aid students in preparing to exit high school.

Teachers' minimal participation in transition related professional development sessions was statistically significantly associated with occasionally performing transition planning competencies. The findings reveal that teachers' performance frequency of

transition planning competencies was marginally related to the number of staff

development sessions completed. ISLLC standard two underscores an instructional

program that advocates growth through staff development. Teacher leaders and special

education administrators are responsible for ensuring that continuous, introspective

transition staff development sessions occur. Staff development opportunities inspire

collaboration and planning that sustains a culture of teaching efficacy and student

learning. It is of utmost importance that secondary special education teachers participate

in transition competencies staff development while frequently utilizing transition

planning competencies to prepare students for movement from high school into

postsecondary settings. Secondary special education teachers' regular participation in

staff development sessions in association with frequent performance of transition

planning competencies cultivates a culture that is conducive to student learning and

postsecondary success.

Teachers occasionally performing transition competencies was not statistically

significantly associated with the number of years of teaching experience. The findings

reveal that teachers' performance frequency of transition planning competencies is not

related to the number of number of years of teaching experience. It is important to

scrutinize that no statistically significant relationship existed between transition planning

competencies and the number of years of teaching experience. A reasonable expectation

is to anticipate that higher years of experience would result in greater acuity in supporting

students with disabilities. ISLLC standard five asserts that students' success is reliant

upon educational leadership based on integrity and fairness. As educators are expected to

suitably serve students with disabilities towards achieving postsecondary educational,

employment, independent housing and leisure interests, special education administrators, with integrity and fairness, must allocate sufficient resources for secondary special education teachers' transition competencies acquisition, implementation and appraisal in the areas of collaboration, instructional planning, assessment and transition planning. Special education administrators who lead with integrity ensure that novice and experienced teachers are continually improving the provision of transition services, to provide an equitable and fair transition process for every student to receive an appropriate, public education.

Teachers who perceive high levels of self-efficacy reported higher rates of frequency of performance of transition competencies as compared to teachers who perceive a low level of self-efficacy. ISLLC standards five and six offer some direction to address the social context importance of self-efficacy and performance of transition planning competencies. Standard five asserts that teacher leaders act in fairness toward teachers and students. Special education leaders have a duty to implement resources to build teacher efficacy. Teachers who facilitate transition planning and service delivery with low self-efficacy may potentially jeopardize the educational programming of the students they serve through impartial service delivery (Jin, Roberts, & Stodden, 2012). Additionally, standard six suggests that administrators and teacher leaders counter views of low self-efficacy by being responsive to the social needs of teachers and providing the supports to empower teachers to increase student achievement. Likewise, special education teacher leaders must ensure that teachers who perceive a high level of self-efficacy are actually implementing strategies and skills to support students' exit from high school. Special education leadership's continuous attention to the provision of

transition services, with repeated assessments of teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy and competencies use, may result in unanimous reports of high self-efficacy, which may enhance transition service delivery and contribute to an improvement in the outcomes of the students with disabilities.

Quality transition service delivery is unlikely to commonly occur when most teachers reported nominal participation in staff development sessions focused on transition. The teachers conveyed rarely using transition assessments, rarely collaborating with an expanded IEP team, rarely performing instructional planning with transition activities included, and only occasionally performing transition planning competencies. School leaders, special education administrators, and secondary special education teachers share accountability for implementing instructional programming that leads to postsecondary achievement for students with disabilities. Presently, countless students with disabilities face ample complications in preparing for adulthood. Compounding those difficulties are uninformed special education teachers who further hinder students' potential progress during and after high school. Low expectations, void community partnerships and limited career and training opportunities result in unfulfilled, discouraged young people and an encumbered society.

Not one child can afford being subjected to unenlightened teachers. Every student deserves teachers who are competent in delivering instructional programming that fosters their success. Every IEP meeting should contain indications of special education leadership that encourages transition planning competencies, promotes collaboration with community partners, and ensures instructional planning guided by transition assessment results. Over time, as the provision of transition services and frequency of performance

improves, it is anticipated that every teacher will consistently report high rates of

frequency of performance across the Transition Planning, Instructional Planning,

Collaboration and Assessment domains, which may contribute to high teacher-efficacy,

competencies implementation and improved outcomes of students with disabilities.

Recommendations for Practice

The researcher recommends the following practices begin immediately within the

study's school district:

1. Develop a SharePoint site that links teachers to the districts' transition

   framework and offers a variety of transition resources such as assessments,

    innovations in transition research, community agencies and contacts to guide

    the transition training and decision-making efforts.

2. Implement transition competencies professional development on a bi-annual

   basis to promote self-efficacy and frequent performance of transition

   competencies.

3. Initiate an intensive one week Transition Competencies Institute to disseminate

   transition research, identify district needs, cultivate partnerships, and

understand

   social services and training requirements.

4. Develop and administer an evaluative tool that allows the district to assess

   transition competencies preparedness and frequency of implementation.

   Additionally, school leaders may consider including transition plans (in teacher

    portfolios) as a component of the Teacher Keys Evaluation System.

5. Designate a Transition Coordinator to support teachers, student, families and

schools in providing quality transition planning and service delivery.

Recommendations for Further Study

Researchers seeking to further examine the topic of transition competencies should consider the following recommendations:

1. A comparison study of a northern Georgia school district and a southern Georgia school district transition competencies frequency of performance across transition domains.

2. Inquiry into professional development budgets and transition course offerings for special education teachers may be worthwhile. Greater insight into perceptions of content offerings may be gained via a survey of special education administrators.

3. This study did not investigate causal factors of reported perceptions of transition competencies. It may be beneficial to include a method to see causal data regarding detailed transition experiences through the use of qualitative techniques.

4. For researchers wishing to replicate this study, it is recommended to administer the survey to teachers at the beginning of the school year to allow for timely feedback and planning for continuous improvement.

5. A study to determine whether there is a relationship between teachers' perceptions of frequency of implementation and student outcomes.

Dissemination

This dissertation will be electronically published in Georgia Southern University's Electronic Dissertation and Thesis database. The researcher will provide

copies of the study to the Research and Evaluation Department of the participating

district, as well as to special education coordinator of each of the participating schools.

Also, the researcher will present this study's findings at various conferences including the

Georgia Educational Research Association (GERA), the Council for Exceptional

Children (CEC) and the National Youth at Risk Conference (NYAR).   This study will

also be distributed to state special education administrators and to a variety of teacher

preparation programs upon request.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

Secondary Teachers' Transition Survey

Secondary Teachers Transition Survey

This survey is being administered to gain valuable information about the way teachers feel about how they plan and deliver transition services to students with disabilities. This survey is intended to evaluate YOUR perceptions of your transition training competencies and transition training, not to evaluate your instructional capabilities as a teacher. It is for our research purposes only, and will be kept completely confidential. Thank you for your cooperation and the valuable information you provide by completing and returning this survey.

Please complete the following demographic information.

1. How many total years have you been teaching? _____

2. How many college-level transition courses have you taken? _____

3. How many transition staff development sessions have you completed? _____

4. Check your perceived level of self-efficacy during transition planning and service delivery.

High Self-Efficacy	Low Self-Efficacy

The column on the left represents transition activities statements. Please complete the three columns on the right by circling-

(1) How **prepared** you are to perform the activity   Unprepared **1 2 3 4** Prepared

(2) How **satisfied** you are with your training: Unsatisfied **1 2 3 4** Satisfied

(3) How **frequently** you perform the transition   Never **1 2 3 4** Frequently
    activity in your daily professional routine:

Instructional Planning	Thinking of your transition training, how prepared do you feel to perform this practice?				How satisfied are you with this training?				How often do you perform this practice?			
	UnPrep			Prep	UnSatis			Satis	Never			Freq
1. Know about and use different models of transition programs and practices	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
2. Modify work and community environments to accommodate youth with disabilities	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
3. Identify post-school services and programs for students with disabilities	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
4. Develop transition programs based on outcomes	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
5. Identify potential job sites	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
6. Know how to support students in taking state & district assessments	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
7. Know about and apply different models of secondary school reform to your school	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
8. Select appropriate vocational education programs for students	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

Curriculum and Instruction	UnPrep			Prep	UnSatis			Satis	Never			Freq
9. Adapt or alter the general curriculum for students with disabilities	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
10. Provide accommodations & modifications to instructional activities for students	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
11. Teach self-advocacy and self-determination skills	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
12. Use a variety of behavior management strategies	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
	Thinking of your				How satisfied are you				How often do you			

3

		transition training, how **prepared** do you feel to perform this practice?			with this training?			perform this practice?		
		UnPrep		Prep	UnSatis		Satis	Never		Freq
13	Provide community-based instruction	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
14	Teach career awareness skills	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
15	Teach daily living skills	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
16	Teach vocational and work-related skills	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
17	Teach job skills identified by employers as critical for successful employment	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
18	Use instructional and assistive technology in academic, work and community environments	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4

	Transition Planning	UnPrep		Prep	UnSatis		Satis	Never		Freq
19	Know about IDEA requirements for developing transition IEPs	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
20	Coordinate IEP meetings with all transition-related team members	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
21	Involve students, parents, and families in IEP and transition planning meetings	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
22	Develop transition outcomes using interests and preferences of the student	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
23	Develop transition goals and objectives for the IEP	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
24	Develop IEPs that align with state and local academic standards	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
25	Include instructional and assistive technology into the IEP	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4

	Assessment	UnPrep		Prep	UnSatis		Satis	Never		Freq
26	Apply results of student assessments to transition plans	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
27	Use a variety of formal and informal career and transition assessment methods	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
28	Match job skills and interests with jobs or vocational programs	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
29	Interpret results of transition assessments for students, families, and other professionals	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
30	Develop accommodations and modifications for state and district testing	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4	1 2 3		4
		Thinking of your			How **satisfied** are you			How **often** do you		

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	transition training, how prepared do you feel to perform this practice?				with this training?				perform this practice?			
	UnPrep			Prep	UnSatis			Satis	Never			Freq
31 Conduct assistive technology assessments	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Collaboration	UnPrep			Prep	UnSatis			Satis	Never			Freq
32 Provide case management during transition by coordinating with others (e.g., students, parents, educators, service providers, employers)	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
33 Collaborate with families in transition goal setting	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
34 Work with outside agencies to identify and provide community services	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
35 Develop and provide transition-related resources and materials to others (e.g., students, parents, educators, service providers, employers)	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
36 Plan with team members for transition that encourages full participation in the community	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
37 Provide information to families about transition services and post-school options	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
38 Know about methods to increase transition services through interagency agreements and planning	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
39 Participate in community-level strategic planning for transition services	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
40 Use transition planning strategies that facilitate input from team members	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
Additional Competencies	UnPrep			Prep	UnSatis			Satis	Never			Freq
41 Understand different family beliefs, values, and practices	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
42 Promote cultural responsiveness in transition planning	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
43 Encourage parent participation in order to foster transition outcomes that support families' cultures	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
44 Refer to transition outcomes research as a resource	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
45 Know how to use transition follow-up studies	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4
46 Evaluate the quality of transition services for students and make changes as needed	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4

5

47. In your own words, what comes to mind about transition planning and service delivery in regards to

a) Competence or skill you perform well

_____

b) What additional training and support is needed

_____

APPENDIX B

Permission to Use Survey

Yes it is fine to use our survey for your research study, just cite as is. Do you need a copy? MM

From: Tonisha Johnson
To: Mary Morningstar
Subject: Special Request

Good Day Dr. Morningstar,

My name is Tonisha Johnson. I attend Georgia Southern University in the Doctor of Education program. My interests include studying the impact of the daily living skills diploma on life outcomes of students with disabilities and improving teacher efficacy in transition planning. During my research, I noticed that my interests seem to be comparable to yours. In addition, I found within The Multistate Survey of Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Their Transition Competencies that you, Dr. Frey and Dr. Benitez developed an outstanding instrument to gauge teacher perceptions of their transition competencies. I am preparing to submit my preprospectus of my proposed study, Social Implications of Transition Planning: Perspectives of Georgia's Special Education Teachers. Thus, the purpose of this email is to ask for permission/ access to use the Secondary Teachers Transition Survey to conduct research within the state of Georgia. Thank you for your time and consideration and I eagerly anticipate hearing from you.

Thank you and remember to make it a GREAT day!
Tonisha L. Johnson, Ed. S.

APPENDIX C

Inquiry to Survey Author

Good Day Dr. Morningstar!

I hope this email reaching you doing well! I am writing to ask a few follow- up questions pertaining to the Secondary Teacher Transition Survey. First, am I accurate in that the survey requires three judgments for each item? Secondly, if this is correct, are there any potential problems to consider-- how this may impact response rates. As well, would you have any suggestions or tips that may make the likelihood of participation/ response greater. Thank you so much for your time and attention in this matter!

Sincerely,
Tonisha Johnson

Dr. M.

To: Tonisha Johnson

Yes it is 3 responses per item. If you wanted to shorten the survey to just 1 or 2 of the 3 responses you could do that, that might increase response rates. MM

APPENDIX D

Descriptive Statistics for Domains

Descriptive Statistics of the Means and Standard Deviations for the Preparedness, Frequency and Satisfaction Constructs for Instructional Planning, Assessment, Transition Planning and Collaboration Domains

Table 13

	N	*M*	*SD*
IP Preparedness	51	2.1618	.75303
IP Frequency	50	2.3925	.55040
IP Satisfaction	49	1.7628	.71181
TP Preparedness	49	2.9796	.79486
TP Satisfaction	46	2.5714	.90851
TP Frequency	48	2.9881	.78900
AS Preparedness	52	2.3718	.89820
AS Satisfaction	51	1.9935	.96204
AS Frequency	52	2.4135	.79383
CO Preparedness	51	2.3224	.75072
CO Satisfaction	50	1.9156	.76473
CO Frequency	51	2.3987	.70874

APPENDIX E

District IRB Approval

Office of Research & Evaluation for School Improvement

130 Trinity Ave., SW, 6th Floor | Atlanta, Georgia 30303 | P: 404.802.2672 | F: 404.802.1601

March 4, 2014

Ms. Tonisha Johnson
6967 Bonnes Blvd.
Austell, GA 30168
tljohnson@atlanta.k12.ga.us

Dr. Rubye Sullivan
Director of Research and Evaluation for School Improvement
130 Trinity Ave
Atlanta, Georgia 30303

Dear Ms. Johnson:

Your request to conduct research within the Atlanta Public Schools (APS) was reviewed by the Research Screening Committee in accordance with its guidelines. Your research proposal entitled "21ST Century Provision of Services: Secondary Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Transition Competencies" has been approved by the committee.

The purpose of this study is to add to the body of empirical research to inform the practice of special education provision of services regarding transition competencies in teacher preparation programs and professional development course offerings to improve the quality of life outcomes for students with disabilities as they transition into postsecondary educational, competitive employment, independent living and preferred social setting as young adults. Among the faculty and staff, only special education teachers serving as case managers for students with higher incidence disabilities will be invited to participate and complete the Secondary Teachers Transition Survey (STTS). This study will be conducted in all of the high schools in the Atlanta Public Schools.

Although there are no required modifications to the activities described in your proposal, the committee does recommend that special attention be given to the following points:

1. **The principal of the proposed school must give approval for you to conduct the planned research study. This letter of permission does not in any way assure approval from the principal. Neither does this letter of permission grant you access to data not available to the general public.**

2. The activities of this study must not interrupt instructional time.

3. Your assurance of maintaining confidentiality of the participants must be strictly followed. Pseudonyms for individuals and the schools, as well as references to APS as "a large urban school system," are required in the title and text of your study before publication or presentation.

4. If you make changes in the implementation of your study or, particularly, revise the instruments used, please notify the Department of Research and Evaluation prior to the beginning of your study.

5. A completed copy of the final research study must be submitted to the Department of Research and Evaluation.

Please contact Dr. Curtis Grier at (404) 802-2644 or at clgrier@atlanta.k12.ga.us if you need any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Dr. Rubye Sullivan

"The mission of the Research and Evaluation Department is to build capacity through research, evaluation, and the application of data to inform school improvement for student success."

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APPENDIX F

University IRB Approval

	Georgia Southern University	
	Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs	
	Institutional Review Board (IRB)	
Phone: 912-478-0843		Veazey Hall 2021
		P.O. Box 8005
Fax: 912-478-0719	IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu	Statesboro, GA 30460

To: Tonisha Johnson
Dr. Kymberly Drawdy

cc: Charles E. Patterson
Vice President for Research and Dean of the Graduate College

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Approval Date: 5/13/14

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered **H14419** and titled **"21st Century Provision of Services: Secondary, Special Education Teachers' Perceptions of Transition Competencies,"** it appears that your research involves activities that do not require full approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) according to federal guidelines.

According to the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45 Part 46, your research protocol is determined to be exempt from full review under the following exemption category(s):

B2   Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: (I) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and (II) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that your research, as submitted, is exempt from IRB approval. No further action or IRB oversight is required, as long as the project remains the same. If you alter the project, it is your responsibility to notify the IRB and acquire a new determination of exemption. Because this project was determined to be exempt from further IRB oversight, this project does not require an expiration date.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer

APPENDIX G

Independent Samples *t*-test Results

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Err	95% Conf Inter Lower	Upper
TPFrequency	Equal variances assumed	1.107	.298	-2.731	46	.009	-.58333	.21356	-1.0	-.15
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.731	45.166	.009	-.58333	.21356	-1.0	-.15